

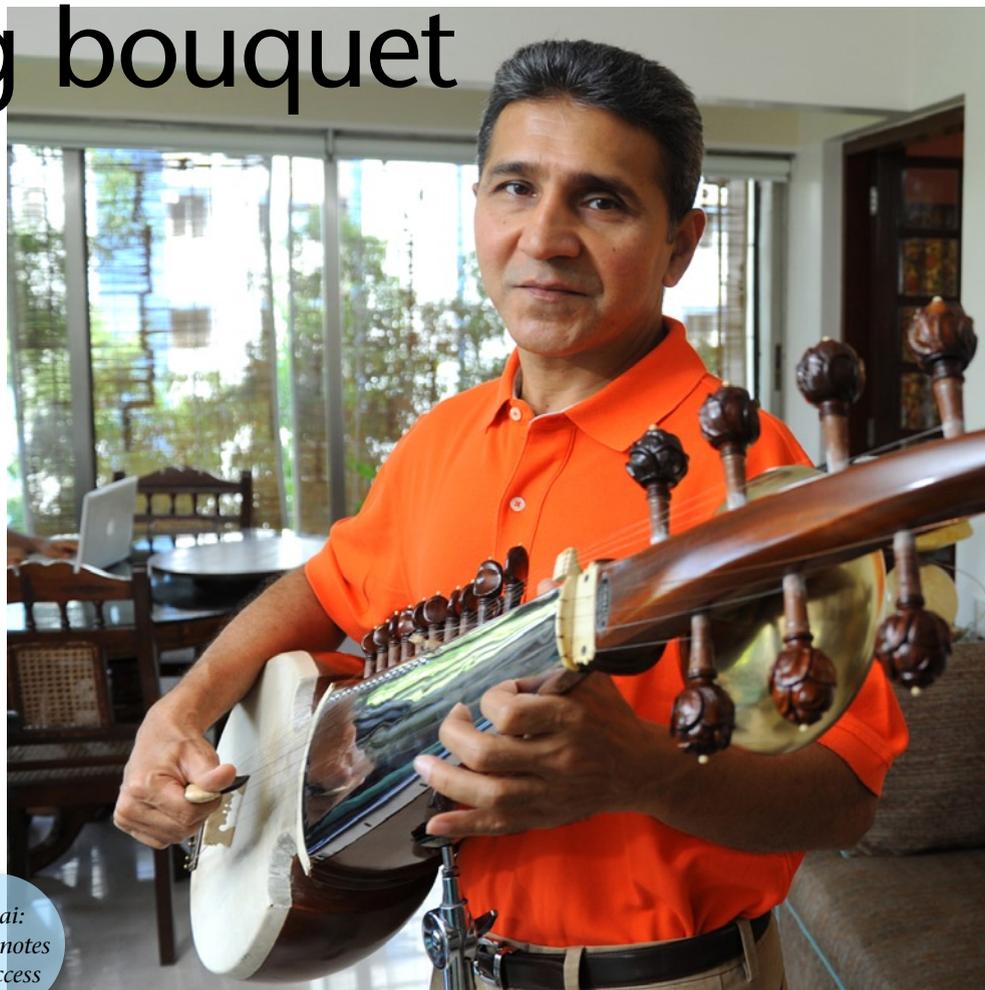
Widening bouquet

Adapting to the economic environment, consultant UCIL moves into business analytics

Over the years, as the Indian industry started maturing, the consulting sector also started expanding – not only in terms of size, but also its service offerings. Along with it, a few home-grown firms too have really woken up to this call and one such company is the Universal Consulting India Ltd (UCIL), promoted by the 51-year-old Jay P. Desai, which is into the conceptualisation and execution of strategies since 1994. Unlike most international players, who formulate strategies and leave execution to the client, UCIL formulates and executes strategic, operational and organisational initiatives for its clients. “We hand-hold the client, create a team and move to the execution stage,” explains Desai. A *sarod* player in his spare time, he has been a student of Indian classical music for over 25 years. “I use it as a stress buster,” he says.

Desai, who grew up in Mumbai, had gone to the US for his masters – taking his AMP degree from the Harvard Business School; MBA from Willamette University and MS in biology from Purdue University. On his return in 1989, he joined Andersen Consulting (Accenture) and worked there for five years. Desai has also authored a book: *Accountability: angst, awareness, action*, on India’s governance systems, which was published by Pearson in 2011.

In 1991, India witnessed economic liberalisation and, soon, Indian companies were reeling under immense pressure to bring down costs, meet customer demands, *et al.* “India Inc wanted to change the way they operated, adopting new mantras such as profit, restructuring, etc,” recalls Desai. “The MIS process too had just begun.



Desai:
merry notes
of success

Companies wanted to professionalise and see results”. Big consulting firms, globally renowned and operating in India, had their hands full. Desai realised that there was a need for small boutique consulting firms, which would be helpful to the mid-level and small companies – and went about setting up one on his own.

“Planning is easy, but implementing could be a nightmare,” says Desai. “While I was working with Andersen, I had come across a small embroidery firm, Suzerilla, run by five brothers, which took a big leap to hire a consultancy firm and implement strategies immediately. This prompted me to start a company that could offer strategies, as also offer help in implementing them.” He quit Anderson in March 1994, purchased a laptop for ₹50,000 and started UCIL, with a mission to help companies implement strategies. He set up project management offices

at clients’ sites, which included team members from both sides. The idea was to work in collaboration with the clients’ people, come up with a joint solution and, then, be part of the client team for real implementation – “a perfect blending”.

Desai knew Anil Agarwal of Vedanta (formerly Sterlite), while working with Arthur Andersen. Agarwal offered him a job, but Desai preferred to remain a consultant and bagged a contract to work on the Sterlite aluminium foil plant in Pune. This was a good break, where Desai had scope to work on organisational structuring. In eight weeks, he got the performance measures, people, etc, in place for Sterlite and was soon ready with another six similar projects for other companies.

Today, having completed 21 years in the entrepreneurial journey, Desai is close to starting work with his



SANJAY BORADE

and director, TVS Srichakra Ltd, which has retained UCIL to do a project for identifying future business opportunities, so as to zero down on all segments and possible alliances.

Constructive suggestion

“A team from UCIL did an extensive study within the company, going through the products, processes, customers and views across the full spectrum, to identify our strengths and weaknesses,” adds Vijayaraghavan. “They also met our major clients across the country, to get a good feel on the performance of TVS Rubber and actual feelings and views of the clients. It was heartening to see the extensive study they did throughout India, in different segments of rubber products – in our existing line as well as those in which we are still not there – to arrive at the market potential and came up with constructive suggestion on way forward. During the exercise, UCIL revealed its experience and expertise in the work involved, as also relating to automotive industry and other industrial segments”. UCIL’s costs are much lower than its peers BCG, Bain, PwC, AT Kearney and the others.

“UCIL came in when we were a ₹1,200 crore company; today, we are a ₹2,000 crore outfit,” acknowledges Shekhar Shetty, senior VP, M&A & business strategy, Indofil Industries. “It set up the supply chain till accounts receivables, systems procedures and compliances and removed all bottlenecks in our growth plan. The team understood our problems across nine offices and factories and came up with solutions that were smooth. They conducted a review of the supply chain for their formulations division and specialty chemicals division and followed with implementation,” he adds. Indofil, a K.K. Modi group company, has a target to become a ₹6,000 crore entity by 2020.

Shankar Rajesh, senior director, UCIL, Mumbai, is full of praise for the firm’s core team. Rajesh has been with the firm for 20 years and has experience in the manufacturing and service sector. He has advised clients in pharmaceuticals, biotech, healthcare, agro-chemicals, telecom and paper

860th client next month. The firm specialises with a deep vertical focus on life sciences, medical technology, healthcare, agri-business & food. Clients include multinational companies as well as mid- to large-sized Indian companies such as Piramal Healthcare, Novartis, Medtronic, Danaher, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge, United Phosphorus, Indofil and Bongrain, to name a few. Desai has spread his business with four offices across India – in Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore, with a team of more than 60 people, of which four are directors. UCIL also has an associate director and three senior managers who form the second-line of professionals.

“The members of the core team are pretty much self-motivated and also keep each other focussed, through the business cycles that we have traversed through in the past 20 years. We work jointly towards a shared

purpose of building a robust organisation and carving a niche in the professional services marketplace in India,” discloses Desai. He draws on his comprehensive understanding of the complex Indian market-place, developed over the past two decades, to help companies determine with grounded practicality, the strategic direction and the adaptive implementation pathway they should follow to succeed. For instance, UCIL works with Sundaram Industries, branded TVS Rubber, for couple of years, on business strategy. “Since our company has four decades of experience, working in the field of rubber products and handling a wide spectrum of clients, we had good discussions with Desai and his colleagues and brought them on-board for an in-depth study of our organisation, to arrive at a business strategy,” says P. Vijayaraghavan, president, corporate strategy, TVS Rubber,

Accountability – angst, awareness, action

Desai's book talks about India poised at a most crucial juncture in its post-independence history. Accountability, the heartbeat of governance, is under siege. The epidemic of unaccountability lurks beneath India's myriad tragedies, conquering the spirit of the citizen and constraining India from unlocking its full economic and social potential. The misgovernance, so vividly visible today, is a strong signal

that India's liberal democracy is disobeying the principles of its grand design. Citizens are deeply concerned about the state of their nation, but unsure what role they can play in improving accountability.

"This book was written to increase the public understanding of accountability," says Desai. His queries include: how did accountability historically evolve in India; can accountability be measured; how does India rank against

other countries; does accountability impact economic and social performance; does our socio-cultural fabric influence accountability; and what role do existing accountability mechanisms and institutions play in strengthening, or weakening, the four foundations of accountability?

He constructs a three-dimensional lens through which he examines the mechanisms that hold our governance institutions accountable. Six

initiatives that can improve accountability are identified. Citizens can play a key role in strengthening accountability, using the five-fold path set out. Desai explains why a burst of governance reforms are sorely needed and describes how the journey of accountability will play out over the next few decades.

Those who read this book will transit from a state of *angst* about accountability, to one of *awareness* and finally into *action*. That's when India will truly make its 'tryst with destiny'. ♦

manufacturing. "My life at UCIL has featured many moments of great joy and emotion," says he. "I have felt a sense of tremendous responsibility towards clients, colleagues, the firm and to myself – a sense of achievement and recognition, which together has made my time in UCIL fulfilling."

Respectful position

Samir Sathe, senior director & head, operations, UCIL, Delhi, has advised clients in the financial services, private equity, automotive, retail goods industry, etc, for long. "I have been with UCIL for the past two decades," says Sathe. "I am proud that it has a respectful position in the consulting space today and hope it will have an even brighter tomorrow."

"I joined the firm as a consultant and, after 13 years, I feel UCIL has enriched me both professionally and personally," says Venkatesh S, director & head, UCIL, Chennai office. "It has been great learning and I have thoroughly enjoyed addressing some of the toughest business issues faced by our clients. The camaraderie, team-work and humility in the management team has created an inseparable bond, that has helped us ride through many business cycles. The years ahead too promise to be exciting". Venkatesh, an MBA from K.J. Somaiya Institute of Management, Mumbai, also holds a B.Tech in chemical engineering from the University of Madras.

While consulting and implementation was a major part of the business UCIL was involved in, Desai realised that he should also assist clients in shaping their markets with its work in policy support, digital strategy and business analytics services, if the company should move ahead in the race. "The intense focus on execution provides tangible monetary benefits for clients," says Desai. "It helps them to accelerate growth, build market position, improve profits, reduce costs and optimise working capital management". So, he started EvolvAnalytics as a business analytics company under the UCIL fold in late 2014. Leveraging the immense power of data analytics, EvolvAnalytics helps companies to analyse data, adapt strategies and evolve businesses.

"Over the past 10-15 years, companies in India have accumulated a large amount of transaction data," explains Desai. "The cumulative wisdom that resides in this data has not so far been extracted, analysed and acted upon, in a limited manner. Even the process of decision-making during the formulation and execution of strategies, relies somewhat more on subjective and qualitative factors, with some amount of objective and quantitative data summoned to support the logic of the decision. Now, with the proliferation of data and of analytical tools, CEOs have the opportunity to analyse data deeply, adapt strategies iteratively and evolve

businesses at a rapid pace," he adds.

Analytics helps companies to differentiate in the intensely competitive marketplace, with data-driven strategic thinking. UCIL's analytics architecture is designed to derive maximum value from a company's data, with its data discovery, model formulation and analytics execution phases. "Consulting (which is more subjective and qualitative) and analytics (which is more objective and quantitative) are just beginning to coalesce together into one blended service," says Desai who in FY-16, plans to expand the analytics and also build an 'independent consulting' delivery model, where external independent consultants will be selectively associated with full-time UCIL teams to execute assignments.

From a geographic standpoint, in FY-16, UCIL plans to focus on growth in the New Delhi and Chennai and Bangalore offices. "We also see a lot of opportunity and requests for work from mid-market companies in North America and Europe, who are now once again actively looking at entry strategy work into India. We expect to see a reasonable step-up in growth in FY16, with further acceleration in FY17, as both global and domestic companies execute their India growth plans, that have been on the back-burner for some years now," concludes Desai.

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