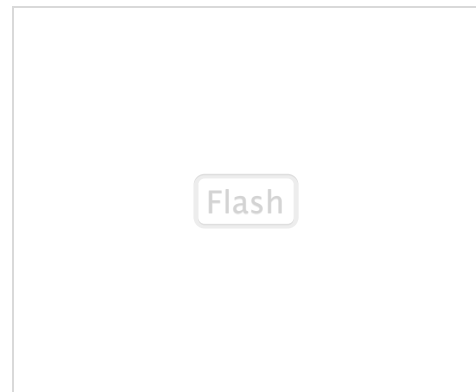
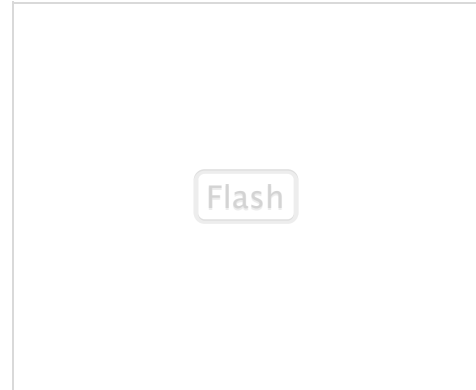




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Narayana Murthy's successor is not his replacement: Jeffrey Lehman, Board Member, Infosys

Pankaj Mishra, Jayadevan PK & Shruti Sabharwal, ET Bureau Apr 18, 2011, 06.33am IST

Tags: [NR Narayana Murthy](#) | [Larry Pressler](#)

In two weeks from now, **Jeffrey Sean Lehman**, who is heading the **nominations committee at Infosys Technologies**, will announce the company's new chairman — one of the most-tracked successions in corporate India. In an exclusive interview with ET's Pankaj Mishra, Jayadevan PK & Shruti Sabharwal, and his first with any Indian paper, Lehman avoids direct questions about the candidates shortlisted for the post, but hints at deeper leadership changes at Infosys as the remaining founders retire from the company over next few years. **Excerpts:**



(Jeffrey Lehman, Board Member, Infosys)

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What's driving the changes at the Infosys board?

You are looking at a company that has had an extraordinary history, trajectory and has achieved great things for its share holders and all its stake holders. It's a point of pride for everyone who is associated with the company. From the beginning, one of the things that the company decided was that it would have mandatory retirement ages for the board and executives. One consequence of that decision is that you have lead time to know when the transition is going to come. That lead time has been a gift and an opportunity which gives us a chance to reflect on what this total transition is going to be. We have been given responsibility to think about how to make the transition over a period of time that will continue the values of the company, the principles, provide the right kind of leadership and ensure that within the entire leadership structure, there is a proper mix of skills and backgrounds. So, that an extremely complex and diversified operations has the resources to operate at the highest level and to deliver performance that all of its stakeholders expect.

What is the board agenda besides Murthy's succession?

Over the next four years, all the founders will be retiring . And it's important to make sure that the proper bench is prepared with a proper depth and proper processes to deliberate about how and when things will change. It should be a smooth glide into the future . We want to ensure that there is the right mix. You have

to have continuity with the past so that everyone knows the historic values and excellence of the company which will be continued. We want to make sure Infosys is a dynamic changing organisation . The challenge is to make sure that the dynamism and the change is orderly and reflects a constancy of high level values even though the way that the values are expressed has to change with time.

Will you also look at CEO transition this time?

We have been thinking about the whole leadership succession process over the next few years. We have been thinking for the last four years. Because of the retirements (of board members), we have known that we need to be thinking about the full succession of leadership in the company as a whole structure and not just one position.

The April 30 date is when you will finalise Murthy's successor. Is it only about that or more?

We will announce that (Murthy's succession) on April 30. I am at liberty to say that the meeting on the April 30 has been called on the behest of the nominations committee. I cannot steal our own thunder. That would be very bad. Don't miss the meeting on the April 30. Be sure to come. It will be an important meeting for the company.

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Are you looking at replacing Murthy?

We began the process almost two years ago as a board to focus on that question. We never said that the object of this is to replace Murthy. He is irreplaceable. It will not be fair to the successor, Murthy or the company to say that we have found a clone of NR Narayana Murthy. That's just never been our thinking. Always, what we have been looking for is identifying the right person to be the chair of the board of directors of Infosys Technologies.

I think that's the specification we are talking about includes understanding the responsibilities of the person in leading the board, in his role and in working with the senior management of the company has also been the responsibility of the chair. The question is how to find a person with relevant background , experience, knowledge etc. that will provide the right kind of leadership. That will be the abstract thing we will be looking for. Then we apply that to real human beings. Each has his or her own constellation of attributes. Then we choose amongst those individuals. Then we think back and forth.

Who nominates the candidates? How do you choose?

It's a board process. This was a process that involved all members of the board and we were consulting each other and people would make suggestions. We did not post a job and solicit applications. This is a process driven by the members of the board of directors of Infosys.

Is there an insider-outsider debate?

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Readers' opinions (4)

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S.K.JHA (Mumbai)

20 Apr, 2011 05:20 PM

Good to hear from Lehman that Infosys has worked in the succession tunnel for more than four years. Have they any way undertaken (LIVE)3 competence evaluation to identify the best on hand and also the existing gap to make grounds in no time. (LIVE)3 is our unique matrix for professional and leadership competence evaluation and is applied to every level from manager to top level band of successors and mentors with level specific application. We have applied it to one of the best MNC (name can't be displayed due to confidentiality clause) to tag 'One' out of a large, most competitive and complex list with perfect ten accuracy. One more observation is that for Narayan, it will be like losing the last battle, if someone says that he does not have replacement/competent successor to hold baton. Rather I would like to assure him that the statements trickle as mark of respect only and we as mentors of mind, method, value, idea, behaviour with business elements can and /or shall format operating leadership to fulfill his expectation by all means. You were never deceived-you will never be deceived. Regards.

hallihuduga (Dubai)

18 Apr, 2011 09:53 AM

Infosys started off as a company that takes advantage of labor cost arbitrage between west and India. Now they want to work (only?) on high margin jobs. There is a basic dissonance between what they were, are and want to become.

DEWAN A. K. PURI (CUTTACK-INDIA.) replies to hallihuduga

20 Apr, 2011 02:32 PM

Well, Gentleman why dont u do something to deliver? If it makes u think that we are cheating them. Let me put it clear- We just supply at the most competitive rates what others cant and about our delivery as regards our products in the field that ur comments are based on have no parallels in the globe. If this not have been the case, tell me- Why in the first place New York Stock Exchange thought it prudent to send personal invite Well Sir, Mr. Narayan Murthy of Infosys, Would it be convenient on ur part to honour us with ur august presence by sounding the Bell at our NYSE on a Day that suits u! We are waiting to see u among our midst! The entire world knows this, but I think u belong to some other place, an alien perhaps, not accustomed to this world and might hv it seems had laid ur hands on documents handed down to colonial rule. Why dont u put a host of question to the very people who never answer them, if at all they do, they do it such a roundabout way that it gets circumvent and the msg is never clear. Hope, to u the message is clear now. thanks. tk cr.

Balaji (India) replies to hallihuduga

18 Apr, 2011 10:05 AM

That is what business is all about. Exploit the differences. That is what every body does.