Is US going to lose its technical leadership?

While I have been following the news articles and opinions about how US may lose its edge on technology leadership, I differ from majority of the views that have been expressed so far. What we see in the media and what is shared by the industry are mere indicators that reflect a problem, but they are not a problem in themselves. The number of students going into schools and graduating with engineering degrees is not what will provide technology leadership. If that were the case India or China would be the world's technological leader or should be showing the signs of becoming one by now.

I see neither! How many leading edge and cool technological innovations or products designed, developed and manufactured from India or China are hitting the world market? On the contrary, what we see are Korean companies, like Samsung, taking the world by storm. Surprisingly, the media and the industry have been mute on that front.

These days, everything seems to be 'Made in China' and 'Supported by India (call centers)'; but concluding that this will threaten US's leadership position is similar to missing out on the forest by focusing on leaves. Yes, a lot of innovation is being done by the Indians and Chinese; but its all for the US! It may come as a surprise but 85% of patents filed by Indians working in India are for the MNCs (multi-national companies) like Intel, IBM, and Microsoft; which for most part are US organizations. Does this mean that there's nothing to worry about? Nope! There's plenty to worry about but the focus has to be shifted away from the indicators to *what drives these indicators*.

Leadership is driven by a certain type of behavior and values, not by certificates and degrees. What encourages leadership behavior are positive social values – freedom of thought and expression, risk taking, embracing failure, discipline, perseverance, focus on quality and plain old respect of fellow human beings. Any society that fosters and encourages all or majority of these values will not only create leaders but will always be in leadership position no matter what. Anyone who doubts this, should ponder on the question – Is Japan a technological advanced nation or a technology leader? Therein lays the subtle difference.

US is at risk of losing the leadership because of subtle but visible change in the social consciousness. Post 9/11 the nation has gone overboard with clamping down its borders. The new policies and procedures do keep the bad elements out but also scare the hell out of the type of immigrants that should be encouraged to come into the country. This combined with traces of racism are the two most compelling factors that'll have visible impact on its leadership – technological or otherwise.

As long as the US continues to be the 'promised land' and fosters an open environment for immigrants, whatever gaps the education system may create will be filled by the best of the brains coming in from around the world!

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