



## The Talent Lifecycle in Emerging Markets

*Microsoft's Dheeraj Prasad Discusses Best Practices Developed in the SSPA Industry Committee on Talent Management*

*By Dheeraj Prasad, Director of Developer Support at Microsoft, interviewed by SSPA's Shawn Santos*

What are the most important talent management challenges and opportunities in today's emerging markets? Why has senior management from Microsoft, Avaya, EMC, Symantec and other major technology companies formed a committee with the SSPA to address these issues? This article explores SSPA's Talent Management Committee—its charter, recent outcomes and future projects—with committee chair Dheeraj Prasad, Director for Developer Support at Microsoft.

### Tell me about your role with Microsoft—what is your current focus?

As a director for developer support at Microsoft, I'm responsible for leading a very large cluster of developers who work on Microsoft technologies. This includes a group of people who I lead in India as a part of the overall America's developer support business, which we work extremely collaboratively between our centers in the U.S. and in India. This group provides high end technical support to all of Microsoft's customers in the U.S. My function is to provide leadership for this group in India.

### How long have you been affiliated with the SSPA, whether at Microsoft or in previous positions?

I was working with Veritas Software about four years back, and through the certified support manager program, I was introduced to the SSPA. Since then, I have been regularly engaged with SSPA to get out in front of what is happening in the services and support world; the SSPA Scenario Planning white paper is a good example of forward-looking services research. In general, I've been a very active member of the SSPA community accessing various SSPA articles, webcasts research papers and so forth.

### How did you become the committee chair of SSPA's *Standards and Best Practices for Talent Management Committee*?

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I actually came across the talent management committee on SSPA's website and became immediately interested. The committee started in June 2007 and they were working on the Top Technical Talent Program (TTTP) for SSPA members *[editor's note—this white paper has just been released to SSPA members. [Click here](#) to download the Best Practices for Retaining Top Technical Talent in Service & Support White Paper with your username and password.]*

I heard in one of the committee meetings that there was a committee focus-area developing on the emerging markets, which solidified my interest. I think I wrote the same day to Trisha *[Trisha Bright, SSPA's VP of Member Programs]*, explaining my background and interests and how I would really like to lead this particular program as the committee chair.

**Tell me about some of the most important outcomes of the committee's work so far. I'm especially interested in the talent life cycle and the newly released white paper on retaining top technical talent.**

In just a little more than two months we've been able to engage the best minds from around the world focused on this particular subject—from the standpoints of both India and China.

We converged on building this particular group—people who are committed to and who are passionate about talent management. This is one of the biggest achievements in the last couple of months—getting the right people on the committee—and we've done so. We've assembled a committee of powerful industry thought-leaders from major technology companies, including Microsoft, Sprint, Avaya, EMC, Symantec and many others.

We also looked at people who understand talent management as a profession—the HR side. We've engaged some extremely experienced people who are heading HR teams in very large organizations in India as well as in the China region.

People representing the academic community are also very important to this committee. It is imperative that we get some perspective on academic research and get that fountainhead of knowledge channeled into this project. We've been looking at getting a 360 degree view on this particular subject, and the right people have taken us there.

**Tell me how you perceive talent management in emerging markets today—what are some of the best practices and opportunities—and what are some areas that need development? How do you see this scenario possibly changing over the next 2-5, or 5-7 years?**

There is an abundance of skilled talent in the emerging markets. Talent Development is going to be a key area of change in the next 5 – 7 years

as emerging markets mature to the next level.

We try and determine how service and support as a business can be looked at as a good career opportunity—a career destination.

Building superior talent management programs are one thing, but creating that level of services-specific awareness in academia, not only at the final year stage, but more in terms of addressing students throughout their academic careers in engineering, is paramount. The value proposition for folks in academia is the starting point in terms of our overall talent pipe that our industry could create for itself.

Another angle deals with the ways and means to develop these folks from a career standpoint. We need to look at the best opportunities to build people within service and support and also outside service and support for our development functions and supportability functions; from project management to consulting, marketing, sales, usability testing and so on and so forth.

In terms of building the next level of product innovation in some of these emerging markets where we see some very mature teams that work on product development, there are some teams which are very mature that work on quality testing, product testing, and so forth. And that is a great opportunity for us to build for the next five to seven year's time.

Another vertical around service and support, which is co-located with the others I just talked about, is building the next era of product innovation actually emerging out of these product markets.

**I did some poking around on the [talent management committee](#) area of the website, and also on the talent management best practices [blog](#). I came across a quote from the *Harvard Business Review*. "The most successful brand cultures offer a single coherent story where the components work together in a synergistic fashion so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."**

**How you think this relates to technology services, and how does the need for developing talent in emerging markets play into that quote?**

This quote can definitely be applied not only to developing people in service and support, but for building people for other related functions in the whole product management space where these functions are intertwined for the good of the customer.

It could be product development, it could be quality testing. That's where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, because for the simple reason that we are actually adding value to different career verticals so people can move from when they move from service and support to some of the other functions like product development and quality testing,

which really give them a rounder exposure to understanding product strategies.

**At Microsoft, I would imagine that you must be just as busy as anyone I know in the technology business. So, what it is about this particular committee that keeps you engaged, and to go so far as to be the committee chair?**

My participation is driven by passion. I really don't look at myself as doing something which is different than what I do today, just that my scope has widened. It's widened just not from a Microsoft standpoint, but it's widened across the industry.

It's a great opportunity for me to partner with folks with similar interests and capacities as me, so I see that as definitely the next level of engagement.

And going even beyond that is to feel like I am without boundaries. I think that's a key point. Folks in service and support truly demonstrate collaboration from a global standpoint, so connecting and strategizing with these companies and individuals takes us to the next level of global collaboration and global support.

**The talent management committee is focused on exploring talent management best practices in emerging markets. Why is it focused specifically on India and China versus some other emerging markets?**

The members of the committee really considered this, and decided to go with the "BRIC nations"—a generic description which is commonly used to define emerging markets. BRIC is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India and China. That's used very generically. And we were looking at this from a service and support and a technology perspective, so we sought out emerging markets that we could appropriately and most beneficially study.

We also want to be sure that we have got this scoped well, so that instead of really going around spinning wheels on markets which are also emerging, but less developed, like Costa Rica, the Philippines, and even Russia and Brazil (which are all up-and-coming geographies from a service and support standpoint), we want to really focus on the two big ones at this stage—India and China.

**What specific areas of managing talent do you focus on developing? For example, do you mostly focus on retention, talent attraction, or talent sourcing? Or do you cover the breadth of these areas?**

The entire talent life cycle was the starting point for us—this is where we looked at seeing the whole talent management process from start to

finish.

We looked at three broad components. One was the talented traction, or the talent attraction component. Talent allotment as the second component and talent retention is the third. We pretty much knew that if we do the three together very well, we're doing an end-to-end mapping of talent management.

From a talent lifecycle perspective, I have actually shared some of my thoughts on my [blog](#) about the key components around the three tracks that we want to focus on, which is more of a talent map with nine blocks.

The next step in our process is to take a deep dive to understand talent mapping, value proposition, best strategies, and talent sourcing as a part of the whole talent lifecycle.

### **What's the next milestone for the committee? What is your next area of focus?**

Our next stage is to skin out the entire design of the program for each of those nine components, which will start from what does the scope look for each of those nine components, and which will we have drawn as a part of the talent lifecycle? What will be the approach to map current practices that exist in each of those emerging markets, which is India and China that we are currently studying?

We know what is working and what is not working, and where the challenges are. We will begin putting together an analytical framework on the data that we will be able to collect, both through secondary sources, which the team will be working on in terms of pulling out from research papers and documents that already exist on that particular subject.

We also plan to implement a survey which will give us good insight into each of those practices that we are studying from people who are in the same industry.

The next step would naturally start in terms of putting together some well-studied recommendations for managing talent in emerging markets, but the immediate focus is to get a handle on what works, what doesn't work, and some analysis around why is it working and why is it not working.

### **Is participation in this committee invite only, or can other SSPA members participate? If so, if there's still room for more participation and if you encourage that, how would they go about getting involved?**

Participation for this committee has been very active. SSPA Members have come to know about it, and they're trying to volunteer themselves (or volunteer some of their folks) to participate.

This is a great opportunity for anybody to participate, even if they don't have a lot of time to commitment towards the particular project. Folks can still contribute by posting their thoughts in terms of comments on the **blog**, which we would really be looking forward to those inputs to help build the overall best practices framework for talent management in emerging markets.

We have a core working group in place, however, we are open to those that have a special interest and can commit a reasonable amount of time in terms of leading a particular best practice for each of those components in the talent lifecycle.

We still are looking at some additional participation to come from the China region. So anybody who's really interested to be still a part of the working group it would be great to hear back from those folks.

### **Do you have any closing thoughts that you'd like to share?**

I see this as one of the programs which will help the whole services business at a global level. I don't think of this as an India, Brazil or China program—this is a global program.

This is a great opportunity, and probably one of the byproducts that will come out of this particular program is a best practice in itself in terms of true global collaboration in a virtual mode.

It's a very tough program. It has multiple ramifications of talent management. It is very deep, yet very broad.

However, we have fantastic people onboard who are extremely senior and bring a wealth of experience, diversity and insight to the table. I truly believe that this is going to be a great piece of work in terms of demonstrating great global collaboration on talent management—a topic that is vital to the future of our industry.

### **About Dheeraj Prasad.....**

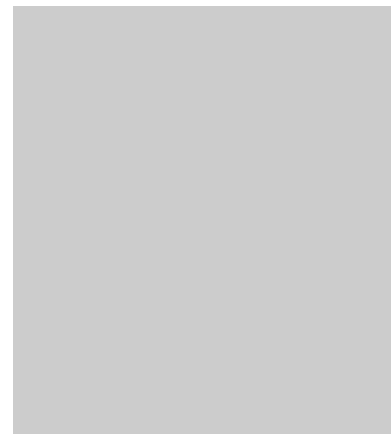
Dheeraj Prasad is Director, Developer Support at the Microsoft Global Technical Support Center, India. He has held leadership roles in companies such as Symantec/VERITAS Software and Andale Inc. In his current role at the Microsoft Global Technical Support Center, Dheeraj provides direction to technical engineers and managers who provide support to enterprise customers across the globe.

Dheeraj is a founder trustee of the VERITAS Software Charity Trust. With a passion for corporate social responsibility, he has worked on projects dealing with medical health, education and children.

Dheeraj is a certified Customer Support Manager (CSM) from SSPA, San Diego and has a Degree in Management from the Birla Institute of Technology.

### **About Shawn Santos.....**

As Director of Member Programs with the SSPA, Shawn focuses on developing and managing SSPA member programs, researching industry trends, and producing insightful content for the technology service and support industry. Prior to SSPA, Shawn managed the inception, development and roll-out of service marketing programs for the test and measurement service and support division of Agilent Technologies. In addition, Shawn pioneered the development of new products and businesses at Enologix and Global Vintage—wine industry leaders in information systems, software, research and consulting. Shawn holds a B. S. in Molecular Biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz.



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