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**AIMA**  
ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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## HUMANISING STRATEGY

**LOVE-BASED LEADERSHIP**  
Yetunde Hofmann

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**Solomon Darwin**

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- Learn to build sustainable and innovative business models.

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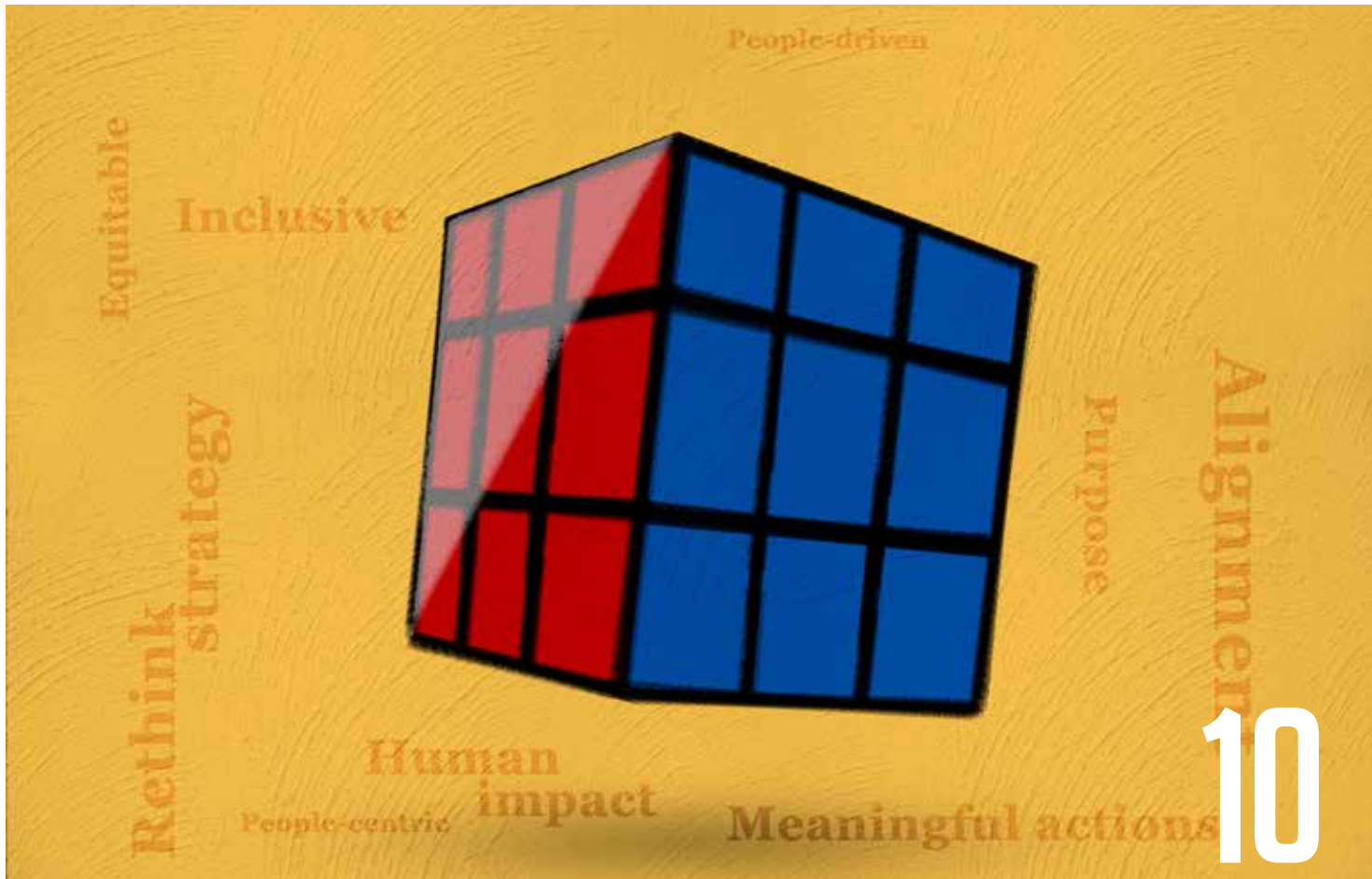
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**THIS ISSUE**



**COVER STORY**

**LOVE-BASED LEADERSHIP**

A guide to aligning your people strategy and your business strategy.

- YETUNDE HOFMANN

**LEADERSHIP**

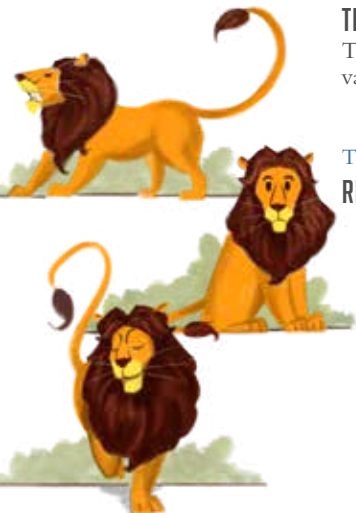
**THE PATH TO INTENTIONAL PROGRESS**

The irreplaceable contribution of valuable feedback.

- MUNIINDER K ANAND

**THE LIBRARY**

**RECOMMENDED READS**



12

16

20

**MYTH BUSTER**

**SET UP YOUR TEAM FOR SUCCESS**

Debunking five common myths that will help teams be more effective and collaborative.

- HELENE CAHEN, MS

22

**ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

**UNLOCK THE POWER OF MISTAKES**

What we can learn from mistakes.

- FRANK DEVINE

26

**MARKETING**

**BRAND YOURSELF**

Build a positive identity for yourself through branding.

- J DEVARPRAKASH

30





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# Aligning people strategy and business strategy

**Nikhil Sawhney** is President, AIMA & Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Triveni Turbine Limited, and a Director of Triveni Engineering.

**Training and retraining are essential to maintaining alignment between the people and the business. It helps to have an internal academy to onboard new recruits and those transferred from old jobs and roles to new ones.**

**T**here is no dearth of good business strategies. One can find them in case studies or obtain them from consultants. But knowing what to do is one thing, doing it is quite another.

A business strategy is only as good or as bad as the people in charge of executing it.

It requires the right people in the right roles with the right motivation to get things done right. Therefore, aligning one's business strategy with a corresponding people strategy is critical.

There are too many organisations that have been successful in the past but cannot seem to find their way forward, as the competition, customers, and regulations change. Typically, such organisations keep trying new formulas for success without first realigning their people with the new strategies.

Even among the startups, there can often be a mismatch between the business strategy

and the talent strategy, which can stifle the most innovative ideas. If the founders fail to find the necessary people to translate their breakthrough ideas into viable businesses, they end up losing their edge to more pragmatic rivals.

In a knowledge-driven economy, it is important to have a strategic approach to recruitment, development and deployment of people. Most organisations have multiple generations in their workforce and harmonising their knowledge and skills with the demands of a strategy upgrade is essential.

Everyone in an organisation must have the ability to grasp and perform the tasks involved in the new business and operating models. Training and retraining are essential to maintaining alignment between the people and the business. It helps to have an internal academy to onboard new recruits and those transferred from old jobs and roles to new ones.

Communication is essential for fixing misalignment issues. The leaders not only need to be clear about what they want from each employee and from each team, they need to put it across in a consistent and verifiable way. They must also clearly establish the linkage between the organisation's strategy and personal goals of the employees.

Employees must clearly understand the importance of their role and performance in the overall scheme of things and also their priority focus areas. It is vital for the leaders to get the employees to understand what exactly is required to be done, how it is to

**Diversity in team composition is also essential to make the team thinking and action more aligned with the real world. Having team members with different domain knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and networks ensures fewer blind spots in executing the business strategy.**

be done, what kind of team behaviour is expected of them, and what is in it for them. Getting employees' commitment to the business strategy is essential to make it work.


More often than not, issues of strategy alignment stem from the structure and composition of teams. While everyone may understand the business strategy imperatives, they may still end up with incentives to work on cross purposes with each other. It is essential that team members trust the leaders and each other. Achieving this trust necessitates a minimum level

of transparency in decision making and a fairly even sharing of rewards and disgrace.

Diversity in team composition is also essential to make the team thinking and action more aligned with the real world. Having team members with different domain knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and networks ensures fewer blind spots in executing the business strategy.

Motivating employees to go beyond mere compliance with the business strategy and

encouraging them to contribute through fitting initiatives and creativity is equally crucial. While money serves as a compelling reason for people to show up for work, it must be acceptably good; however, individuals also seek achievement and advancement for their professional contributions. The biggest reason talented employees stick around is that they see prospects of learning new things that would enable them to acquire higher income, roles and status. They align themselves with a strategy that involves them acquiring not only new hard and soft skills but also building new professional and social networks. It is crucial for the business strategy to factor in the employees' personal and social motivations.

People strategy should be at the forefront of leaders' minds and not delegated solely to HR. The success or failure of a business strategy hinges on its execution, which entirely depends on the individuals occupying critical positions, and not merely on the brilliance or determination of the leadership. 

*The opinion expressed is personal.*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Leaders would do well to realise that unless they align their people to their vision, the organisation is bound to underperform, or worse, fail. Be it growth, profitability, customer retention, business expansion, or any other aspect, success depends on how clearly the leader has articulated his or her vision and strategy and how well the employees have embraced it. A clear strategy, that is ingrained well into the employees' minds, positively influences decision-making, which in turn, leads to great outcomes within expected timelines.

To sum it up, integrating the 'people strategy' into the business strategy is the need of the hour. Leaders must see their business and their people as one and craft a common, integrated future for them. This is the only way that employees will feel recognised and valued, feel like they are growing with the organisation, feel responsible and accountable, and overall, feel like they are adding meaningful contribution to work and are getting meaningful returns from the organisation.

As Yetunde Hofmann, author, *Beyond Engagement*, writes in the cover story of this issue, "For organisations to thrive in the turbulent years ahead, managers must rethink how they approach their strategies to achieve growth and success. A more holistic approach is needed which considers a company's purpose and commercial aims alongside the needs and abilities of their people."

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*Maneck Davar*  
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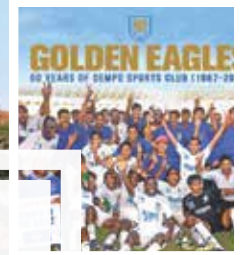
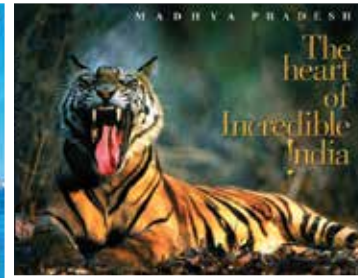
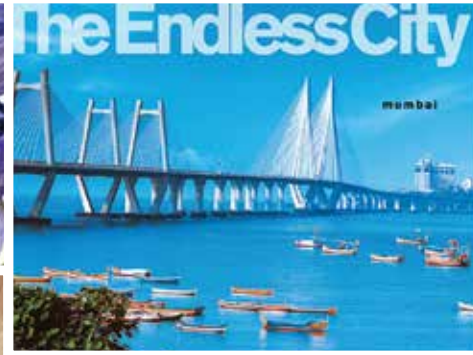
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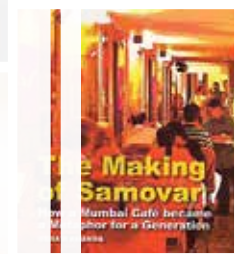
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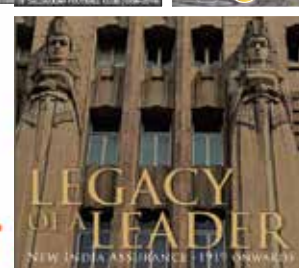
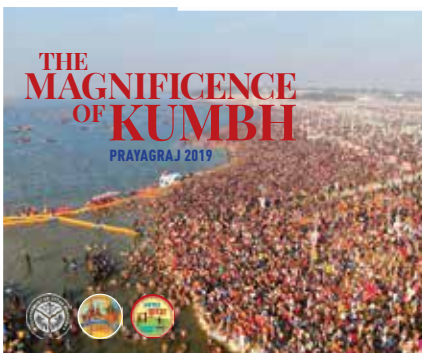
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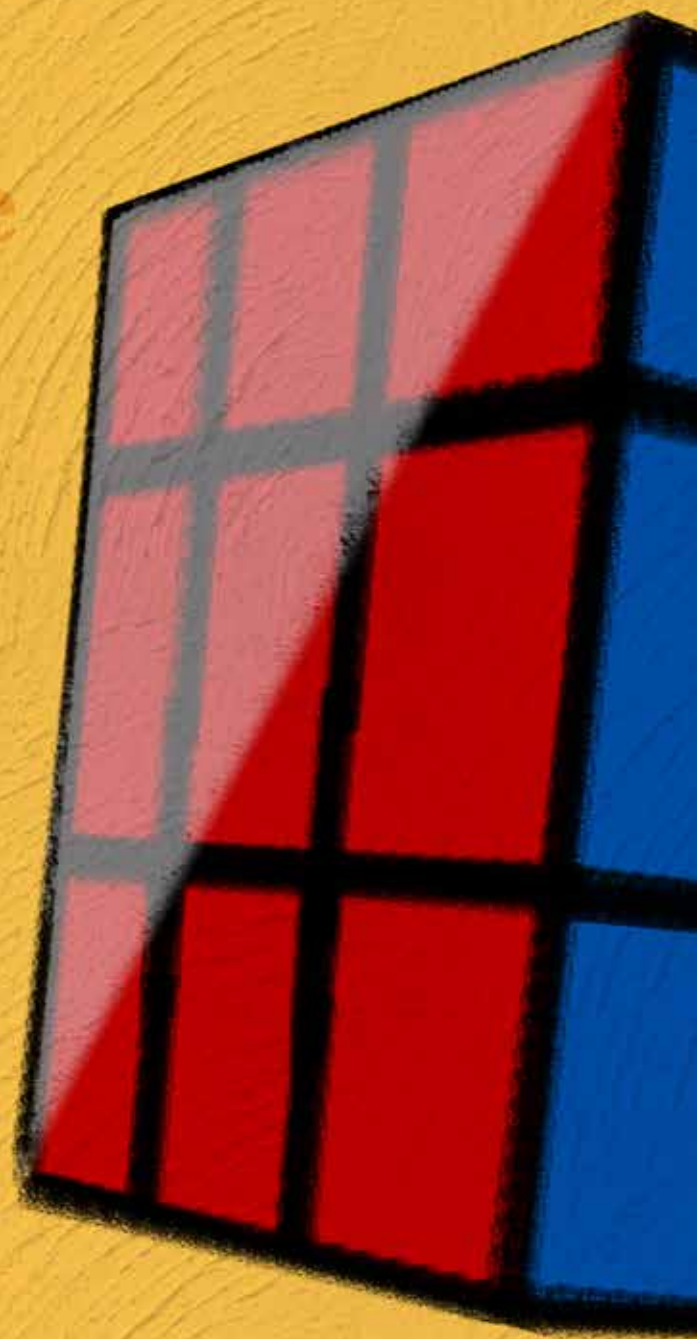
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Inclusive

Rethink  
strategy

Human  
impact

People-centric



People-driven

# BUSINESS STRATEGY MEETS PEOPLE STRATEGY



Purpose

Alignment

Meaningful actions



# Love-based leadership

*In a business environment where change is constantly happening, leaders must prioritise integrating their people and business plans for a holistic growth*

---

◆ YETUNDE HOFMANN, AUTHOR, *BEYOND ENGAGEMENT*

Here is a guide to finding the connections between your people and business strategies, and an explanation of the benefits that this path will offer your organisation.

### Why do we need alignment?


It's often said that a business is nothing without its people. But many managers and organisations often overlook the importance of this saying when crafting strategies for their future. Instead of seeing their people and business plans as one, they consider them separately and miss opportunities that would come through alignment. But failing to do this in a timely manner risks your companies following the doomed paths of the likes of Blackberry, Nokia, and other former business giants who have either ceased to exist or whose glory days have ended for good.

Consider what information you need to know when designing a new product or service or preparing to launch your company in a new market. Who is our customer, what impacts them, how are their needs shifting, and which mission critical deliverables do we need to prioritise to meet their demands—today, and tomorrow? The output of these questions will inform your business strategy in terms of research, marketing, and financing. But it also has a huge impact on your people.

Without understanding the human impact of new plans, you will not understand what strategy is needed in terms of recruitment, training, engagement, and upskilling. Looking at the composition of your teams in the context of your business strategies ensures that the right skill sets and resources are available at the right time. It also enables managers to act purposefully, with a deep understanding of who and how they will be impacted by your decisions, and prioritise meaningful actions that will move the needle on an organisation's growth and impact. In short, you must take care of your people implications and consequences, to successfully deliver your business strategy.

### What prevents alignment?

Many managers make the mistakes of thinking that you can align your people and business strategies by merely ordering it from above. But business leaders with this



**F**or organisations to thrive in the turbulent years ahead, managers must rethink how they approach their strategies to achieve growth and success. A more holistic approach is needed which considers a company's purpose and commercial aims alongside the needs and abilities of their people.

mindset, who believe decisions should be made by those at the top and executed by the middle and the bottom of the organisation, are the ones who risk limiting their company's innovation and creativity. Remember, the more diverse

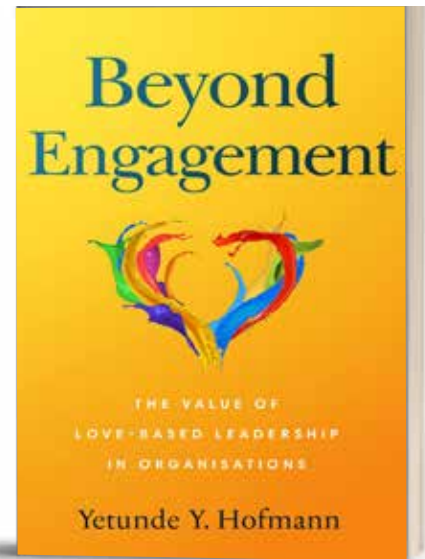
your thinking, the richer your decision-making abilities will become. Ignoring the experiences and perspectives of those around you will only weaken your understanding of the issues at hand.

Not considering or consulting those who will be most affected by your strategies is a mistake that has strong repercussions for your company's culture and ability to achieve its goals. It can breed resistance and resentment from those affected by the decisions, who feel they are undervalued

and unheard. An absence of diverse thought and experience in strategy development can also create blind spots for managers looking to enact changes.

It is paramount that your priorities, plans, and purpose align if they are to be accepted by your stakeholders. This is where a business-led, people-driven strategy comes in. It is

**The more diverse your thinking, the richer your decision-making abilities will become. Ignoring the experiences and perspectives of those around you will only weaken your understanding of the issues at hand.**



about focusing on ensuring that all your people, without exception, are considered and included. It is also about ensuring that all of your customers' and consumers' needs are understood and appreciated. Taking this diverse and inclusive approach can aid how you prioritise attraction, retention, selection, and deployment of talent to deliver on your strategy, and breed more innovative solutions to problems and opportunities that arise.

### **How do we achieve alignment**

Creating alignment is not a speedy process, but there are steps managers can take to kickstart the process. To start, you must establish what is inside and outside of your scope to achieve a better understanding of how various factors could influence your decisions and success. Carry out a review of your competencies and culture, those seen and unseen rules of engagement and ways of working that are adopted by your people. How do these align with your purpose and plans? Knowing the answers to these questions will inform you on what could enable or disable your strategic



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plans and allows you to take evidence-based decisions on creating a more inclusive, equitable environment.

Communication is also hugely important in achieving alignment and acceptance from your people. Managers should be open to accepting feedback and answering questions on why and how the strategies will be implemented to avoid fear and resistance from your employees. Devise an exciting communication plan that builds in reflective touch points and review moments with those involved. Engaging employee resource groups as stress-testers and identifying culture champions whose role it is to promote the benefits of your strategies and plans across the business can help you to identify any issues that may arise from those they represent and enact changes in respect of those findings.

A final tip would be to explore the organisational benefits of love-based leadership. It is, in my opinion, the greatest capability that any leader and business can possess. It enables business leaders to create an environment where everyone performs at their best and feels they

belong, without condition. It means training and development can be tailored to your people's needs, under-represented voices are represented and heard in meetings, and leaders can make difficult decisions with the backing of their teams as they know that they are pursuing the right course of action for the right reasons. Love-based leaders are driven by a deeper purpose and can deliver sustainable, meaningful change—the likes of which empowers others to execute a long-term strategy for the benefit of the consumer, communities, and company in which they serve.

Change is happening in the global business environment. But putting our heads in the sand and carrying on as usual, without consideration for how we can integrate our people and business plans, will leave us defenceless to the turbulence on the horizon. Committed, love-based leadership is needed more than ever. We must look at these strategies in parallel and with respect to our organisational purpose, and seek alignment that draws on our strengths—both now and in the future. ■



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Yetunde Hofmann** is Founder, Solaris Executive Leadership Development Academy. Hofmann is also author, *Beyond Engagement*.





*Constructive feedback is important as it points out results of some of our actions that may otherwise remain hidden, and in the process, makes us realise our weaknesses.*

◆ MUNIINDER K ANAND, CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

**LEADERSHIP**

# The path to intentional progress

**W**hen we are deemed responsible for accomplishing a mission, we are equipped with the needed skill set, but when navigating through fresh opportunities, projects, assignments, and engagements, you uncover the hidden potential and strengths within yourself. With each initiative, you tackle new challenges that stand before the stepping stone of your professional growth.

However, not all aspects of our strengths become evident to us; that's where feedback comes in, as it visibilises the intricacies that may otherwise remain hidden and in the process of doing so, our weaknesses too come to the forefront.

It serves as a much-needed push for your people, as their efforts are recognised and appreciated while also ensuring they know about where they went wrong. People willingly show up when their work is acknowledged through ongoing evaluation at work, as they consistently contribute and strive to perform at their best.

Research by Gallup suggests that people are 3.6 times more inclined to be highly motivated to excel in their tasks when they receive daily

feedback, as opposed to feedback provided on an annual basis. While the emphasis on the importance of effective communication is brought up now and then, we tend to not validate the priceless asset that effective feedback can be in the growth and development of the organisation and its people.

It invites engagement through conversation, highlights the key issues, and improves talent development at work. Although the traditional response methods followed a rigid format as the process was often delayed, the dynamic nature of the modern workplace necessitates adjustments to its structure.

In fact, in recent years, varied ways of adapting to the changes have evolved—from complete elimination to other modifications. At the Center for Creative Leadership we promote feedback as a GIFT and call it the SBI feedback model.

The three key components of the model include: understanding and defining the situation, detailing the specific behaviours observed, and elucidating the impact of the individual's actions. The framework offers flexibility in providing insightful, positive, or negative assistance, allowing both you and your people to progress toward a shared goal.

### 1. Situation

Offering guidance certainly benefits your team, but it also has the potential to introduce ambiguity into the work and create a transparent barrier that hinders communication. Without clear details, information with no context, including the omission of dates and times during feedback, can result in misunderstandings.

Recording and communicating even the details that seem minuscule, like a missed calendar invite for a meeting, proves to be beneficial to curb and eventually eliminate that from happening, as it might come in handy when dealing with situations of uncertainty.

### 2. Behaviour

Often, our unconscious bias, such as initial interaction, gender bias, ageism, etc., stops us from looking at situations and people from an objective perspective. This limits our ability to see people for who they are, as the actuality of situations starts to get influenced by our perceptions and set beliefs.

When we stick to factual information, discuss observable behaviour, and refrain from including personal opinions or judgments, we leave room for more open dialogue among our team members.

### 3. Impact

Every behaviour has an impact on the individual in question or the team around them. Such outcomes can be varied, especially when the team is diverse. Along with that, with obscure and missed details comes indecisiveness in receiving or giving feedback. It lacks personalisation when you need to communicate details.

When you emphasise whether the impact was positive or negative, you employ a more nuanced approach to managing the employees, as it helps them grow and develop their skills in the right direction.

While models like this one make a substantial contribution to employee growth, it is crucial to explore additional factors and conditions that enhance this development.

### Other approaches that contribute to employee's development

Effective mentoring programs and regular performance assessment sessions can provide personalised guidance and support for individual development. Additionally, it offers relevant training opportunities, workshops, and access to educational resources that



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empower people to acquire knowledge, contributing to their overall professional growth.

When giving feedback, I try to ensure that I compassionately convey my views, maintaining a balance that upholds both the quality and effectiveness of the work without compromise. It also goes beyond communicating the right and wrongs of their performance, as when provided with resources and tools, productivity levels significantly increase.

“It’s important to have people in our lives who will give us honest, constructive feedback. This is the only way we can grow and become better.”

- Bill Gates, Former CEO of Microsoft

Your people turn to you for guidance; it is crucial to create a workspace characterised by psychological safety. This, in turn, leads to clearer and more effective communication, as employees feel less hesitant to express their opinions and views. But how can we make sure that the reception of feedback improves so an honest conversation can take place?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Muniinder K Anand** is Managing Director – India, South Asia and Global Support Center, Center for Creative Leadership.

**1. Specificity in communication:** First and foremost is expressing the anticipated outcomes or expectations of the individual at the receiving end so mutual trust can be built. In addition to adhering to established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), a provision for qualitative feedback should also be made available in the organization. Moreover, it’s essential to be attentive to non-verbal cues, as an employee might face challenges in communication owing to hierarchical disparities.

**2. Going beyond coaching:** It is imperative that organisations provide coaching and mentoring initiatives to cultivate the growth and development of their employees but that’s just the beginning.

When we attempt to create optimal learning conditions that are accessible to people working either remotely or on-site we make ongoing and dedicated efforts that significantly contribute to the overall enhancement of both personal and professional capabilities. This holistic approach ensures an atmosphere for continuous growth within the organisation.

**3. Defining development dynamics:**

When working towards collective growth, the organization’s goals must align with those of its employees; a shared purpose cultivates a sense of belonging, fosters team harmony, and creates an environment conducive to seamless collaboration, ultimately facilitating the attainment of common objectives.

The gap between the collective efforts and goals of the organisation can only be bridged by optimal use of feedback, as it promotes surroundings geared towards sustained growth. So, ensuring that all that is said translates into actionable steps leads us to move toward intentional progress. ■



# Recommended reads



## **REINVENT YOURSELF: PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS THAT WILL TRANSFORM YOUR WORK LIFE**

**Author:** Dr Susan Kahn

**Publisher:** Kogan Page

This book offers some fascinating insights that will be invaluable for all leaders and managers. It will help you to build your confidence and tap into your full potential by developing the kind of versatile mindset that will allow you to adapt to any changes that come your way.

Being a manager in 2024 means facing stress and uncertainties, so Kahn outlines simple strategies that will show you how to focus your efforts in difficult times.

ReinventYourself draws upon psychological research and first-hand stories to help you cope when things inevitably go wrong, with exercises that will allow you to continue your learning long after you have finished reading the book.



## **CONFRONTING THE STORM: REGENERATING LEADERSHIP AND HOPE IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY**

**Author:** David Ross

**Publisher:** Business Expert Press

Drawing upon his experience as one of the world's leading VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) specialists, author David Ross outlines the traits that leaders and managers really need today when they are Confronting The Storm.

Interestingly, Ross argues that much of the conventional leadership wisdom that has been celebrated for decades is, in fact, holding back progress when it comes to some of the biggest issues the world is facing today. He outlines a more collaborative approach of leadership instead, urging readers to embrace a mindset that is more open to the ideas of others.

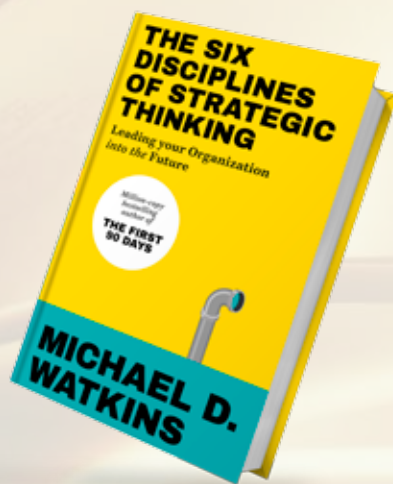


**NO SILVER BULLET: BURSTING THE BUBBLE OF THE ORGANISATIONAL QUICK FIX**

**Author:** Steve Hearsom

When faced with common management challenges, such as digitalisation, disruption or disengaged teams, it is a fairly natural human instinct to look for a quick solution. Often it is this feeling of discomfort in uncertainty that makes managers buy a piece of software or bring in a consultant that promises to fix the problem.

In this new book leadership expert Steve Hearsom argues that when it comes to handling complex issues there is ‘no silver bullet’. You may have your go-to resources and people, but what works in one context, at one time, may not work in another. *No Silver Bullet* suggests practical strategies that will shift your mindset to get more comfortable experimenting with different possibilities.



**THE SIX DISCIPLINES OF STRATEGIC THINKING: LEADING YOUR ORGANIZATION INTO THE FUTURE**

**Author:** Michael D Watkins  
**Publisher:** Harper Business

*The Six Disciplines of Strategic Thinking* offers advice for any managers who find themselves being overwhelmed by chaos or outmanoeuvred by competitors, by using strategic thinking to focus and turn disruption into opportunity.

Watkins argues that every leader can learn to be a stronger strategic thinker. From mental agility and pattern recognition to visioning and political savvy, this fascinating book digs deep into the six disciplines of strategic thinking that separate good and great leaders, and offers the tools required to build this skill into a competitive edge.

This excellent new book not only provides practical steps to bring more strategic thinking your day-to-day work, but also shows how these skills can be nurtured over time to spread throughout your wider team.



**WHAT IS A SOCIAL IMPACT?**

**Author:** Ildiko Almasi Simsic  
**Publisher:** Cap de Nice Press

Leaders and managers all over the world are increasingly aware of the importance of the need for their business to ‘do good’ in society, but still too many don’t know how—or if, in fact, their well-intentioned efforts are actually making a meaningful difference.

This pioneering new book is a guide for anyone wanting to truly achieve social sustainability for their organisation. From ESG to social impact assessment, Corporate Social Responsibility to impact investing, philanthropy and social enterprise, this book goes beyond the buzzwords to show how to make social sustainability a successful reality. The author manages to distil 15 years of experience and compelling case studies into a clear blueprint for a more socially conscious future.



Innovation teams are critical for the success of innovation projects, yet the importance of setting them up for success is often ignored, opines Helene Cahen, MS, founder and principal consultant at Fire Up Innovation Consulting. Helene is also coaching the Executive Program at Haas School of Business and author, *FIRE UP INNOVATION: Sparking And Sustaining Innovation Teams*.

**MYTH  
BUSTER**

# Set up your team for success

## **MYTH 1: The people on the innovation team are the right people for the team.**

An organisation may approach the composition of an innovation team the same way as other teams by including a mix of functions that can provide different perspectives. However, there are more factors to consider besides having a multifunctional team. Innovating involves uncertainty, a high risk of failure, and solving new challenges; the composition of the innovation team needs to address these.

- Team members should be comfortable with ambiguity and excited about innovation. People with previous experience on innovation teams may have the skills necessary to succeed (for example, flexibility, tolerance with ambiguity, curiosity, and being a team player), which are somewhat different from the skills required to be successful in an established business (for example, reliability, technical knowledge, deep knowledge of the field, repeatable process).
- Consider diversity in the team's

composition, including diversity of background and experience and diversity as defined in DEI (race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender, and sexual orientation).

- Finally, consider the rarely discussed yet essential element of diversity of thinking, a topic I cover in my book *Fire Up Innovation: Sparking and Sustaining Innovation Teams* and my TEDx talk. We all solve problems differently, and it turns out that we all have preferences for different parts of the innovation process (you can find out more about your preferences if you take the FourSight® assessment). Ideally, you want diversity in how team members solve problems so biases and short cuts are avoided.

## **MYTH 2: The team should be laser-focused on the outcome.**

Innovation teams must be clear and agree on an outcome and criteria for success upfront. Yet, that is not enough. Clarifying a process(es) and tools that allow the team to get to the outcome is also critical. Many

**Innovation is about creating change for others, and it is essential that the users, defined here as those who will be affected by the change, be part of the process.**

processes may be used, such as Design Thinking, Agile, Six Sigma, or Lean Thinking, but the most important is not necessarily which process you use but that each team is familiar with it. Team members may have used different processes before or are new to an innovation process, so clarifying the process and tools that will be used and providing training will move the project along faster, improve collaboration, and avoid some of the anxiety of the unknown.

A team facilitator (internal facilitator or a hired expert) is also critical to moving the team along. The facilitator's role is to focus on the process (preparing the meetings, selecting the tools, managing conflicts, checking on the team member, etc.) so the team can focus on the content. If the facilitator is part of the team, they must prioritise their facilitator role first and be less involved in the content, as focusing simultaneously on the process and the content is challenging.



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### **MYTH 3: The team knows best.**

While the team needs to make decisions at each step of the process, they do not know best. Innovation is about creating change for others, and it is essential that the users, defined here as those who will be affected by the change, be part of the process. Ultimately, your innovation has to be purchased or adopted, and the users are the ones who can provide the information as to whether or not your innovation is worthwhile.

Sometimes teams get very excited by their ideas and reinforce their convictions by staying in an internal silo. Involving your users throughout the process, from understanding their needs to wanting to share ideas and early prototypes, will ensure your innovation is needed and, ideally, will delight your customers. That approach should include the end users and other users (business partners or other departments in your organisation) that are critical to successfully implementing your innovation. For example, the legal department may tell you that your idea is infringing on an existing patent, or a retailer may not want to carry your product.





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Being in touch with all your users regularly is critical to making the right decisions.

**Myth 4: Innovation teams always succeed.**

Innovation is about trying and failing; then trying again. Iteration is the name of the game. When an organisation provides some of its human and financial resources to work on an innovation project, it often assumes that the team will be successful. However, more than 90 per cent of new products fail, so anticipating they will fail may be more beneficial. The team needs to find ways to limit the cost of failure. One way is to create and test prototypes early and cheaply so that when significant issues arise, the investment is limited rather than waiting for a perfect solution that requires more time and funding. Accepting roughness and imperfection, testing to learn (not to evaluate), and iterating during the early stages of innovation integrate failure into the process. Ultimately, the solutions that start emerging have a better chance of succeeding.

**Myth 5: Company culture is not critical to the success of the team.**

Often, a company will decide to create

an innovation team without considering whether the culture of the organisation will support or limit its chance of success. A supportive culture may put in place systems to protect the team early on, for example, an innovation champion who may not be involved in the daily work but will give freedom and some guidance so the team can try new things and fail without negative consequences. Innovation is about risk and uncertainty. If the management team asks for numbers or certainty about the outcome too early, judges the ideas and solutions using similar criteria to the ones used for their established businesses, or rejects all the recommendations rather than providing constructive feedback, the team will likely get frustrated and demotivated. This may destroy the innovation spirit and limit the team's ability to take risks and enter new territories. That is why start-ups bought by large organisations often end up failing as the new culture with cumbersome rules, steps and guardrails diminishes the ability of the teams to continue innovating.

Next time your organisation starts an innovation project, take time to consider how to best set your team up for success. **IM**



*The way we react to mistakes is crucial to creating high-performing organisations even in competitive global markets.*

**ORGANISATIONAL  
CULTURE**

◆ FRANK DEVINE, AUTHOR, *RAPID MASS ENGAGEMENT*

# Unlock the power of mistakes

**H**ow do we achieve both the minimisation of variability crucial to reliability and the creation of a culture that values the 'healthy mistakes' that have been known to drive innovation, psychological safety and competitiveness? Let's look at how we can unlock the power of mistakes and learn why the way we react to them, at every organisational level, is crucial to creating high-performing organisations even in the most competitive of global markets.

## **Reframe and clearly differentiate between different types of 'mistakes'**

As the comedian John Cleese memorably demonstrated, mistakes are inevitable. They are similar to a guided missile in that it does not matter how many times the missile is off target on its journey provided it adjusts to the feedback received and is accurate on arrival.

Despite this inevitability, employees and leaders alike will naturally see mistakes as universally

bad. This is such a powerful instinct that equally powerful antidotes are necessary to avoid mistakes classified as 'healthy' being squashed by fear, risk-aversion, and negativity.

To avoid this, start by defining terms clearly so everyone can distinguish healthy mistakes from those mistakes that can be predicted and prevented and that require powerful 'why never again' processes. The former are inevitable as we strive to do things no-one has done before or better than has ever been done before. The latter are preventable.

Failing to ensure that a hospital has the right specialists in the right combinations 24/7 - by tolerating reliance on unreliable voluntary overtime - produces entirely predictable lapses in patient care. This should be unacceptable and urgently reformed so it can never happen again.

In contrast, a surgeon, under immense pressure and applying the correct medical best practice, making a decision in good faith that failed to save the life of a patient has not really made a 'mistake'. This is an example of a 'best effort that did not succeed'.

Patients die in both cases, but the former could

have been prevented by robust resource planning and refusal to accept restrictive practices that harm patients.

### **Manage on green**

Walk in the shoes of employees preparing for a team performance review with their senior management. The team's experience of previous reviews is a relentless focus on the metrics showing 'red', i.e. not meeting the standard. This is combined with a total lack of interest in the green metrics, those that are meeting or exceeding standards. In that atmosphere, imagine how employees feel going into these reviews and how easy it is for them to admit mistakes?

Imagine it we changed the model. Imagine the difference leaders can make by asking how the team achieved 'green' and, indeed how the 'reds' were made less red. If employees feel appreciated and understood, rather than audited or criticised, imagine the change in atmosphere and trust for future performance reviews. Consider the impact on the openness and the diagnostic and problem-solving quality of such reviews.

In general, 'manage on green' when reviewing performance and ensure that your organisation rejects the conventional 'management by exception' approach which systematically takes good performance for granted and makes it difficult for employees to admit mistakes.



### **Create bottom-up behavioural standards to set expectations around mistakes**

Top-down corporate values are an important integrating mechanism in any organisation. To powerfully address the natural tendency to fear even healthy mistakes, local differentiation is also needed. To achieve this, managers can set, or better still, agree with employees locally-owned Behavioural Standards .

Organisations implementing The Rapid Mass Engagement process have created powerful, locally owned Behavioural Standards demonstrating what to do when something goes wrong and how to report bad news upwards in the organisation.

### **Lead by example by admitting mistakes and by modelling 'why never again?' responses when appropriate**

Employees know their bosses are human and make mistakes, and they lose respect for leaders who deny or over-explain their mistakes or try to cover them up. If you model admitting to mistakes then others will follow.

Employees also know that not all mistakes are healthy ones. Ensure that this type of mistake is minimised by providing robust 'why never again?' processes and management routines.

### **If national or regional culture is a barrier to healthy mistakes...**

In many parts of the world, differences in cultural dimensions such as Uncertainty Avoidance and Power Distance inhibit mistake-friendly behaviour. To overcome this hidden barrier, identify those cultural differences that are benign and those that inhibit the approach outlined here. Once identified apply countermeasures to adjust.

This equips the organisation's leaders to predict and prevent any potentially damaging cultural differences when operating in any global market and working with people from any culture.

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**Avoid The Heathrow School of Business**

Publication bias is the reporting of successes and the omission of examples of when the advocated drug/ medical device/leadership approach failed or sub-optimised. I often come across what I call ‘the Heathrow School of Business’, named after an Airport where books infected by publication bias are often purchased. The authors of these books are often well-known celebrity leaders and the content can be summarised as:

“I developed a perfect strategy and perfect plans which I implemented perfectly”.

The ghost writer often has little practical experience of how to build globally competitive organisations but is very skilful in making it an entertaining and intellectually undemanding read.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Frank Devine** is founder, Accelerated Improvement Ltd. Frank is also author, *Rapid Mass Engagement: Driving Continuous Improvement through Employee Culture Creation.*

A more authentic book title, consistent with the theme of healthy mistakes, would be: “We created the best strategy we could given all the known and unknown unknowns, we created plans, some of which worked and some did not, we made lots of mistakes and we relentlessly learned from them.”

On reflection, this is probably not catchy enough for the publishers! **IM**

**References**

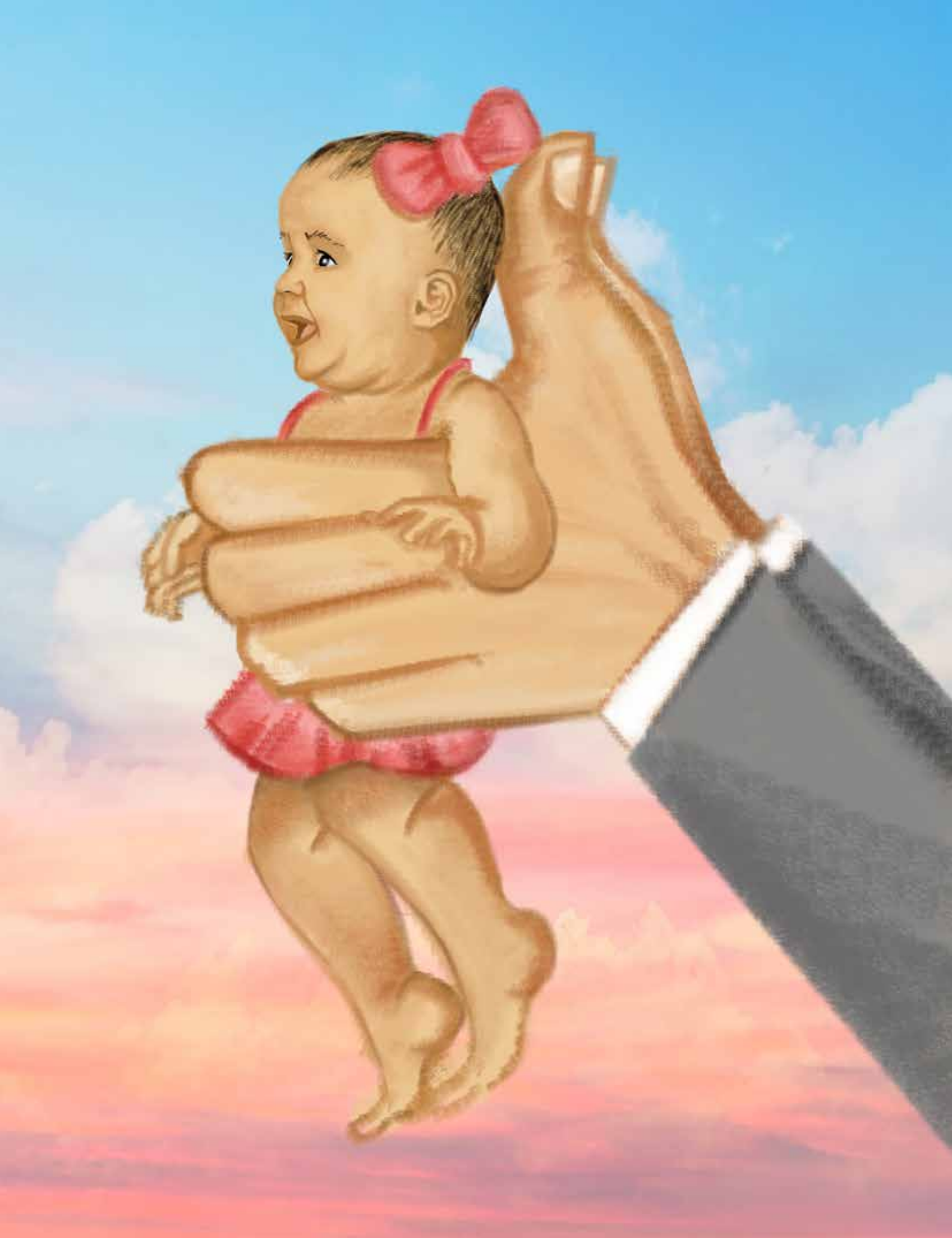
- 1 John Cleese, The Importance of Mistakes, 2004.
- 2 Behavioural Standards are more behaviourally specific than values. They are written in the local language and style thus providing differentiation and local ownership and, crucially, enhanced accountability.
- 3 See *Rapid Mass Engagement*, McGraw-Hill, 2023 for examples across multiple sectors.
- 4 Hofstede “*Cultures and Organizations*” McGraw-Hill 2010 (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition).

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*In this age of branding, it is not just companies and products but also people who need reputation management.*

◆ J DEVARPRAKASH, TARAPUR ATOMIC POWER STATION

MARKETING

# Brand yourself

**W**hether you know or not, whether you like it or not, you are a brand. Your 'branding'

happened soon after you were born, and has happened through the various phases of your life—a crying baby; a silent kid; the smiler; the moody; and many more moods. From toddler to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to middle age to old age, as you go through the human life cycle, your branding travels along with you at all stages. And, usually, this branding lasts till your end. It can be beyond that, if you are exceptional.

In this age of branding, not just companies and products need reputation management, but people do as well. While companies and products crave branding for getting a hold in the marketplace, people require it to have an identity in workplace or society.

## Personal branding

What others largely think about you based on your attitude, knowledge, quality, morale, values, nature, work, commitment and so on is known as your 'Personal Branding'. Jeff Bezos, founder

of the world's largest e-commerce and cloud computing company, Amazon, once said, "Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room."

For instance, look at the brand 'Homi J. Bhabha', the founding father of India's nuclear power programme. His dynamic personal branding raised him as an internationally renowned personality. He was a nuclear scientist, but he was also recognised as a visionary, artist, and an ardent nature-lover. His personal brand value led India to enter the sophisticated list of countries having scientific prowess. Even today, after several decades of his time, brand 'Homi Bhabha' lives on.

## Understanding the relevance of personal branding

Personal branding remained a lesser-known subject until management expert Tom Peters came up with his startling essay *The Brand You* in 1997. Since then, it became an intriguing part in management and personality development studies and is now regarded as a distinctive field. Though the concept of personal branding is relatively new, several organisations and people who have realised its relevance in business and workplace are employing personal brand strategies and are reaping its benefits.

**Your organisation is your identity. Immerse yourself into the system, values and ethos of the society or workplace. Amidst these, try to find a place for yourself.**

Consider the brand 'Ratan Tata': He is known more as a philanthropist than as an industrialist. Drawn by his personal brand that reflects his vision, leadership, nationalism and commitment to social causes, over 126 lakh people follow him in social media. Besides the fact that he is one among the most admirable personalities, his products and organisations have also gained high reputation among the public.

#### **Brand yourself—if you don't, others will**

Your personal brand is a significant trait that travels along throughout your life, but you hardly manage it, leaving it to others and circumstances.

Understanding your own brand and managing it yourself will undoubtedly help in many ways—achieve self-realisation, improve performance, job satisfaction, and of course, fame. Also, it often reminds you about your own strengths and weaknesses. And in organisations, it will pave the way for good work culture, improved productivity, and recognition.

There are plenty of tested personal branding strategies to adopt. In fact, with the exponential emergence of social media you can build your brand overnight. It is much easier to obtain than maintain. Therefore, the key is consistency. Remember, your organisation is your identity. Immerse yourself into the system, values and ethos of the society or workplace. Amidst these, try to find a place for yourself.

#### **Here are some ways to steer your personal brand along with that of your organisation:**

- **Be passionate towards your work**  
Be fanatical about whatever you are today and try to give full justice to the work you have been assigned. With the ambition to achieve

something you might have joined an office. But things might not work out the way you had planned. In such a circumstance, you have two choices other than leaving the job: one, you remain frustrated and work insipidly. Two, keep your annoyance aside and work passionately. Surely, choice two will make you stand out and will increase your reputation among your colleagues.

- **Appreciate others**

Everyone is talented in one way or another. When one of your colleagues accomplishes a task, you be the first person to appreciate him or her. Acknowledging others' work or ability is crucial in maintaining and retaining good personal relationship in the workplace.

- **Face challenges**

Do not fear the challenges that come on your way in the workplace. Taking up challenging tasks will give you a chance to put your best foot forward at work. It will certainly allow you to network with new and more people and open up many opportunities. Face challenges, but take calculated risks.

- **Mere branding will not take you anywhere**

A customer buys a brand new luxury car and drives it home. After a mile, the car comes to a sudden halt. After all his attempts to start the car go in vain, the customer calls the store manager in anguish. The manager, from the other end, politely replies that the car does not have an engine. Taken aback by this response, the customer asks the manager that how did the car ran for a mile without engine. The manager says, "Because of the brand value."

This story is for those who believe that branding alone is enough to acquire esteem. Actually, your personal brand will take you only up to a mile, to move beyond that you must work consistently, and to move beyond with same reputation you must toil. **IM**



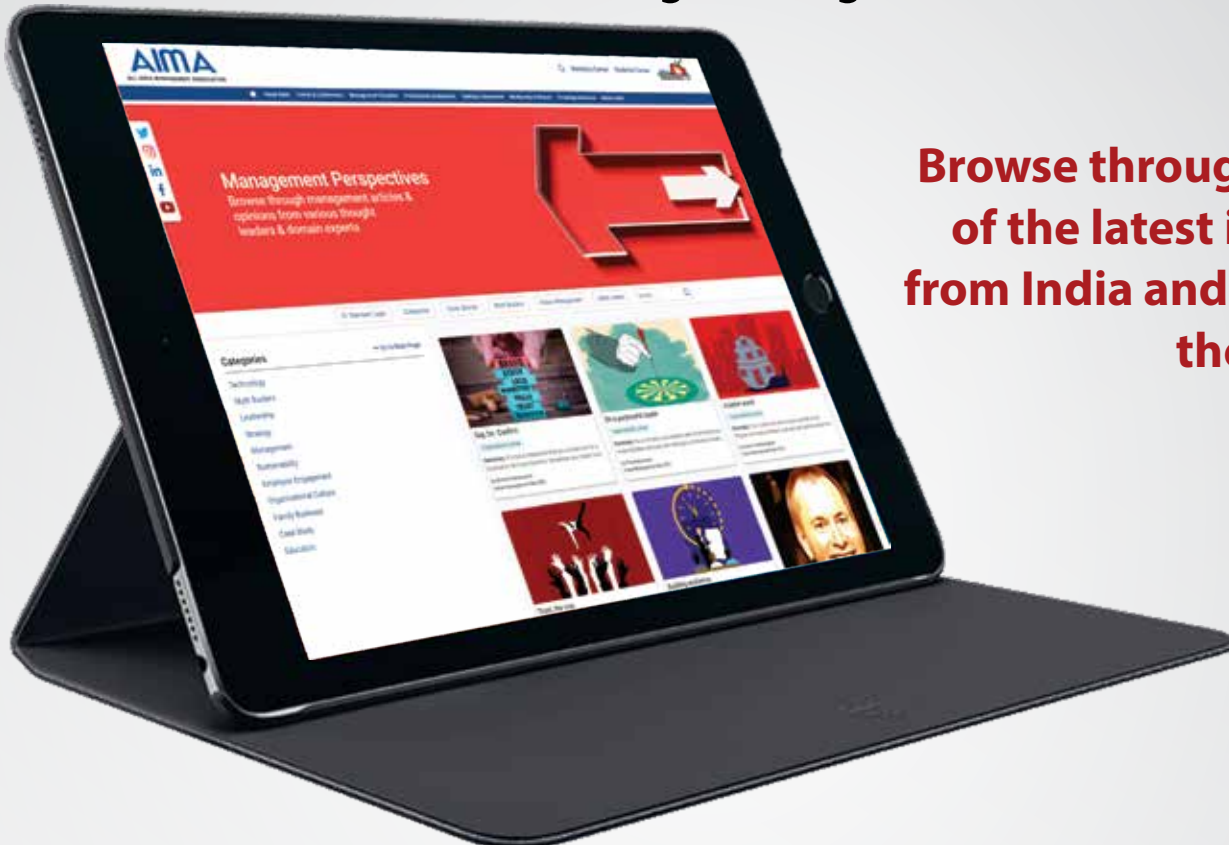
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