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FEBRUARY 2026 VOLUME 65 ISSUE 2 PAGES 39 ₹60

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CURIOSITY OVER COMFORT

Reward reinvention

BUILDING CULTURES OF ADAPTABILITY

DR HELMUT SCHUSTER AND DR DAVID OXLEY

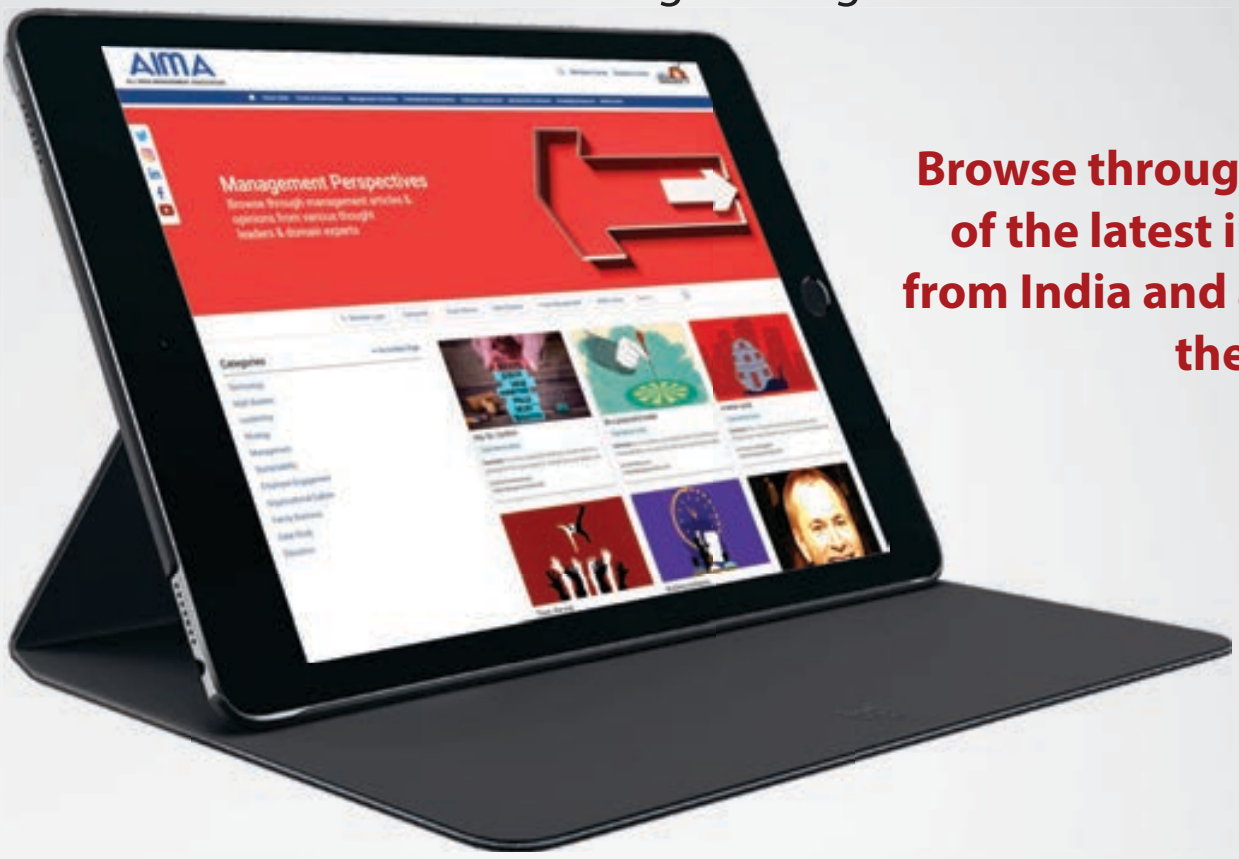


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indian management
THE JOURNAL OF THE ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
VOLUME 65 | ISSUE 2 | FEBRUARY 2026

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Creativity with consistency: Rewarding reinvention

T V Narendran is CEO & Managing Director, Tata Steel.

Every enduring institution carries within it a paradox. The very strengths that create longevity can, over time, become constraints on renewal. Managing this paradox—remaining consistent in purpose while being creative in action—has become one of the most critical capabilities for organisations seeking to stay relevant in an uncertain world.

Consistency and creativity are often treated as competing forces. One is associated with discipline, reliability, and predictability; the other with imagination, experimentation, and change. Yet organisations that endure understand that these are not opposites, but complements. Consistency provides the foundation on which trust is built with customers, employees, and society at large. Creativity provides the momentum that allows organisations to adapt, renew, and stay relevant. One anchors identity; the other enables reinvention. The most resilient organisations do not choose between consistency and creativity; they learn to orchestrate both.

Consistency plays a vital role in large and complex organisations. It reinforces culture, enables operational excellence, and brings clarity to decision-making. Purpose, values, safety, ethics, and respect for people are not variables to be tested; they are non-negotiables that must remain steady even as strategies and structures evolve. When people are clear about what will not change, they feel more confident in questioning what can. Stability, paradoxically, creates the psychological safety required for innovation.

At the same time, consistency can become a constraint when it hardens into habit. Practices that once drove performance can slowly turn into routines that are followed unquestioningly. In a world shaped by technological acceleration, shifting customer expectations, and heightened social and environmental responsibilities, reliance on past success is no longer sufficient. Standing still, even while performing efficiently, can erode long-term relevance. This is why reinvention has become a continuous imperative rather than an occasional response to crisis.

This imperative is visible across industries. Automotive companies are reimagining mobility after decades of incremental improvement. Financial institutions are redesigning access and trust in a digital-first ecosystem. Consumer and retail businesses are rewriting value propositions as experiences and personalisation take centre stage. Even traditionally asset-heavy sectors such as manufacturing are undergoing deep structural transformation, driven by sustainability pressures, changing cost structures, and global competition. Shifts towards circularity, cleaner technologies, and digitally enabled operations are not just environmental or efficiency initiatives; they represent fundamental rethinking of how value is created.

Reinvention of this nature does not happen organically. It requires leadership that creates the conditions for change while preserving

coherence. Leaders must articulate a clear sense of purpose, invest in future-facing capabilities, and encourage teams to challenge established assumptions. Crucially, reinvention cannot be confined to isolated initiatives or innovation labs. It must permeate everyday work, from the shop floor to the boardroom, and be reflected in how decisions are made and trade-offs are managed.

In an uncertain world, organisations often swing between two extremes: clinging to stability or pursuing disruption without direction. Neither path is sustainable on its own. Enduring organisations learn to balance creativity that questions assumptions with consistency that anchors purpose

Resilience has emerged as a defining leadership capability in this context. Recent years have exposed organisations to geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, inflationary pressures, and volatile demand. Those that emerged stronger were not necessarily the ones with the most detailed plans, but those with the capacity to adapt quickly and learn continuously. Reinvention, therefore, must extend beyond formal training programmes and strategy documents. It needs to be embedded in live projects, cross-functional collaboration, and daily problem-solving. Change becomes meaningful when it evolves into habit.

Equally important is how organisations recognise and reward reinvention. Culture is shaped by what is celebrated. If success alone is rewarded, people will avoid thoughtful risk. If efficiency is valued over learning, experimentation will diminish. Organisations that are serious about renewal acknowledge effort, learning, and intent alongside outcomes. Not every experiment will succeed, nor should it be expected to. What matters is whether these efforts build capability, confidence, and options for the future. When people see that challenging the status quo is encouraged rather than penalised, reinvention becomes collective rather than exceptional.

In an uncertain world, organisations often swing between two extremes: clinging to stability or pursuing disruption without direction. Neither path is sustainable on its own. Enduring organisations learn to balance creativity that questions assumptions with consistency that anchors purpose. They combine experimentation with execution, agility with discipline, and a future-facing mindset with enduring values.

The organisations that thrive over time will not be defined by how radically they change, nor by how rigidly they preserve the past. They will be defined by their ability to reward reinvention while remaining rooted in who they are. That balance between creativity and consistency is not merely a leadership challenge; it is a lasting competitive advantage.

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Building cultures of adaptability has become a strategic imperative in a world defined by rapid technological disruption, shifting markets, and the accelerating impact of AI. Organisations that cling to stability, rigid hierarchies, and risk avoidance often find themselves unable to respond effectively to change. While consistency has value, overemphasising it can suppress experimentation, creativity, and honest dialogue about what is no longer working. Leadership plays a decisive role in reversing this pattern.

To foster adaptability, leaders must actively reward reinvention. This means recognising not only successful outcomes but also thoughtful attempts to innovate, learn, and improve. When employees see that experimentation is acknowledged rather than punished, psychological safety increases. People feel more comfortable questioning assumptions, proposing new approaches, and learning from failure. Curiosity becomes an asset instead of a liability.

Rewarding reinvention also signals that growth and evolution are core organisational values. It communicates that adaptability is not optional or reactive, but a continuous expectation. Leaders can reinforce this by aligning incentives, performance metrics, and recognition systems with behaviours such as collaboration, upskilling, cross-functional problem solving, and continuous learning.

Ultimately, cultures of adaptability are built intentionally. By celebrating reinvention and modelling it themselves, leaders ensure their organisations remain resilient, innovative, and relevant in an era of constant transformation.

Do write in with your views to **imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com**

Maneck Davar

Maneck Davar

indian management
THE JOURNAL OF THE ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
A SPENTA MULTIMEDIA PVT LTD PUBLICATION
FEBRUARY 2026 VOLUME 65 ISSUE 2

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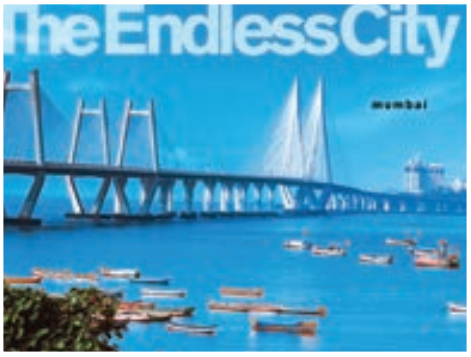
Robert Gomes | 022 24811006
robert@spentamultimedia.com
Bhairavnath Sutar | 022 24811006
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Indian Management, the monthly magazine of Spenta Multimedia Private Limited, is published and printed by Mr Maneck E. Davar on behalf of Spenta Multimedia Private Limited. Printed at Spenta Multimedia Private Limited, Plot 15, 16 & 21/1, Village – Chikloli, Morivali, MIDC, Ambernath (West), District-Thane. Published from 1102, Akashdeep Building, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi – 110001.
Editor – Maneck E. Davar

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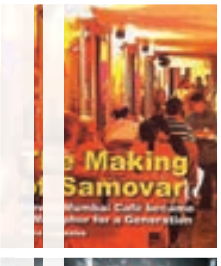








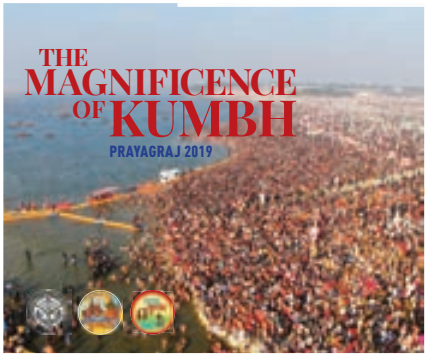


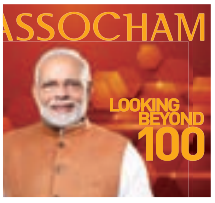








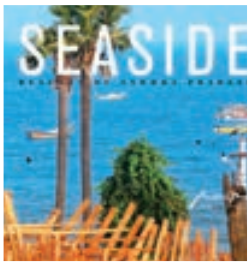










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ADAPTABILITY IS STRATEGY





Building cultures of adaptability

In a world shaped by intelligent systems, the most successful organisations will be those that continually reinvent themselves.

✦ DR HELMUT SCHUSTER AND DR DAVID OXLEY, CO-AUTHORS, *ARTIFICIAL DEATH OF A CAREER*



In many large organisations, a quiet contradiction exists. Leaders speak of innovation, agility, and transformation, yet the systems they oversee encourage the status quo. Employees are guided toward consistency, predictability, and adherence to "how things are done here." Phrases such as "you will quickly figure out how we do things around here" or "our culture has served us well for decades" may sound benign. However, they often reflect an institutional desire to control behavior and reduce variance. Over time, these tendencies become embedded in HR processes, performance management, recruitment criteria and reward structures.

What begins as cultural pride can calcify into cultural rigidity. As organisations grow, structures that enabled early success can slowly become constraints. Mature firms shift from experimentation to efficiency, just as humans move from adolescence to adulthood. While efficiency drives scale, it also diminishes adaptability. This risk becomes especially pronounced in the context of artificial intelligence (AI), where rapid technological shifts demand continuous reinvention.

The central question, therefore, is not merely how to adopt AI, but how to cultivate an environment in which people feel both safe and motivated to experiment with it.

Why large organisations drift toward rigidity

- **Systems that reward consistency**

  Organisational research consistently shows that formal systems shape behaviour. Performance evaluations, promotion criteria, and managerial expectations often reward error-free execution more than creative exploration. Employees quickly learn that conformity feels safer than curiosity. As Amy Edmondson's work on psychological safety suggests, individuals avoid taking risks when they fear negative consequences for experimenting (Edmondson, 2018).

  Over time, such systems produce cultures where employees focus on minimising mistakes rather than maximising possibilities.

- **The decline curve of scale**

  When organisations transition from growth to consolidation, processes become more elaborate and controls more rigid. Researchers call this the 'success trap', where past strengths become future weaknesses. Research on organisational life cycles highlights that firms often enter decline when they stop challenging

existing assumptions and begin prioritising efficiency over adaptability (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

Leadership narratives often shift as well. Instead of championing reinvention, leaders begin to emphasise identity, heritage and "proven" processes. The effect isn't that different from driving at full speed while only looking in the rearview mirror.

What startups do differently

Early-stage companies operate with few formal policies. There are limited job descriptions, minimal bureaucracy and an intense focus on solving problems in any way possible. Startups pivot frequently, iterate relentlessly and embrace ambiguity. This entrepreneurial mode supports what Eric Ries describes as the loop of creating, measuring and learning (Ries, 2011).

The absence of rigid systems allows individuals to think more broadly and experiment more freely. It is this flexibility, rather than technology or funding, that forms much of a startup's competitive advantage.

However, as organisations scale, these informal practices are replaced by structured processes designed for reliability. The very tactics that support stability come at a cost to innovation. Slowly but surely adaptive behaviors are killed.

The AI challenge: Why reinvention especially matters now

AI shifts the ground beneath organisations in profound ways, perhaps like digital tools did in the 1990s, and before that steam power, the printing press, or gunpowder. New tools don't just change workflows; they challenge their very existence. Yet our recent conversations with large enterprises seem to miss this completely.



- **A risk-first mindset**

  Many executives begin AI discussions by asking how to control usage. While governance is important, a fear-based approach discourages early experimentation and signals mistrust. Research from WTW[1] reinforces this point by highlighting that cultures emphasising control over curiosity significantly delay AI adoption and reduce its value (WTW, 2025).

- **Employee inertia**

  Employees often do not feel intrinsically motivated to pursue reinvention. The motivation to learn new tools competes with the comfort of familiar routines. This is a subject that has been central to our own research over recent years. Individuals, particularly in large organisations, often feel completely detached from purpose or meaning. Consequently, they content themselves with a superficial relationship with their jobs, focusing on tasks in exchange for salary.



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■ **Systems that punish novelty**

Traditional performance metrics reward consistency, not creativity. As a result, experimenting with AI may appear personally risky. Research published by Wiley[2] shows that employees adopt AI more effectively when trust, psychological safety and leadership support are strong. A key test is whether well-intentioned mistakes are celebrated…or punished (Wiley, 2025).

For organisations to meaningfully leverage AI, they must empower people to use it without fear of reprisal.

Toward a culture of reinvention: The N.E.X.U.S. Framework

To build truly adaptive cultures, leaders should consider adopting 'N.E.X.U.S'. It positions adaptability as the connective tissue that links people, technology and strategy.

■ **N: Neural sandboxes**

Employees need safe, bounded environments where experimentation is encouraged. Sandboxing allows individuals to test ideas with synthetic or low-risk data, explore new work flows and learn by doing. Time-bound exploratory projects reduce fear of failure and reinforce the idea that learning itself has value.

The *Los Angeles Times*[3] notes that such structured experimentation is essential for employee AI adoption and lowers psychological barriers to trying new tools (*Los Angeles Times*, 2025).

■ **E: Exposed leadership**

Leaders must actively model the behaviour they wish to see. When senior executives share experiments, discuss failures and openly explore AI tools, they create an environment where reinvention feels normal rather than risky. Transformational leadership frameworks show that leaders who empower, inspire and challenge their teams foster greater commitment to innovation (SBS Research4, 2024).

■ **X: Xenial trust**

The concept of xenial[5] relates to hospitable environments. Xenial trust refers to creating a welcoming psychological climate where individuals feel protected while engaging with unfamiliar technologies.

Trust research in AI[6] adoption demonstrates that both cognitive trust (belief in AI outcomes) and emotional trust (comfort in using the tool) are required for meaningful uptake. Without trust, employees either underutilise AI or circumvent it entirely.

■ **U: Unbounded learning loops**

Most organisations treat learning like fixing



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Helmut Schuster
co-author, *Artificial Death of a Career: How to stay relevant and thrive in the age of AI.*

a leaky tap. They tighten a screw, patch a hole or adjust the pressure. This is single-loop learning, because the goal is simply to stop the leak.

What they should be doing is asking a deeper question: Why does this tap keep leaking in the first place? Is the plumbing faulty? Is the water pressure wrong? Is the whole system outdated? This is double-loop learning, which does not just repair the problem but examines the assumptions, habits and rules that created it.

Chris Argyris introduced this idea to show that real adaptability comes not from quick fixes but from rethinking the system that produced the problem in the first place.

- **S: Signal-based rewards**

Finally, organisations must revise reward systems so that experimentation is explicitly valued. This includes recognising learning efforts, highlighting well-designed failures and promoting individuals who demonstrate curiosity and initiative.

Research from Thomson Reuters shows that firms with a formally articulated AI strategy, which includes incentives and recognition mechanisms, are twice as likely to generate AI-driven revenue growth (Thomson Reuters, 2025).

A revised reward system communicates to employees that reinvention is not a moral hazard but a strategic expectation.

Implications for Indian organisations

Indian enterprises are in the midst of an exciting digital acceleration. From financial services and manufacturing to IT and retail, organisations across the country are embracing new technologies at remarkable speed. Many have scaled impressively, and with just a few shifts away from legacy habits, they have an enormous opportunity to become even more adaptable and future ready.

However, adapting existing approaches and automating legacy workflows is only window dressing. The real opportunity is marrying the potential of AI with unique human ingenuity.

Conclusion

Organisations often forget that their earliest successes were built on curiosity, creativity, and constant reinvention. As AI reshapes the nature of work, these qualities become essential for survival. Reinvention cannot be delegated to innovation teams or episodic transformation initiatives. It must become a cultural norm.

Leaders who adopt the N.E.X.U.S. approach signal that adaptability is not merely tolerated but celebrated. By building neural sandboxes, modelling experimentation, fostering trust, enabling deep learning, and aligning reward systems, organisations create an environment where reinvention is not an exception but an expectation. In a world shaped by intelligent systems, the most successful organisations will be those that continually reinvent themselves. IM



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr David Oxley
co-author, *Artificial Death of a Career: How to stay relevant and thrive in the age of AI.*

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Armaan Hoyvoy

A simple story framework that every leader needs.

✦ DOMINIC COLENSO, AUTHOR, *CUT-THROUGH*

Make your message stick

We have all sat through a presentation that has us completely lost—slide after slide of dense data, delivered without life or logic. Many leaders do not think of themselves as storytellers, but if you want to captivate your audience and elevate your presentation skills, it is a vital one to master.

I have worked with thousands of leaders from all over the world and I have lost count of the number of those who have told me they cannot tell stories. But when I scratch beneath the surface, I discover it is not a lack of talent, it is a lack of a framework

What stories really do

Since early human beings emerged, we have been telling stories. Pointing out danger. Sharing right from wrong. It is hard-wired in our DNA. But in a work context, there is often a disconnect. Storytelling can seem overly dramatic or something that 'only sales and marketing people do'. In reality, even the most detailed data can—and should—be turned into a story. Not the kind you read to a child at bedtime, but a clear, logical narrative that helps your audience understand the information you are sharing.

Stories give meaning and order to our message. They help audiences find the thread that ties facts together and remember why those facts matter. When you rely solely on data, your message might be accurate, but it rarely inspires action. The moment you frame that same information as a story—with a beginning, middle and end—you make it easier for people to follow you, believe you and repeat your message to others. That's the real power of storytelling in leadership: it spreads your influence long after you've finished speaking.

How stories help you cut through

By crafting a logical flow of information and sprinkling in some emotion, you increase the chances of what you say being memorable. I started my career as a professional actor and spent years watching amazing actors, directors, and writers create stories that took audiences on a journey. Now, I share those skills with my clients to help them do the same for theirs.

If you think about your favourite film or TV show, the reason it is memorable is because you have an emotional connection to the characters, not just an intellectual one. Great presenters and speakers do the same. They speak to their audience's hearts, not just their minds.

The simple framework that works every time

In my book *Cut-Through*, I share lots of simple but powerful structures to help you craft your message. When it comes to storytelling, the framework I recommend starting with is simple: Past, Present, Future.

It works because it mirrors how our brains naturally make sense of information. We think in time lines. Whether you are briefing your team, pitching an idea to the board, or presenting results to clients, this sequence helps people follow your logic and stay engaged.

You can use it to shape almost any message: progress updates, performance reviews, investment proposals, even difficult conversations. It gives your audience a clear sense of movement, showing where we were, where we are, and where we are going, and that momentum keeps their attention.

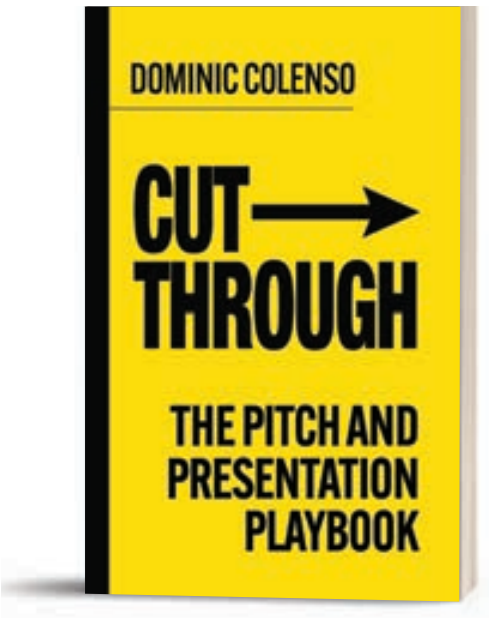
Past, Present, Future should become your go-to storytelling tool because it is practical, fast and flexible. It turns complex ideas into simple journeys that people can remember and repeat. And when your message is easy to repeat, it spreads, which is exactly what every leader needs if they want their communication to cut through.

Past: Paint the picture

Once you have reminded your audience where things began, it is time to bring them into the present moment. This is the point in your story where you answer the question, "Where are we now?"

For leaders, the 'Present' is often about progress: what has been achieved, what has changed, and what still needs attention. It is your opportunity to take stock. In a project update, this might sound like, "Six months on, here's where we stand…" or "Since implementing the new process, this is what we've learned."

Keep it honest and balanced. Celebrate what has working, but also acknowledge what still needs to improve. Audiences respond well to



authenticity. They don't expect perfection; they want perspective. When you speak openly about where things stand, you build trust.

This section is about focus. What do people need to know right now to understand the situation? Avoid the temptation to recap every detail or update. Instead, highlight the key moments of progress and the most relevant data that supports them.

You are inviting your audience to stand beside you in the story. To see the landscape through your eyes. When everyone shares the same understanding of the present, alignment follows naturally. It is the bridge between what has been done and what comes next.

Future: Show what happens next

Once you have clarified where things stand, your audience is ready for what comes next. The 'Future' is the most important part of your story because it tells people where you're heading and why it matters.

This is where you shift from reflection to



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direction. In a leadership context, that might mean outlining the next phase of a project, presenting a new goal, or describing what success will look like once the plan is complete. Use language that looks forward — "Our next step is…", "By the end of this quarter we'll…", or "The opportunity ahead is…."

Make it tangible. Paint a clear picture of what the desired outcome will feel like, not just what it will measure. What will the team, customers, or organisation gain if this future becomes reality? When you make the end state vivid, you help your audience see themselves in it and people are far more likely to support what they can imagine.

Be specific about the actions you are asking for. What decisions need to be made? Who needs to be involved? What support do you need from the people listening? End on confidence and clarity. Your 'Future' section should leave the audience energised, clear on direction, and inspired to act. If you've done it well, they'll not only understand the plan, they'll feel part of it.

Make it a habit

Storytelling is not a performance; it is a way of thinking. The leaders who communicate best do not rely on charisma, they rely on structure. 'Past', 'Present', and 'Future' framework gives you just that.

Before your next presentation, take a minute to map your message against this framework. What's changed since you started? Where are you now? What happens next? When you frame your ideas in this way, you create clarity, confidence and momentum.

So start small. Test the framework in your next meeting or progress report. Notice how much easier it is for people to follow your logic and recall your key points later. Over time, you'll find 'Past', 'Present', and 'Future' framework is not just a way to tell a story; it is a way to think and lead with clarity. IM



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dominic Colenso, is author, *Cut-Through: The pitch and presentation playbook.*


Armaan Hoyvoy

Leadership is not taught in isolation; context shapes who becomes an effective leader.

✦ FAY NIEWIADOMSKI, AUTHOR, *DECISIONS THAT MATTER*

Unconscious competence

The global spend on leadership development is estimated at over US$370 billion[1] per year. And yet, there appears to be a shortage of effective leaders and minimal satisfaction with the ROI[2] from these investments. Why is that?

Leadership development takes place in a particular context. Context includes the corporate culture, the structure of the organisation, human relations, the opportunities for growth as well as the beliefs and unwritten rules regarding promotion.

Because context really matters, I would like to explore three key areas before focusing on the learning and development processes:

1. The input, selection of candidates,
2. The learning and development processes,
3. The output of effective leaders.

The input of candidates

Selection matters. Not all humans are born to be leaders; according to Gallup[3] only 10 per cent are natural leaders and 20 per cent can learn to become like them. In many of the leadership development programmes I have delivered, it seemed to me that there was room to improve the selection process. No matter how hard we try or how amazing the program is, we will not be able to transform a bird into a fish. It is essential that individuals have the opportunity to benefit from their core strengths, whether they fly or swim.

The learning and development process

This is an adventure of enormous scope. Research, development, innovation, human interaction, and empirical observation are only a few of the critical elements that go into the conceptualisation, design, development and delivery of effective leadership development programs. I will go into more detail later in this piece.

The output of effective leaders

The quality of the output is directly influenced by the nature of the input and the objectives of the program. There is a difference between leaders and managers. Some are good leaders

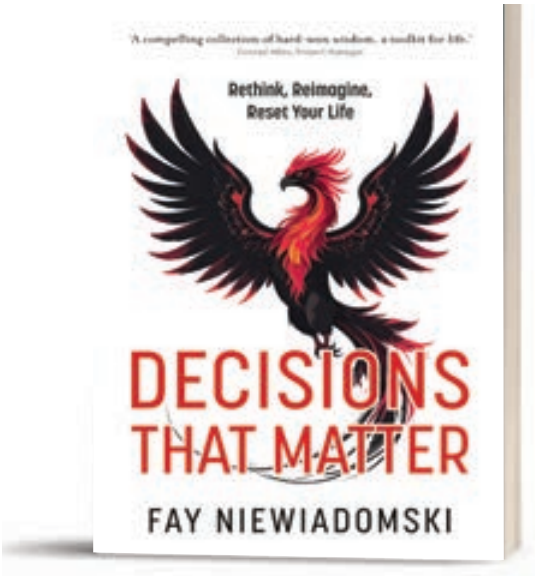
but poor managers; some are good managers but poor leaders, and few are good at both. What is the difference? Managers are all about processes, operations, and deliverables. Leaders are about motivation, strategy and influence.

Another critical factor is opportunity for growth. All the effort goes to waste when the graduates do not have the opportunity to put their new knowledge and skill into immediate practice.

Now that I have established the context within which I am exploring the learning process, I would like to take a deeper look at how we learn. We are first and foremost mimetic. We learn by mirroring and imitating the behaviours of others. Mimicry is not limited to infancy. It extends to the leadership and management behaviours we experience in our professional lives. This is powerful. Time and time again, I have experienced the impact of encapsulation. When leadership development programs are misaligned with the established management and leadership style of the manager, their direct reports will revert to mirroring the behaviour displayed by their manager. The new learning is locked into a neat mental compartment to be used in more favourable circumstances or permanently forgotten as inapplicable.

Social commerce, with its emphasis on immediacy and engagement, dovetails neatly with these expectations

Why should any of this matter, especially now? Given the global, political turbulence as well as the economic and technological upheavals we are experiencing, we need more effective leaders at all levels of the organisation. *Psychology Today* describes successful leaders as, "having high social intelligence[4], the ability to embrace change, inner resources such as self-awareness and self-mastery, and above all, the capacity to focus on the things that truly merit their attention[5]."You will notice that this definition of successful leadership covers things that are unrelated to knowledge and skills per se. Instead, the focus is on a set of behavioural characteristics and abilities. These form part of unconscious competence. Unconscious competence is when we do things that appear to be as easy and natural as breathing. We do not typically focus on how we are breathing. So how do we achieve unconscious competence in behaviours and abilities?



In the 1970s, Noel Burch[6] developed the 'Four Stages of Competence Model'. This model provides a valuable tool for designers and developers of effective learning experiences.

- **Stage one (Unconscious Incompetence):** We don't know that we don't know and see no need to learn.
- **Stage two (Conscious Incompetence):** We discover that we don't know, and if we feel there is value in acquiring the new skills, we may be motivated to learn.
- **Stage three (Conscious Competence):** We work at acquiring and practicing the new skill. However, we may or may not persist until we get to stage four.
- **Stage four (Unconscious Competence):** We achieve mastery, and the new knowledge and skill become part of our skill set and



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capabilities.

In the 1980s David Kolb, with contributions from Roger Fry, added the 'Experiential Learning Cycle' to our understanding of the learning and development processes. The 'Experiential Learning Cycle' , which involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. The cycle emphasises learning through experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and testing new ideas."When these two models are used together we improve the chances of permanent learning. So, where is the problem?

The problem is the developers of leadership programs are often at the stage of Unconscious Competence. Imagine a leader with thirty years of experience attempting to transfer his or her experience to someone at an unconscious incompetence stage. The leader at an unconscious competence stage may have forgotten a lot of detail. For example: How they felt and how those emotions helped or hindered learning. Who or what provided encouragement. What inspired them to persist, the leader they admired and modelled or the guidance that enabled them to navigate through the complexity of organisational politics and diplomacy.

A lot of granularity is lost in a thirty-year leadership journey. Add to that the changes in the context and critically, how their leadership style is perceived by those whom they are looking to develop. Does their track record inspire respect and excite others to model their behaviours? The devil is definitely in every detail.

Here are some of the things I have learnt in my own journey as a leader, leadership consultant, coach, trainer and mentor:

Some critical success factors

- Your own credibility and track record gives you leverage: Are you perceived as successful and grounded in the real world?
- Are you able to quickly and compassionately take your learners from Unconscious Incompetence to Conscious Incompetence



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fay Niewiadomsk is founder and CEO, ICTN. Fay is also author, *Decisions That Matter.*

and get them excited about becoming effective leaders. Do you share the benefits versus the risks and responsibilities?

- Do you regularly unlearn and relearn so your situational examples and experiential activities are contemporary and relevant to your learners?
- Are you able to design and deliver learning experiences that make success not only achievable but easily repeated because you provide practical formulae and foundational principles that work every time?
- Have you ensured that the experience is grounded in memorable emotions and experiences that tap into the all human communication channels VAKOW (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and auditory-digital/words)?
- Remember, the 'medium is the message'[8]. It is therefore essential that we use thoughtfully designed, experiential techniques and learning tools and models that convey contemporary approaches to teaching and learning—business simulations, VR and AR, music, physical activity, theatre, project work, and other techniques that are not a lecturer in a suit!
- Remember that even the most artfully designed and scientifically sound learning experiences and activities are irrelevant without detailed, personalized, specific, and expert feedback and confirmation of change.
- There is no final destination. So you must design the continual learning plan, the KPIs, and the metrics that enable learners and the sponsoring organisation to measure ROTI-return on training/coaching investment.

It is important to remember that no matter how exciting the emerging technologies are, they are not a substitute for human intelligence.

Conclusion

Leadership development requires continuous learning and unlearning, objectivity overriding vanity, psychological safety that allows for open conversations, business emotional intelligence where collaboration supplants command and control mindsets.

The world of learning and development is going through as much technological upheaval as most other fields. However, it is important to remember that no matter how exciting the emerging technologies[9] are, they are not a substitute for human intelligence. Understanding, conceptualising , designing, developing, and delivering content for clearly identified learners in the specific context in which they live and work. By all means, keep your finger on the pulse of AGI, henerative AI, quantum computing, neural links (BCIs, brain-computer interfaces), VR and AR, IoT, blockchain for learning credentials, and 3D printing for rapid prototyping.

None of these is a replacement for you. They extend and amplify human ingenuity and impact in developing leadership capabilities. IM

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Armaan Hoyvoy

Ego isn't the problem; unconscious leadership is, opines Christie Garcia, founder and Ego Management expert, Mindful Choice and author, *Your Ego is Showing: How Ego Management Unlocks Authentic Confidence & Meaningful Success.*

MYTH BUSTER

The real leadership risk

In leadership discussions, few concepts are as misunderstood—or as casually misused—as the Ego. It is often framed as the root cause of dysfunction: the source of arrogance, conflict, insecurity, and poor decision-making. Leaders are encouraged to suppress it, transcend it, or eliminate it altogether.

This framing is not only inaccurate; it is counterproductive.

The ego is not the problem. Unconscious leadership is.

Ego is a normal, necessary function of the human mind. It is the part of our psychological wiring that helps us protect identity, seek belonging, manage uncertainty, and navigate risk. In high-pressure environments—which define most modern organisations—ego is not an anomaly. It is the default operating system.

The real challenge for leaders and organisations is not the ego itself, but the ego operating without awareness.

The cost of misunderstanding ego

Most leadership failures are not the result of poor intentions or lack of competence. They arise from unconscious reactions under stress—moments when leaders respond automatically rather than intentionally.

This is where the ego operates most powerfully.

Under pressure, ego-driven behaviour shows up as:

- Over-control disguised as decisiveness
- Avoidance framed as harmony
- People-pleasing is mistaken for empathy
- Emotional withdrawal interpreted as professionalism

These behaviours are rarely recognised as ego-driven because they often appear socially acceptable or even rewarded in organisational cultures. Yet over time, they erode trust, slow decision-making, decrease innovation, and create misalignment between intention and impact.

The issue is not the ego; it is the ego left unmanaged.

Myth 1: Ego is a character flaw

One of the most persistent myths in leadership culture is that the ego reflects weakness or moral failure. In reality, the ego is neither good nor bad. It is neutral. What determines its impact is how consciously it is managed.

Leaders do not outgrow the Ego with experience or success. In fact, Ego patterns often become more entrenched as authority, visibility, and responsibility increase. Many leaders rely on trial and error to develop, but without awareness, the very Ego strategies that once supported their growth tend to intensify—eventually becoming a constraint rather than a strength. Senior leaders face higher stakes, greater scrutiny, and more complex relational dynamics, all of which amplify Ego-driven reactions under pressure. New managers, on the other hand, often struggle with leadership confidence, managing from insecurity as they attempt to prove their value and worth. These behaviours are not inherently wrong or bad; what matters is whether leaders are aware of the impact they are creating.

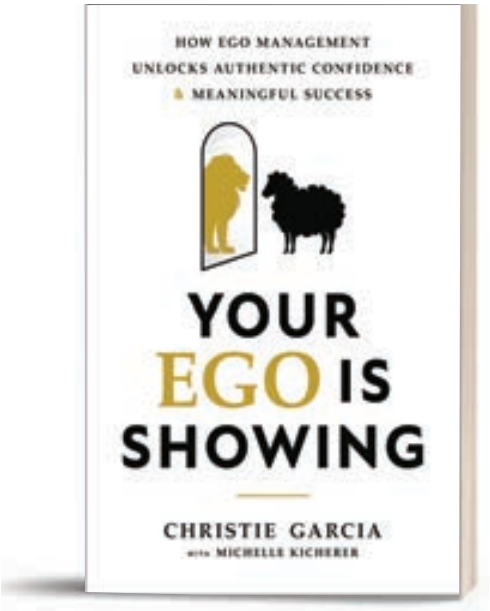
The most effective leaders are not ego-free. They are ego-aware.

They recognise when the ego is influencing their reactions, judgments, and communication—and they take responsibility for managing it before it manages them.

Myth 2: Strong leaders are above the ego

There is a widespread assumption that confidence, decisiveness, or resilience indicate ego mastery. In practice, the opposite is often true.

High-performing leaders frequently struggle with the ego because their strengths have served them well. Drive, intelligence, empathy, and integrity are assets—until they are overused. When strengths cross a certain threshold, they become liabilities.



- Drive turns into micromanagement
- Integrity turns into rigidity
- Empathy turns into self-neglect
- Confidence turns into defensiveness
- Ambition turns into burnout

These shifts are subtle and often invisible to the leader experiencing them. They are, however, highly visible to teams.

Leadership maturity is not measured by the absence of the ego, but by the ability to notice when strengths are being overextended and to course-correct in real time.

Myth 3: The ego only appears as arrogance.

The ego is commonly associated with dominance, control, and overt displays of authority. This narrow definition obscures some of its most damaging forms.

In organisations, the ego often manifests quietly:

- In leaders who avoid difficult conversations to maintain approval
- In managers who overwork to feel indispensable



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- In professionals who remain silent to avoid conflict
- In teams that tolerate misalignment rather than address it

These behaviours are frequently mislabelled as humility, loyalty, or professionalism. In reality, they are ego-driven safety strategies—attempts to avoid discomfort, rejection, or loss of control.

Unaddressed, they contribute to burnout, resentment, and systemic inefficiency.

Myth 4: Ego management is 'soft' leadership work

Ego Management is often dismissed as emotional or intangible, better suited to coaching conversations than boardroom discussions. This perception overlooks its direct connection to organisational performance.

Unmanaged ego is a significant driver of:

- Repeated conflict
- Poor delegation
- Decision bottlenecks
- Talent attrition
- Cultural inconsistency
- Unnecessary team drama

These are not soft issues. They are operational risks.

Ego management is not about emotional expression for its own sake. It is about impact—how leaders' internal states shape external outcomes. It requires discipline, self-regulation, and accountability, particularly in moments of pressure.

From this perspective, ego management is not separate from leadership effectiveness; it is foundational to it.

Myth 5: Managing ego weakens ambition

For high achievers, there is often concern that letting go of ego-driven control will reduce performance or edge. In reality, an unmanaged ego is one of the primary causes of leadership fatigue and organisational burnout.

MYTH
BUSTER



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Ego-driven ambition focuses on speed, control, and short-term validation. Ego-managed ambition prioritises sustainability, alignment, and long-term impact.

Leaders who manage ego effectively:

- Delegate with clarity rather than control
- Develop people instead of hoarding responsibility
- Focus on systems rather than symptoms
- Create cultures where accountability is a priority
- Build a team that is engaged and empowered to show up fully

Ambition does not diminish when the ego is managed. It becomes more effective.

The reality leaders must confront

Most human behaviour is unconscious. Under pressure, individuals revert to familiar patterns designed to protect identity and reduce discomfort. This is not a failure of willpower; it is how the brain operates.

Leadership begins when individuals reduce unconscious reactivity enough to create choice.

Choice to pause rather than react.

Choice to inquire rather than assume.

Choice to prioritise outcomes over quick-fix fire drills.

This shift—from reaction to intention—is where the Ego becomes a tool rather than a liability.

Reframing ego in leadership

The prevailing leadership narrative treats the ego as something to fight. A more accurate and productive approach is to treat the ego as information.

Ego signals stress, threat, or misalignment. When leaders learn to interpret these signals rather than suppress them, they gain access to better decisions, stronger relationships, and more resilient cultures.

The leaders who succeed in complexity are not those who deny the Ego, but those who are literate in it.

They understand its patterns, anticipate its triggers, and manage its influence with awareness and discipline.

In an increasingly uncertain and interconnected world, leadership effectiveness will depend less on authority and more on intentional presence. The ego is not the obstacle to that future. Unconscious leadership is. IM

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Armaan Hoyvoy

From digital adoption to digital sovereignty, India is leveraging AI to recalibrate its power.

MP SUKUMARAN NAIR, CENTRE FOR GREEN TECHNOLOGY & MANAGEMENT, COCHIN

STRATEGY

Digital independence

India's journey toward digital sovereignty represents a pivotal transformation in its national development narrative. At its core, digitisation serves not merely as a technological upgrade but as a profound instrument of empowerment. By harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) as a catalyst, India—already recognised as a global software superpower—seeks to assert greater autonomy in the digital domain. This ambition addresses a fundamental question: How rapidly can India achieve self-reliance in a digitised AI regime, and how extensively can it redefine its role from a consumer of technology to a co-creator? Achieving a meaningful impact requires indigenous capabilities, a strategic deviation from historical patterns of technology adoption, and robust support from infrastructure, legislation, and regulatory frameworks. As of December 2025, the foundations for this sovereign digital future are firmly in place, yet the pace and scope of progress hinge on deliberate, accelerated actions.

Historically, advanced economies in the West have dominated the innovation lifecycle: developing, testing, and commercialising new technologies, while developing nations like India have primarily purchased these solutions for domestic application. This model has imposed significant constraints. Even operational enhancements derived from practical experience are often curtailed by stringent patent laws, leaving countries perpetually reliant on outdated versions and vulnerable to external dependencies.

The vision for a 'New India', however, presents a markedly different perspective. India is positioning itself as an active partner in the development of emerging technologies from the outset. This shift is already evident in critical sectors such as green hydrogen production, electrolysers, renewable energy systems, critical minerals processing, electric vehicles (EVs), advanced sensors, and small modular nuclear reactors. A compelling illustrative case is nano-fertilisers, where indigenous innovation has demonstrated India's capacity to leapfrog traditional pathways.

National institutions have excelled particularly in domains where off-the-shelf technologies are unavailable or strategically sensitive, including atomic energy, space missions, agro-chemicals, and vaccines. Conversely, indigenous development has lagged in areas where imported solutions are readily accessible, underscoring a need for reorientation. To make a substantive dent in the digitised AI regime, India must prioritise building homegrown capabilities in high-stakes fields like AI algorithms, semiconductors, and

quantum computing. This demands a deliberate pivot in research and development (R&D) focus, channelling resources toward breakthroughs that enhance national security and economic resilience.

A key enabler in this reorientation is the pooling of intellectual resources from India's burgeoning digital universities. These institutions, with their vast reservoirs of talent and computational infrastructure, must be mobilised for targeted research in strategic areas. By fostering collaborations between academia, industry, and government, India can accelerate the creation of proprietary technologies that align with national priorities. This approach not only mitigates risks associated with foreign dependencies but also positions India as a contributor to global standards, ensuring that its software prowess translates into hardware and systems-level sovereignty. Digital sovereignty cannot be realised without a solid infrastructural foundation. Central to this is the establishment of domestic data centers, ensuring that India's national digital space remains under sovereign control. The surge in demand for digital infrastructure, propelled by AI adoption and regional data protection laws, has catalysed substantial investments in the data centre sector. Projections indicate inflows exceeding $50 billion over the next five to seven years, expanding capacity from the current 1 gigawatt (GW) to approximately 9 GW by 2030-2032.

India's emergence as a premier data centre hub is underpinned by several advantages: cost effective power supply, swift scalability in construction, and an unparalleled talent pool in engineering and data sciences. Complementing this is the exponential rise in data consumption, which has escalated from 8 exabytes in 2017 to 229 exabytes in fiscal year 2025. Key drivers include over-the-top (OTT) platforms, digital payments, and social media, with anticipated further acceleration from the notification of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules and widespread AI integration.

Initiatives such as the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), the Aadhaar identity system, and the India Stack exemplify this momentum, providing interoperable building blocks for a secure digital ecosystem. Coupled with strategic emphases on AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing, these elements lay the groundwork for technological independence. At its essence, digital sovereignty encompasses three interdependent dimensions: data sovereignty, technological independence, and operational sovereignty.

This pillar emphasises ownership, protection, and control of data through mechanisms like data localisation—storing and processing information within jurisdictional boundaries to align with local regulations and shield it from extraterritorial access—and robust encryption protocols. Such measures ensure compliance, enhance security, and foster resilience against breaches, safeguarding sensitive national assets.

True autonomy requires control over underlying infrastructure, eschewing reliance on singular providers. Strategies include adopting open-source technologies to mitigate vendor lock-in, maintaining oversight of software stacks for flexibility, and cultivating self-determined development in strategically vital domains. This reduces external vulnerabilities and empowers India to innovate on its own terms.

Operational resilience demands defences against cyber threats, autonomous crisis response capabilities, and adherence to jurisdictional laws—such as equivalents to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Equally vital is transparency in IT operations, which builds public trust and accountability, ensuring that digital systems serve national interests without undue surveillance risks.

The government must consolidate its leadership to translate these principles into



reality. In hardware, accelerating investments in semiconductor fabrication, indigenous operating systems, and domestic certification authorities is imperative. National programs should target talent development in AI, cyber security, and chip design, while independent oversight mechanisms balance privacy with security, curbing potential abuses in surveillance.

Diversifying supply chains to diminish dependence on any single nation or entity for critical components remains a priority, as does bridging the skills gap through targeted education and upskilling initiatives. On the global stage, India should promote its data governance capabilities via participatory forums, advocating for open and democratic principles that favour multi-polar digital architectures.

The political will to forge digital sovereignty is unequivocal, as demonstrated by recent policy advancements. To propel this forward, strategic investments, diplomatic engagements, and technological self-reliance are essential. Advancing industrial developments in the data sector necessitates public-private partnerships for both infrastructure and innovation, extending beyond existing Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to encompass comprehensive R&D funding and international collaborations.

India's pursuit of digital sovereignty is advancing at an encouraging pace, with foundational initiatives like DPI and DPDP Rules setting a robust trajectory. Yet, the extent of progress—how far India can extend its influence in the global AI landscape—depends on sustained momentum. By deviating from passive adoption, amplifying indigenous R&D, and fortifying infrastructure, India can not only empower its 1.4 billion citizens but also emerge as a model for equitable digital governance. The question is not merely one of speed but of strategic depth: With concerted action, India stands poised to claim its rightful place as a sovereign architect of the digital age. IM



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dominic Colenso, is author, Cut-Through: The pitch and presentation playbook.

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