



INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEW

Interview and Interview Analysis of Karunesh Singh from Bajaj Auto, an Indian based company



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Interviewee Information

- Karunesh Singh is a hardworking International Manager working for the company Bajaj Auto. Before he oversaw the Eastern African Market, he oversaw the Western African market. During his time then, he traveled to Nigeria where he mingled and worked together with the rural population. It was there that he learned people should be happy with what they have, rather than what they do not.
- **Full Name:** Karunesh D. Singh
- **Job Title:** Regional Business Manager of East Africa
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Organization Background

Bajaj Auto is part of the Indian-based Bajaj Group. The auto section is their biggest cash cow and has the biggest investment of all their other businesses.

Bajaj Group was founded by Jamnalal Bajaj in 1926. Currently, Bajaj Group is involved in multiple businesses including financial activities, travel, production of home appliances, lighting, production of iron and steel, and insurance. (Wikipedia, 2022). Their auto manufactory, Bajaj Auto, is their biggest cash injector.

Bajaj Auto (Bajaj Auto Limited) is a 2-wheeler and 3-wheeler manufacturer headquartered in Pune, India. They also manufacture 4-wheelers designed for the small roads found in many cities. Bajaj Auto is the world's third-largest 2-wheeler manufacturer and the largest 3-wheeler manufacturer. Their 2-wheelers have various products which they have put into 3 segments: Sport, Utility, and Transport. The sporty segment has a higher engine power and was designed to be fast and good to the eye. Their Utility segment was designed primarily for the Asian and African market where motorbikes are used as taxis and load carriages. These bikes, which includes the Boxer brand, are the most sold, sturdiest, and renowned of all their bikes. Boxer bikes have the capability to go on almost any terrain. It is common to see up to 6 people carried on the motorbike in India and other countries. The transport segment motorbikes are designed for comfort and daily usage. They may not carry 6 people, but they save gas with some going up to 190 miles per gallon. They are also strong and have the capacity to carry a passenger.

Bajaj Auto also owns about 48% of KTM, the Austrian motorbike manufacturer. KTM is known for dirt bikes and racing bikes. Bajaj Auto also manufactures electric bikes with riding ranges of up to 55 miles on a full battery.

On February 12, 2022, Rahul Bajaj, a chairman member of the company passed away (may he rest in peace). His passing was huge news all over India, which shows just how big the Bajaj name is in India. Bajaj is now business as usual after the passing of Rahul Bajaj.

Personal Reflection

The interview has helped me understand that international business needs communication more than anything. The role of Karunesh is very vast. It includes the management of different teams and working with both ends of the company. From his company's end, he handles export and some parts of the supply-chain process. From the distributor's end, he handles volume (import amount), marketing, money collection, and other segments of the business. Because his work role is vast, he should be devoted to his work. Communication is important because every group needs to be on the right track for the business to sustain itself. One person slacking or holding back on the job could be irritating because it could put on pause another work role. I also learned that international business requires patience, and more than anything it requires us to be non-critical of a person's behavior. Karunesh explained well that whenever he meets a new group that is from abroad, he always be observant with a neutral view. I understand why it is important to be neutral because it is human nature to want to understand the behavior of a person we meet. Concluding without neutrality means that you will be coming to the wrong conclusion. International business, especially with Karunesh's role, requires coming face-to-face with multiple new cultures, and mastering neutrality is important and critical.

I also learned that self-management is the first step of managing others. Managing yourself is what is meant by improving yourself. I interpreted this as having to always mold into the environment you are in. This is especially important in international business because it requires traveling and being introduced to new cultures, values, people, and business processes. The way time is viewed in one country may be different than the way it is viewed in another country. Understanding different cultures and values come from reading books and articles about the country and its people.

Furthermore, I learned we should focus on the things we have rather than what we do not. As humans, we always look for more. We want more wages, more profit, more clothes, and so on. Although it is alright to be ambitious and looking for growth, we should be happy with what we have at hand and enjoy it, rather than be filled with jealousy with what we do not have. Karunesh made a comparison between Africans and Asians and described this as something he learned himself.

Recommendations on Working in the International Field

From my analysis, working in the international field is not difficult, however, it is time-consuming. We should be willing to work long hours at times. It is no secret organizations would like you to work long hours. However, when you are in the international business field, either as the owner, or an employee of an organization, there will be times when calls need to be made during your off-hours. We need to look beyond our needs and commit to the job more than another employee would.

Information sharing, communication, and fast reaction should be in the worker's habit. When working in international business, it is recommended to develop polychronic habits. This way, the employee would be willing to make an important short call to their international counterpart that is 7 hours behind while watching a movie with the families. Communication is extremely vital. Karunesh would constantly make calls with his international counterparts and not only with just 1 person but with multiple people. Gathering different information helps him understand the general point of view of where the company on the other side of the sea stands.

My 3rd recommendation is to always look for ways to improve yourself. No one can ever be perfect, but continuous improvement reminds you that you will that there will always be something you will need to improve. This helps us with avoiding cockiness. Karunesh has said that it is very important to never be in bad terms with people. I agree that we should never be in bad terms with people, it is best to talk out any issues that arise between international counterparts. It would be innocent to think that conflicts can be avoided, but it would be foolish to try and take an upper hand of a conflict rather than to talk it out.

Finally, I think we should be as observant as possible. This does take energy and it drains us when we try to understand every situation that is around us. However, when we are in a new environment and meeting new people, we should try our best to take in as much information as possible. Karunesh said that we should talk to new people with neutrality, or in other words, without being judgmental. Being judgmental will only lead to being false conclusions. I highly agreed with this because I have come to learn it is best not to judge others, but rather let live like we would want to live without interruption and judgment from others.

Interview with Karunesh (Paraphrased)

Brook: What is your previous experience in international business and what is your current position in Bajaj Auto?

Karunesh: I am the Regional Business Manager (Regional Business Head) of Bajaj Auto for the E. African market. These are 12 countries which include Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and other countries. Previously I had the same role in W. African in countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, and Benin. I am in charge of the 2-wheel and 3-wheel export overall.

Brook: **What is the role of a Regional Business Manager in Bajaj Auto?**

Karunesh: As a Regional Business Head I oversee the business with the country where I have many responsibilities. My main concern is ensuring volume and business are taken care of with the country and maintaining market share. As a Regional Manager, I have multiple responsibilities where I look for new product launches, study patterns, study competition strategy, especially with their product and pricing, and set up a counterstrategy, channel business, channel expansion, money collection.... We have a team for each country in which I oversee my respective teams. Teams study the Drive for Business Growth, Volume (Volume means the unit exported), Competition, Business Offering, Legality, Customs, and more. It is important to know these because to coordinate with our distribution team. My role is end-to-end with my company and the distributing team in the respective country.

Brook: What is the main Law or Code you apply to yourself in International Business?

Karunesh: To be a successful manager, you should first manage yourself. Managing yourself is the big word because everything starts from there. You should also always know your limitations and have an honest assessment of your ability. Over-confidence will lead to underperforming (because we over-estimated our ability and thus, we do not reach our goal). Under-confidence leads to missing opportunities (because we are limiting our capabilities). It's only after you manage yourself that you can manage your business. There are always ups and downs that cannot be controlled, the best way we can handle this is by anticipating anything that can happen. You should know the legality and customs (among others) of a country otherwise it is impossible to work together with the distributor in the country abroad.

Brook: How do you improve yourself?

Karunesh: That's what it means, managing yourself.

Brook: What challenges have you faced when working with people abroad?

Karunesh: I can go on and on about challenges I face (to mean there are many occasions if an example is given). There is a cultural challenge. I work with multi-cultural and multi-lingual people and need to be quick to associate. Uncertainty is very big in Africa. There are new rules and regulations, government crackdowns, and more that disrupt business. This leads to anticipation. Nigeria's Boko Haram caused uncertainty and the recent political situation and civil war in Ethiopia disrupted business. But early anticipation helps us find new solutions, so we don't always lose business.

Brook: African countries must be highly uncertain compared to other countries

Karunesh: Arabian countries are the same. In Afghanistan, we had a huge business where we were selling 3,000 units a month but now, we do not have business in Afghanistan (after the Taliban's takeover). Thousands of units were sold in Iran until the US put sanctions, now we are down to 0. The middle east is more uncertain than Africa. Sri Lanka was a big Bajaj Auto market until China put the country in huge debt. The country now hasn't imported for long.

Brook: What are the best and worst parts of International Business?

Karunesh: There are no worse sides. The challenges you meet sometimes make you feel helpless. The best part of international business is the new horizons, new cultures you learn, the learning you get as a human being and a professional is vast. I learned that Africans don't have money but have a smile on their face without craving for more (than what they have). Asians have money but are mad because they don't have more. I went to risky parts of Nigeria and despite Boko Haram, Nigerians look for something to be happy about. Learning comes from managing yourself. Whether a culture is good or bad is an individual perspective. It enriches you, I learn about various economies and read plenty on countries. For example, there are men that are not happy when you speak to their wives. Some cultures have people laughing very loud so they can hide their disappointment.

Brook: What applies differently when working with people abroad rather than just among co-workers and local customers?

Karunesh: There is no way you can be bad with people working abroad. You have to always be patient. When interacting, always be neutral and observe first, then you apply your brain and your opinion. Observations should always be neutral because we don't know the culture of that country. We should always hear from him first and then apply our thoughts.

Brook: What is your advice to beginners in International Business?

Karunesh: You should never create your own ideas. Always observe things as it is first with a neutral mind. When making first interactions, you should always go with a 0 background. Be very observant in your interactions (first-time interactions) because if you do not observe you will conclude wrongly. Read constantly about cultures and update on countries consistently. Always observe the first time as it is without applying your own opinion. Be passionate about traveling and new interactions. Be open to new foods, don't have a higher standard, be ready to accept having a harder living condition like a lower standard of hotels. I went to dangerous parts of Nigeria where Boko Haram is a risk, for the business. Take Risks! And most importantly, people respect opinions based on experiences (sharing experience is respectable).

Note: Questions in Green were not pre-planned, but rather questions that rose from one of his answers.

Bibliography

Wikipedia. (2022, February 17). *Bajaj Group*. Retrieved from en.wikipedia.org:
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