Here’s a lush and well-spread 18-acre campus in the heart of Pune and it houses a gracious heritage structure designed by Scottish architect George Wittet, known for his creation of the Gateway of India in Mumbai. The bustling campus, which plays host to some 10,000 senior Tata executives every year, hosts the Tata Management Training Centre (TMTC), an in-house resource that plays a major role in expanding and nurturing the Tata talent pool.

Heading the TMTC team is Dr Shubhro Sen, entrepreneur, consultant and educator, who took over as director about eight months ago. Dr Sen’s qualifications reflect his pedigree. He has a BA (honours) in economics from Delhi University; an MA in international relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; an MS in finance from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and a PhD in marketing and strategic management from the Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley. And, for the present, he has exciting plans in place to expand the centre’s offerings.

TMTC’s canopy of learning is already spread large. Apart from the 13 internal faculty members and four researchers in its ranks, the centre has 250 visiting faculty, many of them attached to leading universities from around the world.

Over the years TMTC has remained in step with the Tata group, taking on the responsibility of customising learning and development programmes that match the group’s requirements. “The aspiration for the group is to become a truly global entity,” explains Dr Sen. “For us the challenge is to create a global cadre of managers over time, people who are sensitised to the dynamics and difficulties of running a global organisation that is multi-racial and diverse, and not necessarily Indo-centric. The overarching challenge is to look at the world as an oyster and create a fungible, mobile, global workforce of leaders.”

Change is the chime

New vistas are opening up for the venerable Tata Management Training Centre as the institution’s mandate to nurture and develop the Tata group’s talent pool undergoes a subtle transformation.

According to Dr Sen, TMTC’s role as a pan-Tata resource helps it act as a glue that binds the group. For instance, leaders who attend programmes here get to interact with their counterparts from other Tata companies. In an interesting development, TMTC is now trying to institutionalise this level of interaction. “For leaders from overseas companies, this is a great acculturation process,” says Dr Sen.

The challenge is to create a global cadre of managers over time, people who are sensitised to the dynamics and difficulties of running a global organisation.

Dr Shubhro Sen, director, Tata Management Training Centre
TMTC’s primary role — developing the apex leadership programme for the group — has not changed over the decades. The centre runs multi-tiered leadership programmes for which senior executives have to be nominated by their companies. There are products for emerging leaders, enterprise leaders, strategic leaders and for the top leadership. It also does customised leadership training for individual companies.

One change that is a result of the times is that programme durations have been reduced. The longest programme (for emerging leaders) is 19 days long, but that, too, is broken up into two segments.

Most of the courses are for three to seven days. TMTC also offers open programmes that are topical and contemporary, such as branding in the social media generation, corporate governance, M&A best practices, and things like the ‘theory of constraints’.

There is increased emphasis on soft skills, ensuring that an executive is not just a knowledgeable, business-savvy leader, but also more self-aware, someone who understands his or her strengths and weaknesses and can motivate the team. “The metaphor we use is of changing a captain into a coach,” Dr Sen explains. “The most effective leaders today are mentors and coaches. While a captain can lead from the front, he or she has to increasingly focus on becoming a mentor, stepping away and giving others the opportunity to succeed or fail.”

Until 1993, the Tata group was India-centric and TMTC, as such, focused on training the next generation of leaders, especially those from TAS (formerly called the Tata Administrative Service). But as the Tatas started to expand geographically, TMTC’s role also changed and it began to reach out to people in other geographies. The group today has over 50,000-plus employees in Europe, 22,000 in North America, 4,000 in China and
a growing presence in Africa, Latin America and South East Asia. The challenge has increasingly been to provide quality learning and interventions for all Tata personnel, as opposed to a small or fractional subset, which was what happened in the past.

As the centre’s scope and depth of engagement with Tata companies grows, there are new challenges that it has to confront. “Keeping our values intact, strengthening them, and disseminating our culture is a subset to being global,” the director points out. “We need to become global, but in a distinctly Tata way. Beyond that, the goal is to continue to reach out to all our people.”

**VALUES REMAIN VITAL**

TMTC wants to ensure that there is no dilution of the values that underlie everything that it does. “These values have helped our business models to be better aligned socially and we have a head start over many other global organisations in this respect,” says Dr Sen. “Every programme at TMTC has a Tata-specific layer, where we talk about ‘Tataness’ and aim to inculcate and enhance this quality in our leaders.”

Another challenge is to keep the trusted Tata brand together in the face of economic turbulence. “Today we are facing heightened competition and a tremendous democratisation of knowledge and information,” explains Dr Sen. The challenge is to retain our core values while remaining modern and competitive.

For TMTC, growth does not necessarily involve establishing campuses in new geographies; instead, it intends to expand through the virtual route, utilising the facilities that the group already has. “We have inherited training facilities from some of our global acquisitions and companies such as Tata Consultancy Services have good facilities in the United States,” says Dr Sen.

TMTC has made a big push into digital learning, offering interventions for learners who could be located anywhere in the world. The centre is happy to move away from the brick-and-mortar model of academe. “When a company identifies a major thought leader, we are able to bring that person to our campus here. Going forward, we may not necessarily bring them physically to Pune, but instead interact with them audiovisually,” says Dr Sen.

Although the modalities and technologies of learning may be changing at a rapid pace, the need for managers and executives to be constantly at the forefront of their business means that the role played by institutions such as TMTC will gain in significance. A quality centre of learning, TMTC will continue to occupy a prime position in the heart of the Tata group.

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There’s more to TMTC than Tata

While the Tata Management Training Centre (TMTC) was set up in 1959 to cater to the learning and development needs of Tata leaders and senior executives, it has steadily built on its engagements with non-Tata companies and even government entities.

According to director Dr Shubho Sen, about 15 to 20 percent of TMTC activities relate to non-Tata companies. The centre works with government departments and public sector undertakings as well, specifically on programmes relating to execution of projects, customer-centricity, project management and ethics.

With public-private partnerships becoming increasingly popular in India, TMTC is gaining distinctive expertise in this domain. The National Innovation Council has tasked the centre to do a study on innovation clusters. “We recently did work on a furniture cluster and are now working on a food park initiative,” says Dr Sen.

TMTC has in the past worked with the Singapore government, helping acculturate investors from its sovereign funds with Indian business practices and helping them do business more effectively in India. “We have revived this again,” explains Dr Sen. “During the visit of British Prime Minister David Cameron to India, we teamed up with UK Trade and Investment, offering a similar programme of acculturation that was designed for British companies. We have similar plans for North America and Africa.”

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— Nithin Rao