

Shaping Business FORTUNES

WNS Global Services is working with businesses around the world to use the power of technology, analytics, and process excellence to quell the feared three in business—increased costs, eroded margins, and shrinking profitability.

Images by Scott Ehler

As a leading business process management (BPM) company, WNS Global Services offers vital value to more than 200 clients around the world by combining operational excellence with deep domain expertise in key industry verticals.

Keshav R Murugesh, Group CEO of WNS Global Services, and Chairman of the NASSCOM BPM Council in India, sat down with *The CEO Magazine* to discuss the company's transformation in recent years as it has restructured and reimaged its processes and priorities.

***The CEO Magazine:* What are some of the common concerns you hear from CEOs, and how do you help them address these? Has WNS seen remarkable growth in recent years under your leadership?**

Keshav: Let me first set a context about business in general today. It's a new world order where traditional business strategies don't work anymore. Technology, digitisation, globalisation, and economic volatility have completely transformed the business

landscape. Concerns such as retaining market share in the face of constant innovation and disruptive changes, facing a burgeoning number of unprecedented business models due to changed consumer behaviour, and building an agile, world-class organisation that can grow sustainably are some of the concerns that keep CEOs awake at night.

Therefore, it's a no-brainer that CEOs are actively looking at ways and means to achieve their business goals, even if it means moving away from conventional business models. Outsourcing of certain non-core business processes from locations that are far away from their own shores, while focusing on their core business, is now becoming the business norm.

As a BPM company that handles the outsourced parts of clients, WNS sharply focuses on reducing costs, increasing business efficiencies, and creating an overall impact on both top and bottom lines. Through the use of platform technologies and core analytics ably supported by people who are experts in their own right, WNS

ensures tangible increase in business outcomes, including creating new revenue streams for certain clients.

Looking back a few years, when I picked up the reins as the group CEO of WNS—a globally leading top-tier outsourcing provider working with many marquee clients—the company was quite a bundle of contradictions. It had grown exponentially from its headcount of 300 in the initial years to a whopping 15,500 in 2009, but the business had become static. The organisation was buzzing with talent, yet there was a lack of cohesiveness. The company had an impressive client roster, yet the organisational morale was at an all-time low.

The need of the hour was to usher in changes—and by 'changes' I don't mean typical changes like lay-offs and shutting down units. By 'changes,' I mean those with a dramatic influence on business—ones with a far-reaching impact on revenues, people, clients, and the overall business philosophy.

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according to the industry of our clients. The business units—practices—we have today are aligned with client industries. There is a banking and financial services unit for clients from the BFS industry; there is a healthcare business unit for clients from the healthcare industry. It's important to mention that having a business unit means end-to-end understanding and solutions for that particular industry, and expert industry talent, technology, and solutions at our end.

Second was evaluating all the technology we were providing and making changes or developing new ones to closely align with client needs. Where the need was for a platform, we went ahead and created one.

Third was adopting a client-centric client-partner model, where we closely aligned resources to the client in an effort to understand client needs better and work as a nodal part of the client ecosystem.

To add to the above, we also carved out a group to focus on creating the right solutions for clients. With these strategic changes, our clients began to exude immense confidence in our ability to deliver, as they could see that we knew their industry from the inside, were willing to develop solutions that they required, and were willing to closely align ourselves with them.

How have you expanded the WNS global delivery network and increased the company's reach? What went into making the brand that WNS is today?

A key indicator of the maturity of a BPM player in today's market is its ability to deliver services to clients as and when they want it. Today, an organisation's business imperatives behind adopting BPM services are varied, and BPM players must respond to these needs.

If our client is based out of a certain location and cannot move some of its processes outside of that location for whatever reason, then we have centres either in that



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same location or near it to give comfort to our clients. Our expansion strategy is completely guided by our clients' wide range of business needs.

Currently, we have delivery centres located in Australia, China, Costa Rica, India, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the list is still growing.

What makes us the brand we are today is our impressive roster of clients, our ability to deliver market-leading services and solutions with the help of our expert talent and technology, and a strong culture rooted in our value system.

How do you engage and work with your employees across WNS? Being a global company, how often do you have to switch gears working with employees across different locations?

I am very proud of my stable team of leaders who work with me. I have a lot of channels within the company, including a quarterly live webcast that I conduct to speak about the results of the company and answer questions of employees

around strategy, growth, HR practices, and so on. I am quite hands-on in interacting with my employees and always keep my eye open for the talented sparks whom I often observe at meetings, town halls, or other official gatherings we might have.

Having said that, I have to admit that I don't have to switch gears at all when it comes to employees across different global locations. They might look different or like different cuisine or work in different offices, but their goal and ethos is one—to enable outperformance for clients with a passion for service and innovation. This goal has been the cornerstone of our entire growth story, from the time we were swimming the tide as an organisation a few years ago, to the leader we are today—testament to what can be achieved when the minds and hearts of 27,000-plus people tick together.

How important is innovation in your context? We know that organisations today cannot survive without innovation at their end. What happens when the process is moved to providers like yourself?

Innovation is the oxygen for every organisation today, it does not

matter whether it is client organisations or outsourcing providers like us.

At WNS, apart from using innovation as a part of an employee's life cycle and work culture with various HR and other practices, I have also instituted an entrepreneurial contest to encourage innovation. The brightest minds in the company come and present their innovative ideas—for developing either a product or a service that is relevant to clients—and, if chosen, they get a sizeable investment from WNS to kickstart the same. They remain on our rolls, so they don't have to face the fear of failure. We call this contest 'Wincubate', and we have seen our last two products that emerged as winners seeing great traction with our existing clients, even before showcasing it to new clients. In fact, Progenie, our proprietary solution for unified web management, just won a Gold Stevie Award for Best New Product or Service of the Year—Software—Web Services Solution.

Moving to a completely different topic, you and your family are very involved in cricket. What inspired your love for the game? How do you think this dedication to sport has impacted your leadership style?

Are you asking me this question because I recently interviewed Adam Gilchrist at a conference? [Laughs]

My father, MK Murugesh, and my father-in-law are well-known former cricketers who represented the southern region in India. My mother, Arati Murugesh, was the first manager of the first Indian womens cricket team and was instrumental in driving womens cricket in India. For me, cricket is a passion, and I have imbibed a lot from the gentlemen game.

It is beyond doubt one of the finest team games. You may have one captain, but you need all eleven players to win the game. You need to understand the strengths of the team and empower your players so

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they can play to their full potential. I have always practised that learning even in corporate life: I believe in empowering people and allowing them to perform to their fullest potential.

Another learning that I have had from cricket, especially test cricket, is that you have to prepare really well to play a long game. In cricket, you need to have the stamina and the wherewithal to sustain you for five days, whether you are batting, bowling, or fielding. In the world of business, you have to have the stamina to make the right investments in terms of people and technology and wait for them to show the right

results. Only your commitment and patience will allow you to emerge as a winner.

What is your short- and long-term vision for WNS?

The future is exciting as we move into new areas of growth. In terms of new geographies, I foresee growth in markets such as Europe, the US, and the Asia-Pacific.

Our investments into building technology-enabled services and domain expertise have shown great results. I expect WNS to capitalise on these strengths and build long-term, strategic partnerships with clients. •