

Pradeep Kumar, assistant general manager, strategic business, RailTel, has extensive experience in engineering management and business modelling. He worked with Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited from 2003 to 2013 before joining RailTel. He also served as officer on special duty (technology) during the Commonwealth Games 2010.

In his current position, Kumar is responsible for exploring new telecom avenues and creating new business cases for RailTel. “The key challenge is to continuously evolve new businesses in light of the changing technologies, declining tariffs and rising customer expectations. I have to decide on the choice of service and technology, given organisational constraints, adopt the right business model, and reduce the cost and time to deliver products,” he says.

Kumar believes that the internet of things (IoT) will fundamentally transform businesses, generate economic wealth and create immeasurable social value. “IoT is creating a world full of sensors, data and algorithms that can anticipate consumer needs. Up to 50 billion things or devices will be connected to the internet by 2020. IoT will lead to the emergence of smart cities, connected utilities, connected railways, connected factories, connected cars and even connected mines.” Kumar also sees software-defined networking (SDN) and big data analytics as emerging trends. “Tomorrow’s most successful companies will be those that make the best use of big data to increase sales and reduce costs. SDN will be hugely disruptive because it fundamentally changes who controls the telecom network.”

For Kumar, one of his most memorable assignments was deploying Wi-Fi at railway stations. “It was a new technology with no proven business models, so it was like experimenting with a hope to redefine the way people commute. It was an attempt to bring quality internet and an excellent user experience at railway stations, and led to the creation of the largest public Wi-Fi network in the world. Once fully operational, it will pave the way for services like IoT, financial inclusion and content delivery,” he says.

On his management style, Kumar says, “I am very democratic and allow ideas, views and perceptions to flow in from all directions, including from colleagues, subordinates, vendors and users.” Kumar is an electrical engineer with an MBA in marketing management. In his spare time, he likes to play sports and watch the news. His family comprises his wife, an assistant professor, and their two daughters.

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