

ISB presents book on Indian Railways

The book 'Changing Tracks: Reinventing the Spirit of Indian Railways' discusses about the brilliant work performed by the officials of Indian Railways. **Pallavee Dhaundiyal Panthry** dissects the book, operates upon its main aspects, stitches lessons and delivers the takeaways

There took place a major innovation in Indian Railways between 2004 and 2008. The iconic Indian organisation, which was nearly bankrupt in 2001, dramatically improved its performance in subsequent years, especially between 2004 and 2008. All this is talked in depth in the book - "Changing Tracks: Reinventing The Spirit of Indian Railways", written by V Nilakant and S Ramnarayan. The book is written for a wider general audience, having an interest in India, Indian Railways and management. It has many anecdotes and stories to illustrate the powerful themes that the writers discovered in the course of their research work.

The book published by HarperCollins India, is a richly textured analysis of change and innovation in Indian Railways in the above mentioned period. Not surprisingly, the renewal of Indian Railways has attracted a great deal of world-wide attention.

"Our book is based on in-depth research carried out over a two-year period. We have extensively analysed internal documents and interviewed key people involved in the transition. We got a very nuance picture about the Indian Railways that we cannot generalise the changes. Every change was different and brought by different set of people at different times", said S Ramnarayan, one of the authors of the book and a faculty at ISB.

The entire book mainly argues on four different aspects of the innovation in the Indian Railways. The authors identified four distinctive features associated with the renewal of Indian Railways. "First, is about developing perspectives to do right things at right time. Second, the change was aimed at changing mindsets about costs, revenues,

investment and business models. The focus on mindsets was a distinctive feature of the change. The change did not involve any restructuring or down-sizing. Third, the momentum of the change process was sustained by fostering positive emotions. Fourth, changes were persistently and patiently seen to completion by focussing on results", explained Ramnarayan.

The book clearly mentions that the transformation of Indian railways was a team effort, involving the railway board, key officers, staff of Indian Railways, the minister and his advisor. No single person can claim to be the sole reason for its success. "In our book, we profile the key individuals who made a significant contribution to the transformation of Indian Railways. Most of these individuals were from the Indian Railways", said Ramnarayan.

Indian Railways, being a very big organisation, is also known as a microcosm of India. According to the authors, the lessons from its successful renewal are particularly relevant for decision makers and organisations in India engaged in developing a world-class infrastructure that will sustain the high economic growth necessary to lift millions out of poverty.

The way to improve performance and administrative efficiency is by challenging existing assumptions, beliefs and values. According to Ramnarayan, the key to high economic growth is innovation, which is not possible without challenging existing mindsets. We need to develop the leadership and managerial capabilities that will foster innovation. "The successful renewal of Indian Railways shows that this is possible. Our book tells the story of how this was done", he concluded.