

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Fri, 17 Apr-15; Times Of India - Delhi; Size : 211 sq.cm.; Page : 23

Cos seek to learn from young staff

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Mumbai: The view from top can at times be hazy. A bottom-up feedback is useful to the top echelons in a corporate set-up. After a few homegrown companies experimented with shadow boards to bring in a fresh perspective to the top leadership team, it is now Harsh Mariwala's Marico which has constituted a Young Board comprising eight leaders from different functions across its India and international businesses.

The objective is to usher in a different thinking on matters that will help strengthen Marico, the institution. The Rs 5,000-crore maker of brands like Parachute, Saffola, Livon and Set Wet has given an open mandate to its Young Board to spot new opportunities, potential pitfalls and build a strong case for a few highly relevant organizational initiatives.

"The Young Board provides top management with a bottom-up view and aids lateral thinking with their recommen-

EAR TO THE GROUND

> Cos are using boards with young teams to provide bottom-up feedback & lateral thinking that guide the brass

> The objective is to spot growth areas, highlight dangers & suggest relevant organizational initiatives

> In addition to shaping cos' policies, such teams identify and nurture future leaders



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dations on a periodic basis. They are also invited to critique and give inputs to shape certain organizational policies and guidelines that are to be revised or introduced in the organization," said Ashutosh Telang, chief HR officer, Marico.

"The platform enriches young leadership talent by broadening their perspective and building capability as they are involved in high-impact organization agendas which are beyond their domain or functional areas," said Telang.

Mahindra & Mahindra and Godrej are other Groups which started off early on this journey.

For the Mahindra Group, the shadow board is a platform for grooming young talent through experiences and exposures to make them global leaders of tomorrow. Some of the recommendations made by the Mahindra shadow boards have found their way into the groups business. For instance, the diversification into commercial vehicles in the case of Mahindra Trucks and Buses and a leap into a bold acquisition, for example Punjab Tractors.

"Many of the young managers who have spent time on Shadow Boards have seen their careers getting fast-tracked. A shadow board member back

in 2004 who was the brand head for a utility vehicle, Bolero, now heads product development and marketing for the Group's international business," said Prince Augustin, executive VP, group human capital & leadership development, Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M).

As young managers are given the responsibility to address critical problems, organizational rigidities become more flexible. The number of shadow boards at M&M has gradually increased from two in 2004 to 13 shadow boards in 2014.

When the Godrej Young Executive Board (YEB) was formed in 2001, the brief was to work alongside a senior leadership team on change projects. "I was myself a part of the first YEB. As a team, we met senior leadership every quarter and presented our thoughts on issues of corporate governance, HR development and strategic planning," said Sumit Mitra, head, group HR and corporate services, Godrej Industries and associate companies.