

From babu to corporate honcho

[Rajshree Kukreti](#) Edition: [December 27, 2007](#)

As senior vice-president in charge of the human resources department at Dr Reddy's Laboratories in Hyderabad, Prabir Jha has no regrets about the move that altered his career course in 1999.

"I cleared the Indian Ordnance Factories Service exams at the age of 23 and with regular promotions, I would have reached the top before retirement," says Jha, who started his career as an assistant works manager at the Dehu Road Ordnance Factory, Pune.

At the time of putting in his papers in 1999, Jha was managing a staff of a few thousands as works manager, Ordnance Factory Khamaria, Jabalpur. "I was 30 and life was comfortable," he says of his days as a Class I officer with the Government of India.

Since Jha, an alumnus of St Stephen's College, Delhi, had been handling the entire gamut of human resources and industrial relations issues in the ordnance factories, he decided to beef up his skills with an MBA degree. "In 1997, I applied for a full-time MBA course from Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI) in Jamshedpur," says Jha, who refused job offers during the course.

"Bringing about a change in a government organisation takes time but its impact is far-reaching. The more the number of employees, the greater is the impact," says he.

However, the central government refused to reimburse the course fees and also did not pay Jha his salary for the two years that he was on leave. Jha, who returned with three gold medals from XLRI, decided to quit rather than run from pillar to post to get the funds sanctioned.

Having enjoyed all the trappings associated with being a government employee for nine years, looking for a job was not a very pleasant experience. "It was difficult coming to terms when I couldn't land a job after the first few interviews. There was always the nagging doubt that

	PRABIR JHA, 50, MA (History), MBA, XLRI Jamshedpur
Previous career: Indian Ordnance Factories Service	
Job profile: Administrative head of ordnance factories	
Salary in previous job: Rs 1.5 lakh a year	
Age at career switch: 32 years	
Reason for job switch: De-motivation at work	
Current career: Senior V-P (HR)	
Job profile: Responsible for HR functions and corporate communications of the company	
Earning: Best in the industry	
Transferable skills: People management, administrative skills	
Career outlook: "Be prepared for career shifts"	

leaving the security of a government job was not the best career decision I had taken,” says Jha. What kept him going was his belief that he would be able to snare a job in the private sector.

While in B-school, Jha had interned at Thermax, an energy solutions company. So, when Thermax Babcock and Wilcox (TBW), a joint venture company offering steam generation solutions, offered him the post of HR head in Pune, he took it up. His salary: Rs 4 lakh a year. “For me, the challenge lay in being able to adapt myself to the corporate culture,” he says.

Jha knew the transition would be tough. Apart from the work environment, his job profile was also in for a massive change. He was no longer required to manage labour directly and be an administrative head of a factory.

While in government service, his HR responsibilities had a routine format, at Thermax, it had to evolve to suit individual needs. He was also required to start employee-friendly initiatives, which he had never done before. He realised that to succeed he had to take the initiative and also innovate.

While there were fewer employees to handle at TBW, Jha’s hands were full. The company was being restructured and a new HR crisis cropped up every day. It was around this time that he also started mentoring employees and working as a career counsellor.

In 2001, Jha moved to Mahindra British Telecom (MBT), an IT services and telecom solutions company, at a salary of Rs 10 lakh a year. “I wanted to enhance my work experience in a sunrise sector,” he says. As region head for Pune, Jha was leading the HR division for all its centres. For the next two years, MBT went through the rise and fall cycle that affected all IT companies as the dotcom industry went into a tailspin.

His next move was to Dr Reddy’s in January 2003 as a general manager. Gradually his responsibilities grew to include the company’s overseas acquisitions and corporate communications. He also made good use of his academic skills and is a visiting faculty in a few B-schools.

“It is not possible to compare the two jobs—government and private. Each has its share of learning. But I find my role more challenging in the private sector. And there is more scope for growth, both in terms of career and money,” he says.

JHA'S TIPS FOR CAREER SHIFTS

- 1. In a government job, guidelines are laid out clearly. In the private sector, one not only has to create guidelines, one must take responsibility for them.**
- 2. If you are looking for an easy life and unctuous juniors, stick to the public sector. The private sector is more critical of your worth.**
- 3. Unlike in government service where experience matters most, in the corporate world it is the amount of value that you add to the organisation's growth that is more important.**