

ORGANIZ

Vivek Paul worked with legends like Jack Welch and Azim Premji in building global corporations in the past, and today he is taking an entrepreneurial bet...

By Bindi Mehta

Perhaps the strongest thread that runs through the [Silicon] Valley's past and present is the drive to 'play' with novel technologies.— Timothy J. Sturgeon, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in his paper on globalization.

If there is one individual who personifies Sturgeon's sentiments, it is Vivek Paul. Fittingly, 51-year-old Paul says his favorite place to live is Silicon Valley in California. And the spirit of the Valley has somehow become a part of Paul's system now. "I can live anywhere in the world. But the Valley is special," he says.

Like his answer, his aspirations are also global with a specific and special focus. With his entrepreneurial venture Kinetic Glue, Paul wants to build strong global industry networks and ecosystems.

However, the venture's specific aim and goal is 'to make Indian companies the most competitive enterprises in the world.' Neat. Let's look at how he plans to make this happen.

"I had seen the consumer internet revolution unfold. There were a lot of different platforms that people were using to achieve different tasks. However, there was no platform or software targeted at corporate entities. If individuals could share and network in a manner that would help their personal growth, it could add much more value in a corporate environment," says Paul.

With this conviction, he stepped down from his role of partner at investment firm TPG (formerly Texas Pacific Group) in August 2008 to give birth to Kinetic Glue, his first entrepreneurial venture. Kinetic Glue aims to offer enterprises a social networking platform akin to Facebook, Twitter etc. It combines the advantages offered by consumer social networking platforms under a single banner and adds relevant features to make it suitable for a corporate environment.

"Businesses have special requirements. They need confidentiality, user credibility, control and, finally, all features should be available in one place. We built Kinetic Glue keeping all these unique requirements in mind," says Paul. In early 2008, Paul was already studying the consumer internet movement and giving shape to the idea in his mind.

He discussed it with Meeta Malhotra who was working as director, Ray+Keshavan, in Bengaluru, to further understand the scope of such a venture. Malhotra is today Paul's partner in the firm. "We spent the summer and fall of 2008 just studying the market and conceptualizing the thought in our minds. By the end of 2008, I was ready to become more engaged with the venture. We built a core developers' team comprising engineers from Wipro and Neev Technologies, a startup in Bengaluru and set the ball rolling," says Paul. Today,



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VIVEK PAUL: A SUCCESS STORY

PRIOR TO THE LAUNCH OF KINETIC GLUE in 2008, Paul served as a partner at venture capital firm TPG (formerly Texas Pacific Group). During his stint there, he funded Elevance, a leader in developing chemicals from renewable sources, FPT Corporation, Vietnam's leading ICT company, and Amyris Biotechnologies, a leader in biofuels using synthetic biology. Paul's learning at TPG was: There are very few entrepreneurs who actually do what they set out to do.

Paul's association with Wipro (1999-2005) before TPG was perhaps the most popular phase of his career. Under Paul's leadership, Wipro grew from a \$150 million conservative Indian company to a globally-focused \$1.4 billion software services giant.

Paul also led the firm's listing on the New York Stock Exchange. While at Wipro, he unveiled a vision to put the company among the top 10 global IT firms. He was the highest-paid Indian executive during this period. The lesson he picked while transforming Wipro: "In the real world, there is no cocoon."

In the pre-Wipro phase, he was employed at GE for 10 years, in charge of the company's Global CT (Computerized Tomography) business, reporting directly to the Chairman of GE. He also served as the President and CEO of GE's medical equipment JV in India (with Wipro). The JV was recognized by GE as among one of its best joint ventures in the world, and subsequently by the *Economist* as the best JV in Asia.

At GE, Paul says he learnt to regenerate himself constantly from Jack Welch who imagined that he had just been appointed as chairman every time he landed in New York.



the company has a team of about 20 people working from its Karnataka headquarters. For disciplines and functions like marketing, HR, social engineering and creative development, the founders hired experts and brought them on board.

“It just felt natural to start my own company when Kinetic Glue was launched. In life, you may have a grand plan but it may not unfold with exact precision. In this instance, everything just lined up perfectly,” says Paul. He strongly feels that to survive in today’s world of cutthroat competition, companies need to innovate constantly. What is it that can make such innovations possible and consistent? “Sustainable and consistent innovation is only possible through collaboration. We are working in a space where we are trying to make these two diverse disciplines—innovation and collaboration—meet each other and interact. The former is not possible without the latter and survival is not possible without the former in today’s world,” says Paul.

He may not be too far from bull’s eye as far as gauging the market is concerned. Research shows there is a Rs.11,250 crore market to tap in the space he is targeting.

Generally, corporate offices are known to block social networking and personal e-mail sites stating that these hamper employee productivity. So, why should an enterprise adopt a product like Kinetic Glue?

“Social networking is relevant for enterprises if there is an internal network aimed at increasing employee engagement and productivity. It may also work well as a closed/private social network,” says Rajiv Dingra, a social media expert and Founder & CEO of WATMedia Pvt Ltd. Dingra also feels that Paul brings an understanding of the B2B space to the venture, which could prove to be a

key factor in its success. “The other factors that will help Kinetic Glue sustain in the long run are innovation, early user feedback loop and implementation as well as knowing where its strength lies. There can’t be two LinkedIns nor can there be two Facebooks,” says Dingra.

Paul feels people use popular social networks like Facebook primarily to connect with former colleagues and old friends.

“Let me put this as strengthening weak links. However, this story of the consumer internet revolution is only half the story. The other half is about strengthening strong links. Here’s an example. Imagine five best friends who meet each other every day and work together in the same project group. How do you give them a platform to work together better? Why can’t we

offer them multiple ways to speak to each other in their workspace? I am talking about enterprises building a common knowledge base and sharing ideas and expertise. We are offering them a platform where features like sharing posts, graphics and photos, micro blogging, opinion polls, discussion forums and much more are clubbed together for easy access,” explains Paul.

His company’s current target market comprises Indian enterprises while it is also working toward a global launch. As of date, there are about 600 enterprises in the country that are using Kinetic Glue either on a trial or subscription basis.

The company charges Rs.225 per user/per month. It expects to break

even by mid-next year. Securing external or VC funding remains a decision under contemplation. “We are running a revenue-generating operation as of now,” says Paul.

He feels that to succeed one must enter the entrepreneurial journey with great passion. “It is like setting out to conquer a hill. When everyone else thinks you are a fool, you have to

THREE-FOLD STRATEGY OF KINETIC GLUE

1. Build presence in the consumer internet space: Achieved through the launch of **ITfundas**—an online industry networking platform for IT professionals.
2. Build a **SaaS product** for enterprises: The firm’s business model is built around the Software-as-a-Service or SaaS concept so that enterprises enjoy total flexibility.
3. Build **global industry networks**: After building intense collaboration and connection within a company, Kinetic Glue aims to take that collaboration to the industry level and, finally, to the global business ecosystem level.

still go and conquer that hill. However, if along your way to the hill, you look to the right, spot another hill, and think to yourself, 'It makes more sense to conquer that hill first', then you have to be agile and nimble enough to change your course and turn toward the new hill. Entrepreneurship demands a paradoxical combination of unwavering passion and agility," says Paul.

He would be the right person to know about conquering hills. Paul enjoys all outdoor activities and adventure sports when he takes time off to unwind. Hiking and scuba diving rank foremost in his list.

During his engineering college days at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) at Pilani in Rajasthan, Paul was captain of both its swimming and water polo teams. "Even if I take a weekend break, scuba diving is the right recipe for relaxation," he says.

According to Paul, the most important practice in an entrepreneurial venture is uncertainty of retirement or the retirement of risk. "Entrepreneurship is all about taking risks. However, at the same time, one must be able to retire that risk in a systematic and planned manner. In an entrepreneurial role, like in every other role, you have to have a clear idea, engage others in the idea, and work towards its execution. The main difference lies in the fact that you have to work with few and finite resources so your sense of prioritization needs to be that much stronger," he says.

How does a person like Paul, who juggles multiple roles of entrepreneur (Kinetic Glue), director (Electronic Arts), founder (Akansa Capital) and family man, prioritize his time? "Whether you are working or with your family, you should know how to have a good time. Demarcate both and you will be able to make the most of each," he says.

Paul feels that being on the board of a media company that publishes video games (Electronic Arts) helps him to keep in tune with a completely different market segment, viz. teenagers. Here is a man who certainly loves his share of challenges.

Finally, Paul feels that success is all about being comfortable with yourself and giving it your best shot.

"I am who I am and I am willing to work as hard as I can. Apply that in any field of life and you'll be fine," he concludes. 📌



"THIS IS A GAME CHANGER"

YES Bank is among the first few customers of Kinetic Glue in India. The bank's CIO Umesh Jain talks about meeting Paul, choosing to adopt Kinetic Glue and how the product is silently breaking down communication silos within his bank.

1. What made YES Bank adopt the Kinetic Glue platform?

We came across Kinetic Glue just as we were preparing our thoughts on using social media in the enterprise to break down hierarchies and silos as far as communication and collaboration were concerned. When we met Vivek and his team, their thoughts behind the platform resonated very well with our thoughts on what we wanted to achieve—so there was a meeting of minds in the first discussion itself.

2. How has the user experience been?

It has been mixed so far. This is a game changer. Hence, it requires transformational thinking and breaking away from the old school viz. organizational communication. The younger generation, which is already conversant with most of the social media tools, is leading the effort.

3. What was the most convincing bit about the pitch Paul made to YES Bank??

To put it in perspective, Paul has far more experience of managing organizations of very large sizes. That gives him the benefit of both laying out a vision very clearly, giving an early thought to challenges etc and then articulating and communicating in a manner which resonates very well with the end users—something that sales/pre-sales guys somehow are not very effective at.

Being an entrepreneur, he personally front-ends the sales process, which he anyway makes sound more like a dialogue than a sales pitch.

4. What are the benefits YES Bank has reaped through the adoption of Kinetic Glue?

There are far too many qualitative benefits like open and transparent communication, more effective and efficient collaboration, breaking down of hierarchies, viz. information availability, cross silo communication and intense collaboration, leading to breaking down of traditional silos. We are currently piloting the product and it is too early to comment on the exact benefits that YES Bank has accrued at this stage. But we are very confident that the qualitative benefits articulated above are going to be key in organizational transformation in the years to come.

5. Which are Paul's most outstanding qualities?

He has been vice-chairman of Wipro and was named one of the top 25 global business leaders in the recent past. In interactions with him, you catch glimpses of that. However, he has no airs whatsoever. He pretty much gets down to the basics and tries to build a consensus. He is very persuasive and passionate about his product and dealing with him is always a pleasure.