2010 **SSON Excellence Awards**
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WINNER: Asheesh Mehra

*Head of BPO-Asia Pacific, Japan
and Middle East, Infosys BPO Ltd*

Asheesh Mehra leads the APAC, Japan and Middle East region for Infosys BPO. He brings over a decade of cross-industry, global sourcing experience, driving business transformation through outsourcing for a number of Fortune 500 companies. Prior to joining Infosys BPO, he led WNS's insurance BPO practice and was a member of the start up management team of Msource, during which he was instrumental in driving strategic initiatives in the areas of market penetration, operational excellence, organizational development and transition.

"...on his journey through BPO and the future of the industry... "

>> Over the past 10 years, and across all the geographies in which I have worked, I have seen the BPO industry evolve from straightforward, outsourced processes with labour arbitrage as the basic premise, to the complex and sophisticated global engine of business transformation that it has become today.

I have had moments of success however also witnessed strategies that failed to deliver. Learnings from each helped me chart my course. One such learning is that to do business in a region, an insight into its culture is key. For example, studying the business challenges and cultural differences unique to Asia enabled me to successfully bring in amortisation to help corporations in the region build positive business cases, given the lack of scale and decentralisation in the region.

As part of the BPO leadership at Infosys, I continue to be the executive sponsor for large, multi-tower, global deals across Asia, having created a significant footprint for Infosys in the region over the past two years.

Having worked across operations, transition, sales support, frontline sales and BPO leadership, three critical learnings stand out:

1. Invest upfront in knowledge transfer, find the best people across your operations, and transition and transfer knowledge while keeping sight of the client's objectives.
2. Ensure you are providing long-term value, surpassing the cost factor and moving to true business value.
3. Finally, understand the culture of your customer and the culture of the region in which your delivery centre is located.

A powerful concept that has personal resonance is the idea that the sourcing industry has tremendous potential in helping combat economic disadvantage. Consider this: There are 446 million Indians living in poverty. That's 42% of Indians and 33% of the global poor. There are a 106 million unemployed Indians, the second largest labour force in the world, in an environment where the growth in labour force far outpaces the growth in employment. Of the 467 million strong labour force, 25 percent are employable by US firms and 20 percent are vocationally trained. Rural literacy

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rates are higher than urban literacy areas. All of this points to a clear opportunity gap – there is a growing pool of underutilized talent.

Now, if we look at the BPO industry we see that global competition and aggressive client expectations are pushing down billing rates and margins. At the same time, attrition and the growing cost of talent in urban areas is pushing up costs. I believe one solution lies in rural BPO. It is a win-win for clients, vendors and the rural employable population. While the rural areas benefit greatly with better jobs and an improved standard of living, the company gains huge cost savings. To that end, I am also on the advisory board of Samasource, a not-for-profit organisation headquartered in the US, which reaches out to the underprivileged across Asia and Africa with a unique outsourcing model.

The future of the industry is going to be interesting. It will mirror how fundamentally businesses are changing across the world. Virtual businesses will increase, with little or no front-of-house human intervention and a robust back office operation – so this presents an opportunity for the BPO industry.

From a vendor standpoint, I think the focus will shift to domain knowledge, transition challenges, change management, HR issues and governance. The demand for knowledge workers will continue to rise. To reiterate: rural BPO will gain tremendous traction and there is an opportunity for educators to produce people with skill sets that match industry needs and for governments to invest in infrastructure.

I believe that India will continue to excel in services that require advanced English, like Research and Analysis Outsourcing, Content and Medicine. However, countries like China, Russia, the Philippines, Kenya, Brazil and Egypt will become major players from a location perspective.

Regional outsourcing hubs will develop as companies take up strategic near-shoring and on-shoring initiatives to minimize risk and leverage cultural and linguistic compatibility.

More countries will find outsourcing attractive, creating a multi-polar world. Following the lead of the US and the UK, European Union markets will expand their off-shoring programs, while Japan will increasingly look to China for its needs.

Finally, reengineering and transformation will be game changers for all businesses. All transformations reflect change in the process but mere changes do not result in transformation. Post the Global Financial Crisis, every organisation is striving hard at re-writing the way business processes are conducted to make them leaner, meaner, and more efficient; in other words -- to transform them. This will define the industry for the next 5-7 years as most organisations are still performing operations on decades-old legacy systems. This convergence of technology and business process will mark a key trend over the next 5-10 years, and it is this convergence that will provide organisations or outsourcing outfits with the multiplier effect they are seeking. SSN

About the Shared Services & Outsourcing Network:
The Shared Services & Outsourcing Network (SSON) is the largest and most established community for shared services and outsourcing professionals. We provide the roof under which key industry experts and organizations share their experience, knowledge and tools; and practitioner peers from all over the world connect with each other. SSON focuses on developing its members through providing training, tools, and networking opportunities. Our staff work from international offices in New York, London, Singapore, Sydney, Johannesburg, Berlin and Dubai to research current trends and developments in shared services and outsourcing.