

BusinessLine

Finding a successor for Sikka will be no walk in the park

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R Seshasayee, Chairman of Infosys Board

Top talent, domestic or global, will be wary of joining Infosys after all that has transpired

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“I will not try to pretend that we will have the same kind of felicity in attracting overseas talent that the organisation had a while ago.

“But it is that very task we have to address even more rigorously, by providing the right environment for people to come and innovate and create new products and services,” said R Seshasayee, Chairman, Infosys, now faced with the onerous task of finding a successor to Vishal Sikka, who abruptly quit the software major as CEO on Friday

HR heads and honchos at executive search firms feel that this is easier said than done.

“Infosys’ ability to attract senior management talent will be seriously impaired after Vishal Sikka’s exit, as his are not small shoes to fill. Potential candidates will be wary of joining Infosys at the CXO level after all that has happened and many more exits can be expected over the next few weeks, especially those that were hired in the US and worked closely with Sikka.

“This is because, after Vishal the centre of action will shift to Bengaluru, so the top-level hires in the US will understandably be uneasy about the direction of the company,” said Ronesh Puri, Managing Director, Executive Access India Pvt Ltd.

The challenge of finding the right man has been thrust on the five-member Nominations and Remunerations Committee (NRC), comprising, besides Seshasayee, Jeffrey S Lehman (chairperson), John W Etchemendy, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, and DN Prahlad.

The Infosys Board has made it clear to the NRC that Sikka’s successor must possess extraordinary people skills and must buy into the strategy and vision of the company, continuing on the path where the company has already started tasting success.

“It is important that a 200,000-strong global organisation like Infosys has a leader with great people skills, who understands the company’s culture, integrates into it and then changes it and moulds it as necessary. The NRC and the Board will have to see whether these requirements are best served by one of our leaders inside or whether the next part of the race will be better served by an outside candidate with no preconceived ideas at this point” said Ravi Venkatesan, co-chairman, Infosys.

In 2014, Infosys offered the CEO’s role for the first time to an external candidate.

Sikka, who was a member of the Executive Board of SAP, accepted the challenge of helping transform the company during a time of significant change in the services industry. However, this time around attracting global talent of Sikka's stature is likely to be a near impossible task given that Infosys' standing as an employer of choice has taken a nasty beating.

Anshoo Nandwaani, CHRO, Greyhound Knowledge Group, feels the Infosys management does not want a forward-looking CEO who will reinvent the wheel, but a COO who will imbibe the existing culture, execute on the existing strategy and bring back normalcy.

She agrees that it would be extremely difficult to hire senior global talent, with no takers for the hot seat at Infosys, especially after Sikka's exit.

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