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TECHNOSTRESS

Thriving in a digital world

DIGITAL DETOX

Petra Velzeboer





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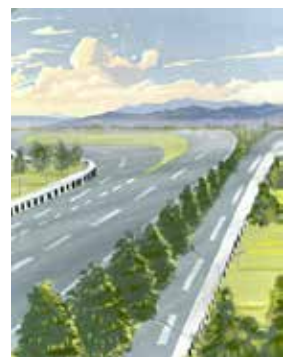
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Protecting employees from technostress

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.

The impact of IT on people was recognised even before the internet and mobile phone age, in the mid-1980s, when the term 'technostress' came into vogue the same year the Apple Macintosh was launched

In the post-COVID world, the emergency measures of the pandemic period have become normalised. Constant calling, messaging, and impromptu online meetings have become ingrained as remote and hybrid work have become routine. Many employers expect uninterrupted availability

and traceability of employees, whether they work onsite or remotely, with fixed hours or flexible.

The separation between work and personal time and space is no longer the norm. Moreover, the accelerated upgrades and innovations in technology are squeezing the space for settled work and job assurance, leaving employees distracted, anxious, and overwhelmed.

Employees themselves have developed a dependence on technology beyond work, spending most of their waking hours on connected devices. They invite an indiscriminate barrage of emails, messages, and notifications, with attendant sounds and vibrations, which trigger involuntary behaviours, such as constantly checking their devices. It is Chaplin's *Modern Times* on steroids. There is also the compulsion of having a mobile phone connection to be a

valid citizen and to access government and financial services.

In the absence of a predictable escape from the enveloping technology, there is no rest and recovery for the mind. A significant portion of the workforce suffers from sleep deprivation, emotional volatility, dependence on stimulants, and a surrender of critical thinking to popular noise. Employers need to protect their employees' ability to bring energy, focus, and equanimity to work. They must balance the business benefits of technology with its costs to employees' physical and mental health.

While every new technology has involved human costs and required adaptation to new ways of working and living, corrections have always been necessary to ensure that both people and machines function optimally to sustain production and consumption growth. Employers need to ensure that technology works mostly for people, not the other way around.

The impact of IT on people was recognised even before the internet and mobile phone age, in the mid-1980s, when the term 'technostress' came into vogue, the same year the Apple Macintosh was launched. However, the futurists of that time could not have imagined the current omnipresence and omnipotence of digital technologies.

The most common issue with the digitalisation of work, transactions, and communication is information overload in the form of emails, WhatsApp messages, and

Frequent technology upgrades and changes also affect employees. Employers require employees to keep up or make way with each new application and process introduced by tech vendors

app notifications. Since the internet moved from fixed cables to mobile phones, and from pull to push technologies, senders have been free to violate the time and space of

the receiver. Now, senders are further empowered by surveillance technologies that trace and target the receiver.

Employers need to set the norms for acceptable hours of work-related communication with employees and between employees, barring exceptional circumstances. They also need to train managers and employees to use digital communication primarily for hard information and instruction, discussing

issues in person when possible.

Frequent technology upgrades and changes also affect employees. Employers require employees to keep up or make way with each new application and process introduced by tech vendors. Many employees fear becoming subservient to machines, if not altogether redundant, because of AI technologies.

Persistent job, income, and status insecurity due to technology's creeping influence on work particularly affects older employees. Training and retraining often

clash with expectations of continued output, and many employees are overwhelmed by the demands on their energy and time. Employers need to ease employees into new tools and ways of working. Resorting to a sudden introduction of new technologies to prevent employee resistance strains loyalty and organisational solidarity, which can be counterproductive.

Employers can introduce internet-free intervals and spaces in the workplace and train employees for digital detox. They should also allow and encourage remote, hybrid, and flexible employees to respond and deliver only during work hours.

Only a healthy, rested, and optimistic workforce can be adequately productive and creative. Employers can achieve substantial productivity gains by reducing employees' technostress. 

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Technostress—stress and negative psychological effects of excessive use of technology—impacts employee well-being, mental health, productivity, and work-life balance. As digital devices, software, and online platforms become more integrated into daily life, individuals experience challenges in adapting to constant connectivity, rapid technological changes, and the pressure to stay updated.

Information overload, a major cause of technostress, flows through constant emails, notifications, and digital content and makes it difficult to focus, leading to anxiety and reduced productivity. The situation is further aggravated by the 'smartphones and work-related apps network', which blurs the line between professional and personal life, increasing burnout. The frequent adoption of newer tools and technologies in some organisations increases technology-related anxiety as, often times, employees struggle to keep pace with them.

Petra Velzeboer, author, *Digital Wellbeing*, writes in the cover story of this issue, "If left unaddressed, technostress can hinder creativity, erode work-life balance, and lead to burnout. As leaders, understanding this challenge and fostering resilient teams isn't just a managerial task—it's an essential strategy for organisational success."

To combat technostress, individuals and organisations can adopt strategies such as setting digital boundaries, taking regular breaks from screens, and promoting digital detox periods. Employers can offer training programs to ease technology adoption and encourage a healthy work-life balance. Mindfulness practices and ergonomic adjustments can also help reduce the negative effects of prolonged screen exposure.

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

Maneck Davar
Maneck Davar

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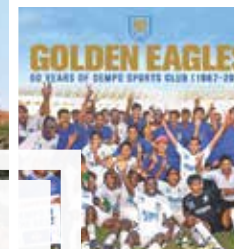
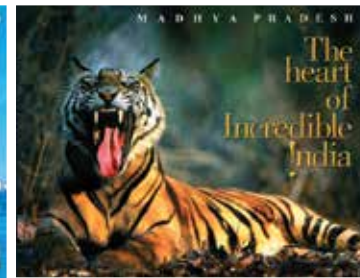
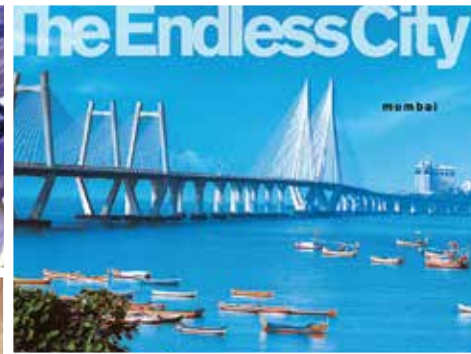
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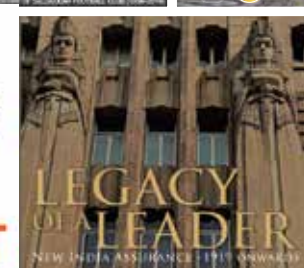
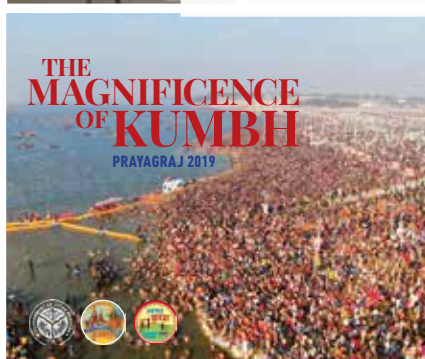
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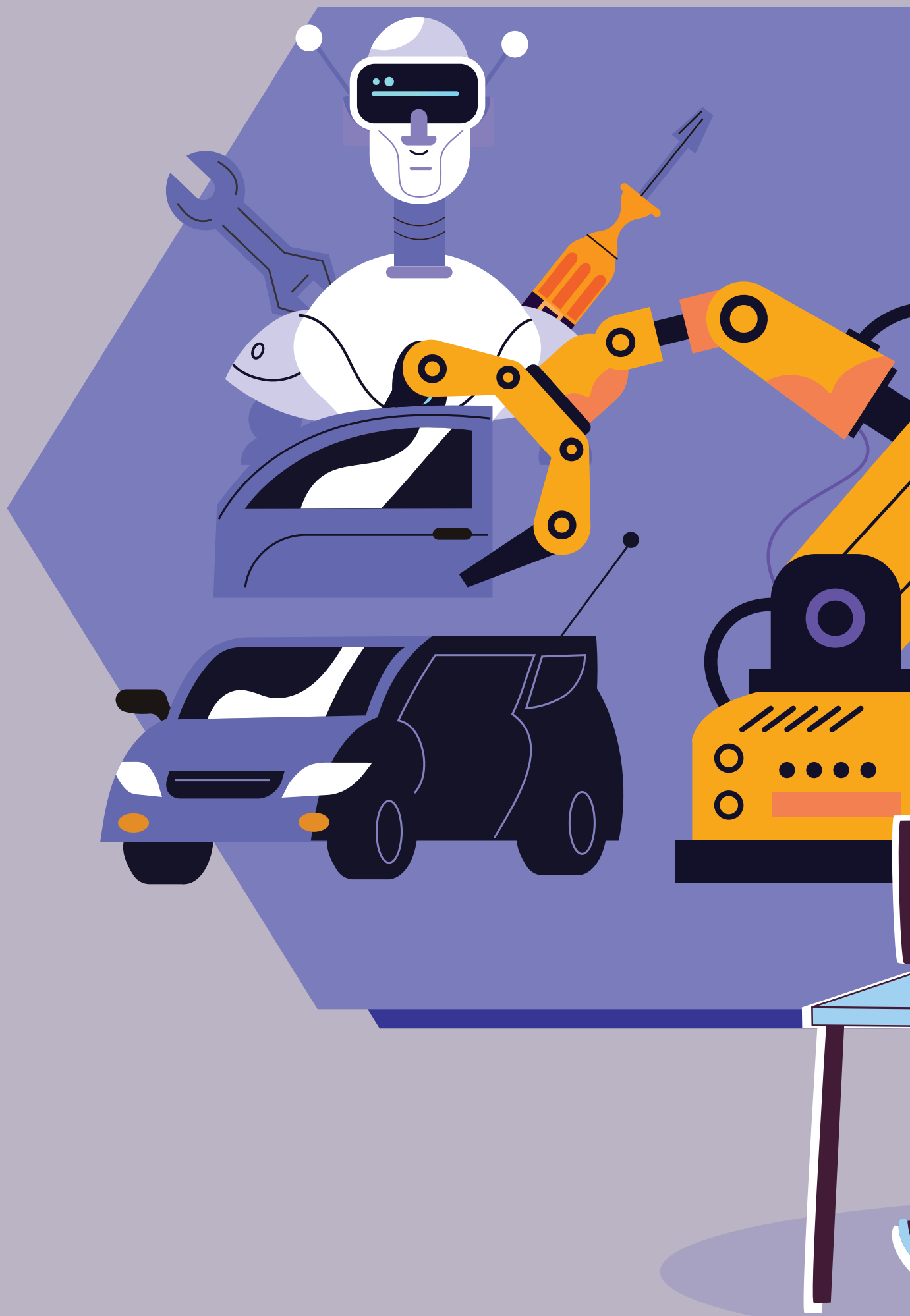
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BUILDING RESILIENT TEAMS





Digital detox

By addressing the root causes of technostress and fostering a culture of resilience, managers can create environments where employees not only manage stress, but thrive.

♦ PETRA VELZEBOER, *AUTHOR, DIGITAL WELLBEING*



In today's hyper-connected world, technology is both a blessing and a challenge for workplaces. It enables faster decision-making, seamless collaboration, and ground-breaking innovations. However, this reliance on digital tools has also given rise to a growing issue: technostress—the psychological strain caused by constant connectivity and technology overload.

Employees navigating endless notifications, adapting to ever-changing tools, or grappling with virtual meeting fatigue often feel overwhelmed. If left unaddressed, technostress can hinder creativity, erode work-life balance, and lead to burnout. As leaders, understanding this challenge and fostering resilient teams isn't just a managerial task—it's an essential strategy for organisational success.

Here are practical ways to help your team manage technostress while fostering a culture of well-being and resilience in the workplace.

Understanding the causes and impacts of technostress

Technology's addictive design can leave employees feeling more stressed than empowered. On average, professionals spend 6–8 hours a day on screens, frequently switching tasks every few minutes. This fragmented focus strains mental capacity and leaves little room for creativity or reflection. Add the expectation of 24/7 availability, and it's no surprise that many feel like they're perpetually running on empty.

The toll of technostress on employees includes:

■ **Heightened anxiety and mental fatigue**

Constant notifications and the pressure to always be available blur boundaries between work and personal life. This fuels anxiety and prevents employees from fully unwinding.

■ **Reduced focus and creativity**

The multitasking culture undermines deep work, making it harder to produce innovative ideas or problem-solve effectively.

■ **Burnout and overwhelm**

Managing countless tools and adapting to ever-evolving platforms can lead to a 'freeze response', where employees feel stuck and unable to function optimally.

■ **Eroded work-life balance**

The inability to disconnect after hours strains relationships, reduces job satisfaction, and heightens stress.

■ **Loss of human connection**

Over-reliance on digital communication can isolate employees and weaken trust and collaboration within teams.

Strategies to alleviate technostress

■ **Encourage digital detox practices**

Intentional breaks from technology not only reduce stress but also boost creativity and productivity. Encourage team members to:

- Schedule regular 'no-tech' breaks during the workday, allowing mental resets and fresh ideas to emerge.

- Establish device-free zones in meetings or common areas, fostering presence and meaningful discussions.
- Define clear boundaries for after-work communication to enable true rest and recovery.

Some organisations have successfully introduced “email-free Fridays” or “quiet hours” to reduce digital overload. As a leader, model these practices by unplugging yourself, demonstrating that balance is achievable and vital for success.

■ Foster open communication about tech challenges

An open dialogue about the struggles employees face with technology can transform frustration into collaborative

problem-solving. Instead of relying solely on surveys, schedule check-ins where you actively listen to employees’ concerns.

Ask questions like:

- What’s working for you, and what’s not?
- Are there tools or processes that are hindering your work flow?

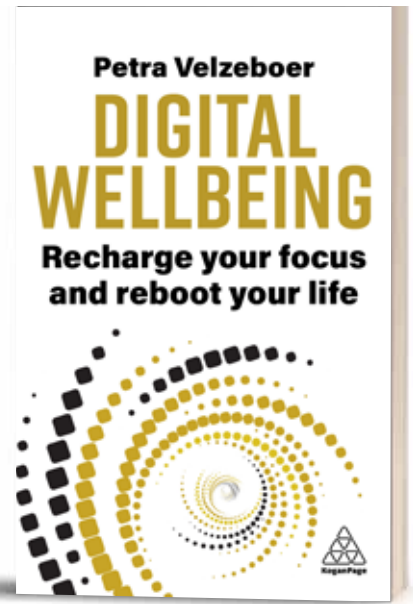
By involving employees in finding solutions, you create a shared sense of ownership and foster trust. When people feel heard and empowered to make changes, stress decreases, and innovation flourishes.

■ Streamline tools and reassess virtual meetings

The proliferation of apps and platforms can overwhelm even the most organised teams. Evaluate your organisation’s tech stack to identify barriers and focus on user-friendly tools that simplify work flows. Proper training on selected tools can further reduce frustration and improve efficiency.

Equally important is reassessing virtual meeting culture, which often interrupts

Simplifying tools and prioritising meaningful interactions can free up time for impactful work and foster a healthier digital environment



deep work. Are endless meetings preventing your team from focusing on strategic tasks? Encourage shorter, more intentional meetings with clear agendas, and avoid scheduling unnecessary ones. Simplifying tools and prioritising meaningful interactions can free up time for impactful work and foster a healthier digital environment.

■ Set clear expectations around digital communication

The ‘always-on’ culture thrives in the absence of boundaries. Help your team reclaim balance by setting clear expectations around communication:

- Define acceptable response times for emails and messages to avoid the pressure of immediate replies.
- Limit after-hours communication unless it’s truly urgent.
- Encourage team members to schedule uninterrupted work blocks in their calendars.

When employees understand that they are not required to be perpetually online, they feel less anxious and more focused on achieving their goals.



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■ Recognise and address digital fatigue

Excessive screen time can leave employees mentally and physically exhausted. Look for signs of digital fatigue, such as reduced engagement or irritability, and proactively address it by:

- Encouraging outdoor breaks or walking meetings.
- Promoting non-digital tasks or activities.
- Providing flexibility to reduce screen time when possible.

Simple shifts like incorporating more face-to-face connections or creating time for connection even virtually can help combat digital fatigue.

■ Celebrate wins and acknowledge efforts

Recognition is a powerful antidote to stress. Celebrate your team's milestones, no matter how small, and acknowledge individual contributions regularly. Sharing success stories and expressing gratitude not only uplifts employees but also builds stronger, more cohesive teams.

■ Building resilient teams in the digital era

Resilience isn't just about surviving stress—it is about thriving despite challenges. Here's how managers can cultivate resilience within their teams:

■ Promote emotional intelligence

Teams with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate challenges. Build emotional awareness by encouraging reflection, empathy, and constructive feedback. Training on emotional regulation and conflict resolution can help team members work together more effectively, even under pressure and can translate well to a virtual environment if discussed and practiced explicitly.

■ Nurture a growth mindset

A growth mindset helps teams view challenges as opportunities for learning and adaptation. Highlight examples of resilience and innovation within your organisation, and reward efforts to embrace change. This mindset builds confidence and helps employees see themselves as capable of



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overcoming obstacles—go further by showing up honestly yourself. When a leader shows the way rather than just telling others what to do, this gives teams permission to be honest too.

■ Strengthen connections

Strong social ties enhance resilience. Create opportunities for team bonding, whether through team-building activities, peer mentoring programs, or casual check-ins. A sense of belonging builds trust and boosts morale, making teams more adaptable and collaborative.

■ Prioritise well-being

Resilient teams are built on a foundation of physical and mental health. Encourage habits like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and mindfulness practices. Where possible, offer programs and resources that boost well-being and focus, giving education and tools to help employees thrive. When employees feel cared for, they're more likely to approach work with energy and focus.

■ Lead with vulnerability

Authentic leadership inspires resilience. Share your own experiences with

overcoming challenges, and model a willingness to adapt and grow. When leaders acknowledge their struggles, it normalises seeking help and builds trust within teams.

In summary

Technostress is a growing challenge in the digital workplace, but it does not have to derail productivity or well-being. By addressing its root causes and fostering a culture of resilience, managers can create environments where employees not only manage stress but thrive.

Practical strategies like encouraging digital detoxes, simplifying tools, and promoting open communication empower teams to tackle challenges together. Meanwhile, focusing on resilience through emotional intelligence, connection, and well-being equips teams to adapt to the ever-evolving demands of work.

In a fast-paced digital world, resilience is no longer optional—it is essential. By prioritising your team's mental health and equipping them to handle technostress, you lay the foundation for a workplace where well-being, creativity, and productivity flourish. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Petra Velzeboer is a psychotherapist and a leading workplace mental health expert. Petra is also author, *Digital Wellbeing: Recharge Your Focus and Reboot Your Life*.

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Tushar Dey

Belief in myths about introversion can lead to us limiting ourselves, so it's important to understand and dispel them, opines Mike Schiller, author, *High Impact at Low Decibels: How Anxiety-Filled Introverts (And Others) Can Thrive in the Workplace*.

MYTH BUSTER

No limitations

MYTH 1: I'll never be as successful as those other leaders.

Many of us tend to think that the most successful leaders are all super-confident extroverts who have a natural way with people. So, the rest of us surely have a ceiling on how successful we can be, right? But as I've spoken with successful leaders throughout my career, I've found that there are just as many of us who don't fit that 'classic' success profile. It is just that we all feel like we need to hide that fact and instead pretend that we fit the expected profile and personality. But the reality is that we all have internal struggles, even the most successful leaders. The key is to not let them result in your placing artificial limits on yourself. Be aware of them, figure out how to mitigate them so that they don't become derailers, and then figure out how to make them work to your advantage. Because those challenges do not have to be limitations; instead, they can provide a diversity of experience and thought that help you thrive as a leader.

MYTH 2: I'm not good at building relationships and networking.

Being an introvert doesn't equal having poor social skills. It means that you get energy from being alone. Time around others is draining

for an introvert. As a corporate executive, I generally spent all day every day in various meetings. That meant that I was in a constant state of being drained and, therefore, a constant state of wanting some alone time to recharge my batteries. When there was down time, my inclination was to close my door and catch up on emails so that I could recharge.

But our success as leaders is largely about relationships. If I gave in to my natural inclination to maximise alone time, it would have impeded my success as a leader (plus made my job less fulfilling and enjoyable).

The key is to develop techniques for mitigating your default nature of wanting to be alone. For me, it was as simple as leveraging my strengths. I'm extremely organised and task-oriented. So, I turned relationship-building into a task. For each job I had, I created an inventory of that role's important relationships and key stakeholders and then implemented repeatable processes for building and maintaining those relationships. This could be as simple as scheduling recurring one-on-one meetings (or coffees or lunches) with individuals. And making sure those meetings weren't 'all business' but included time for connecting on a personal level and building authentic relationships.

Bottom line, for each important relationship, you can establish a goal for that relationship and figure out how to meet that goal, in a concrete and structured way. Instead of being a derailer, relationship building can become an area of strength, even for those of us who are extreme introverts, due to the focus and intentionality we put into building those relationships.

MYTH 3: I don't need to speak up in the meeting. I can just follow up one-on-one afterwards.

Speaking in a group setting can be stressful because all of those people looking at you.

It sort of feels like you're giving a short spontaneous presentation, but without being able to prepare. All eyes are on you, and you feel the pressure to make a salient point that doesn't waste everyone's time.

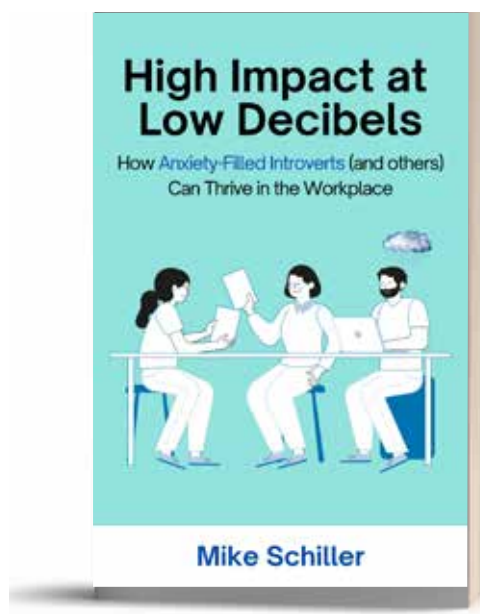
I'd really rather not speak up in those situations. I'm more comfortable speaking to people one-on-one. Early in my career, I would find myself making notes of the points I'd like to make and

then following up with the appropriate people after the meeting adjourned. I tried to convince myself that this was a fine way to handle things. But there are problems with that approach.

First, it's inefficient. If it's something that could substantively alter plans or decisions, I need to say it where all can hear it. It's pretty frustrating for attendees to arrive at a decision only to have another attendee bring up an important point after the meeting has adjourned.

Second, the optics are bad. While you shouldn't make comments just so people can hear the sound of your voice, if you just sit

While you shouldn't make comments just so people can hear the sound of your voice, if you just sit silently in every meeting, it's not leaving a very good impression on people and certainly isn't building their confidence in you as a leader



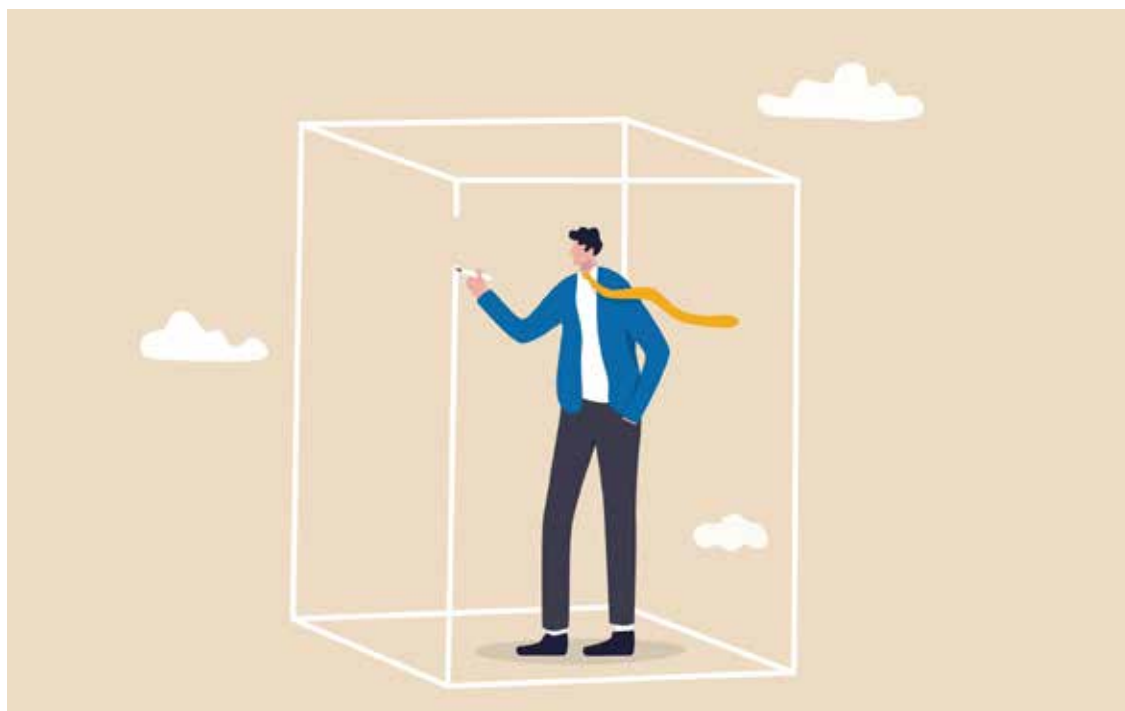
silently in every meeting, it's not leaving a very good impression on people and certainly isn't building their confidence in you as a leader.

As uncomfortable as it can be, it is important to speak up in those big meetings and share your thoughts 'in the moment'. The good news is that the more you do it, and experience success with it, the more comfortable you'll be doing so in future meetings.

MYTH 4: I don't have to be a good public speaker.

Introverts are more likely to dislike public speaking, because we don't like being the centre of attention. I used to try to take the 'survival' approach of dealing with this issue, which consisted of trying to avoid giving presentations and, when I did have to give one, just trying to 'get it over with'. The result was a series of mediocre presentations.

I eventually came to the realisation that public speaking was an important part of my job as a leader. Avoiding it simply wasn't



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an option. As leaders, we need to be able to effectively communicate to large audiences, whether it be our teams or our stakeholders. This was a situation where either it could control me or I could control it. In other words, I could either dread it and try to avoid it (unsuccessfully) or I could embrace it and figure out how to do it well.

Of course, making a decision that you're going to master something is great, but you then have to move into how you're going to do so. For me, it was a combination of formal training, adopting the practice of dry-running each presentation, and signing up to speak at conferences.

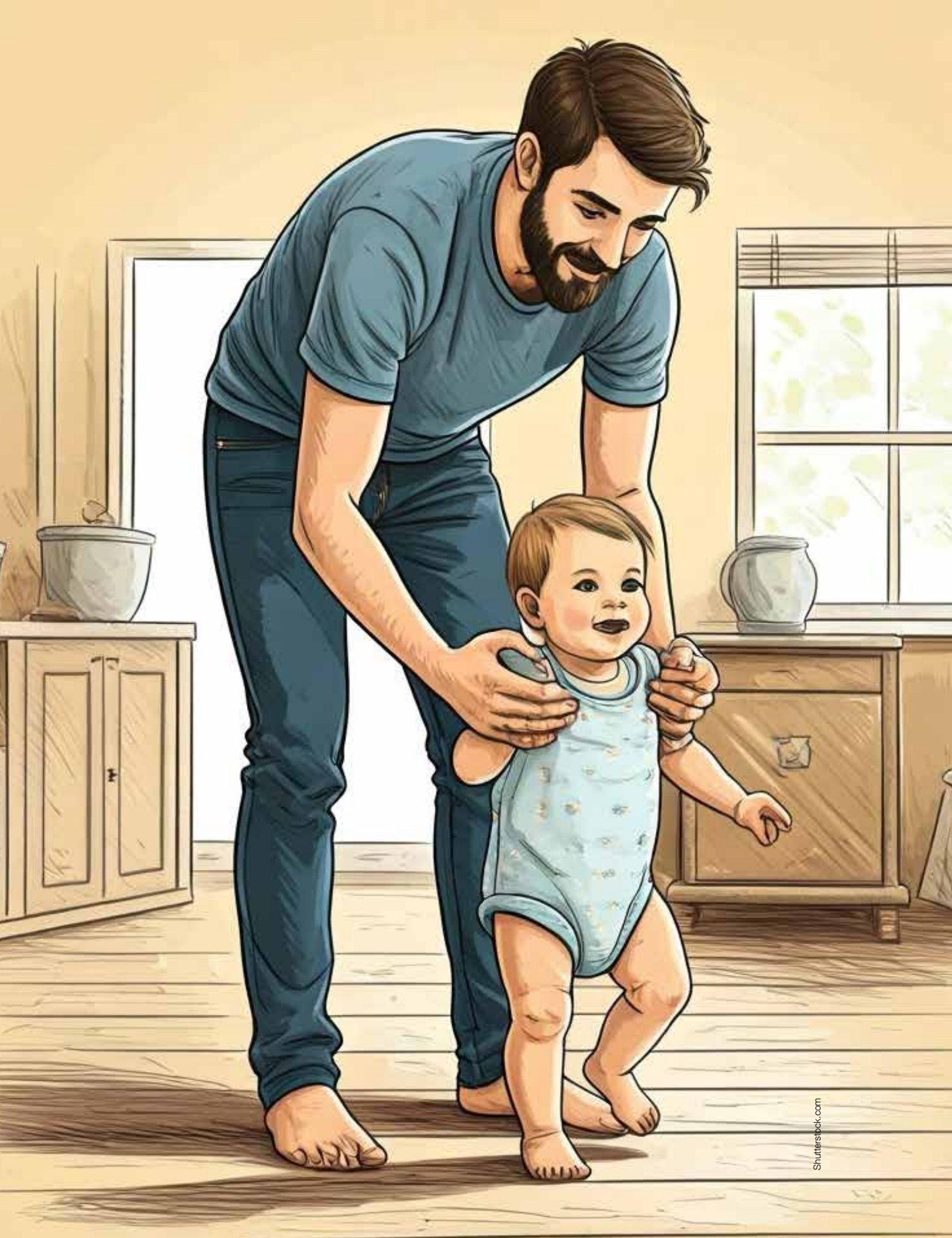
With intentional focus, public speaking is a skill you can transform into a strength, and it can be a difference-maker in your success as a leader.

MYTH 5: I deserve to feel imposter syndrome.

I have found that introverts are more likely to have low self-esteem and experience imposter syndrome. It was certainly true for me. Despite having a successful career, I experienced imposter syndrome every day. And beat myself up over even the smallest mistakes. I found it hard to give myself the grace that I extended to others and felt undeserving of any praise I received.

If you experience imposter syndrome, understand that it's your brain misbehaving, basically trying to trick you into believing something that's not true, and learn how to mitigate it. Simple techniques like stopping the flow of negative self-talk and learning how to accept compliments (versus trying to argue them away) are helpful first steps.

Portions of this article are adapted from my new book, *High Impact at Low Decibels: How Anxiety-Filled Introverts (and others) Can Thrive in the Workplace*. 



By creating environments where everyone feels safe to contribute, leaders can unleash the potential within themselves and their teams.

♦ REV. DR. SUSAN GOLDSWORTHY, AUTHOR, *CARE DARE SHARE*

**ORGANISATIONAL
CULTURE**

Unlock your potential

In today's challenging business landscape, leaders must embrace the opportunity to foster environments where employees can reach their full potential. High-performance cultures don't just happen; they require intentional strategies and leadership styles that encourage individual growth, team synergy, and organisational clarity. They also require a change from the old style 'power-over' dominant and extractive leadership model that is no longer fit for purpose. Secure base coaching delivers a more transformative, 'power-with' approach, deeply rooted in psychological safety and the unleashing of human potential. This article explores the origins of secure base coaching, the 'Play to Thrive' concept, and the foundational principles of caring, daring, and sharing that enable and sustain high-performance cultures.

The roots of secure base coaching

Secure base coaching is inspired by attachment theory, a psychological framework developed separately by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby that emphasises the importance of secure relationships in enabling individuals to explore,

learn, and grow. The secure base coaching principles are also influenced by Carl Rogers' person-centred approach and its three tenets of unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and congruence. In a business context, a secure base is a leader, mentor, or coach who provides a balance of support and challenge; someone who instills confidence while encouraging individuals to step outside their comfort zones. By fostering trust and creating an emotionally safe environment, these leaders help individuals navigate fear, take calculated risks, and embrace opportunities for growth.

The 'Play to Thrive' concept

At the heart of secure base coaching is the 'Play to Thrive' 'power-with' concept. This philosophy challenges the traditional 'Play to Win' 'power-over' mindset, which often focuses on aggressive and relentless competition and short-term results. While winning is important, thriving emphasises sustainable growth, innovation, and well-being. Thriving requires the courage to be collaborative, to co-create, take risks, face uncertainties, and confront challenges head-on.

- **Explore possibilities:** Secure base leaders inspire curiosity and creativity, enabling team members to explore new ideas and approaches.
- **Overcome fear:** By providing psychological safety, leaders help individuals face their fears and turn them into opportunities for learning and development.
- **Achieve balance:** Thriving involves a harmonious integration of professional ambitions with personal well-being, ensuring sustainable high performance.

In the words of Anna Estrovopa, Global Leadership Programs Director at Sanofi, “When we, as leaders, want to play to thrive, it’s not about telling others “From now on we start playing to thrive, let’s go.” No questions, no discussions, I said so, you go. This won’t work. It’s rather about creating the secure base and coaching our team, so that the team sees us as role models of both caring and daring, creating space to ask questions, raise concerns, think together and together come

The 'Caring, Daring, and Sharing' Framework

To implement secure base coaching effectively, leaders must embody three key attributes: caring, daring, and sharing. These principles form the foundation of a high-performance culture.



- **Active listening:** Leaders create the conditions where people feel they can openly express how they feel and be actively listened to in the process. They use inquiry through open-ended questions to be curious, seek insight and increase engagement.
- **Empathy in action:** Leaders who practice empathic understanding relate to the challenges their teams face and offer appropriate support. For example, a manager who recognises the stress of a tight deadline might proactively offer resources or adjust priorities to alleviate pressure.
- **Building relationships:** Trust is built through consistent, authentic interactions. A leader who is congruent, approachable, and transparent fosters deeper connections with their team.

Daring: Encouraging growth and risk-taking

Daring involves encouraging individuals to step out of their comfort zones and unlock their potential. Secure base leaders balance support with challenge, pushing their teams to achieve more than they thought possible.

- **Courageous leadership:** Daring leaders model courage by confronting difficult situations, making tough decisions, and embracing uncertainty. This sets a powerful example for their teams.
- **Stretch assignments:** By assigning tasks that require new skills or innovative thinking, leaders help employees grow while demonstrating their belief in their potential.
- **Constructive feedback:** Honest, constructive feedback is a hallmark of daring leadership. By addressing areas for improvement while acknowledging strengths, leaders inspire confidence and continuous development.

Sharing: Fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange

Sharing completes the triad by emphasising collaboration, openness, and the free flow of ideas. In high-performance cultures,

information is not hoarded; it's shared to inform and empower the organisation.

- **Knowledge sharing:** Leaders who share their expertise and experiences create learning opportunities for their teams. This could involve mentoring, coaching, or simply being available to answer questions.
- **Inclusive decision-making:** By involving team members in decisions and valuing their input, leaders foster a sense of ownership, accountability and commitment.
- **Celebrating success and failures:** Sharing successes and failures, whether individual or collective, reinforces a positive culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities to motivate the team to aim higher.

Practical steps for leaders

To integrate secure base coaching into their leadership style, senior managers can take the following practical steps:

- **Develop self-awareness:** Leaders must first understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and emotional triggers. Self-aware leaders are better equipped to provide a secure base for others.





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- **Build deep connections:** Take time to listen to and understand the needs, aspirations, and fears of each team member. Regular one-on-one and team meetings can help build trust and rapport.
- **Balance support and challenge:** Strive for a balance between nurturing and pushing. Offer encouragement and resources while setting ambitious goals.
- **Foster a growth mind shift:** Encourage continuous learning by celebrating progress, rewarding effort, and reframing failures as opportunities for growth.
- **Lead by example:** Demonstrate caring, daring, and sharing in your daily interactions. Model the behaviours you want to see in your team.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Dr. Susan Goldsworthy is author, *Care Dare Share: The Secure Base Coach*.

The impact on organisational culture

When leaders embrace secure base coaching, the ripple effects can transform organisational culture. Employees in high-performance cultures are more engaged, innovative, and resilient. They are willing to

take calculated risks, collaborate effectively, and strive for excellence because they feel supported and empowered.

Says OysterHR CEO, Tony Jamous, “Intentionally showing up as a safe leader, discerning when to care and when to dare, cultivates an environment that maximises human potential. Moreover, being a safe leader is not just advantageous for others, it significantly benefits the leader. One must develop a secure relationship with oneself to effectively provide safety for others.”

Moreover, secure base coaching aligns with broader organisational goals such as diversity, equity, talent attraction and retention, and inclusion. By creating environments where everyone feels safe to contribute, leaders can unleash the potential within themselves and their teams. By embracing the principles of caring, daring, and sharing and adopting the ‘Play to Thrive’ mind shift, senior managers can cultivate environments which lay the foundation for sustainable success in today’s increasingly challenging business world. **IM**

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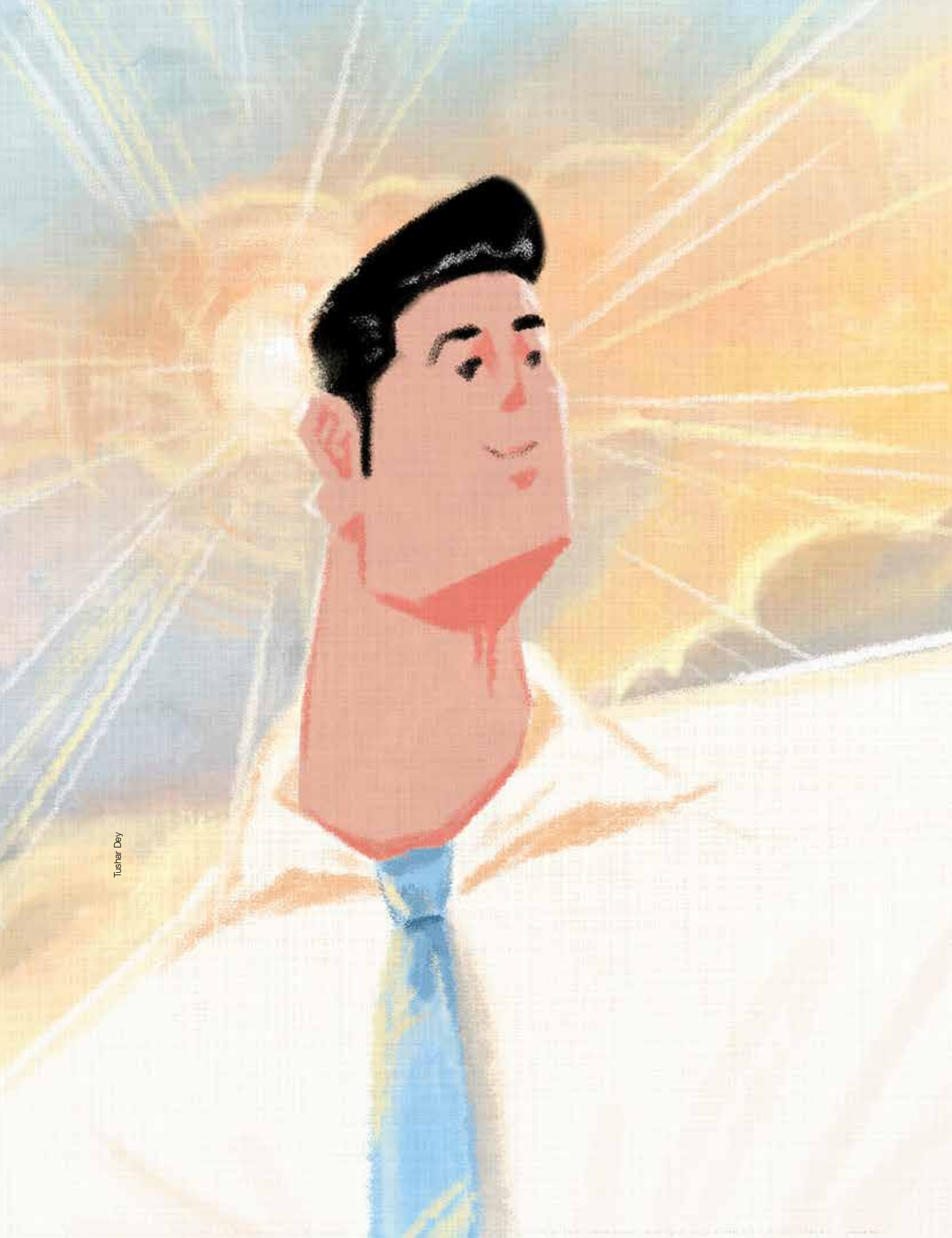
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Tushar Dey

Trying to change your introverted nature will only drain your energy and become a hindrance to success.

♦ SISSEL HEIBERG, AUTHOR, *QUIET LEADER*

MANAGEMENT

‘Don’t’ put up a fight

There are many complex reasons for burnout, and we all feel stress from time to time, to varying degrees. You might have tried a number of different strategies to manage this; perhaps saying, “no” more often; perhaps you have tried different productivity hacks; or perhaps you have gone for a massage or started to meditate. All of these are useful. However, a possible source for burnout and stress is an unusual one that you might not have considered already: Your introversion might be demanding that you listen to it. The reasons are simple: One of the main causes of burnout is when we don’t feel like we are in control, and we can feel stress when we are continuously acting in a way that’s not congruent with who we really are. There is only so much we can adjust and adapt before it affects our day-to-day energy and zest, and if we don’t listen to our minds and bodies telling us when we’re reaching that point, they will find a way to make us listen regardless. In a lot of corporate environments, introverts are doing a lot of this adapting and adjusting, so it’s no wonder you might be feeling exhausted.

Adapting on the part of the introvert happens because introverts are still seen as ‘different’

from the standard, and this standard is generally considered to be extroversion. Therefore, as introverts, we end up ‘masking’ to pretend to be something we are not and to display behaviours that are not in our natural style. This requires energy, is not sustainable, and will eventually come to a head—either in the form of burnout, other forms of stress, or simply that your career doesn’t have the trajectory it had the potential to.

There are several reasons why extroversion has been seen as the standard, some of which has to do with very primal biases we all hold, but there is also the fact that extroversion is easier to see: One of the core building blocks of introversion is to have a preference for thinking things through before talking. When an introvert is highly active, this activity therefore starts out on the inside. An extrovert might say something immediately in a meeting, which can be seen and heard, whereas an introvert might prefer to mull things over before speaking and is therefore less visible. The thinking the introvert does is no less of an activity than the extrovert’s immediate talking, but it’s not an activity that others can easily see, and it therefore has the potential to more easily be misunderstood. That’s not to say that introverts never talk, but we tend to add a pause before we do so (which has lots of benefits for

organisations—not least of which is that scientific research has shown us that decisions are more robust when we don't make them impulsively).

and in most corporate environments you can still see this in examples such as group exercises on away-days, team bonding activities, group lunches, free-form brainstorming sessions, and not to mention that most recognition and credit still goes to the people talking the loudest about their accomplishments (instead of asking managers to get better at identifying high performers).

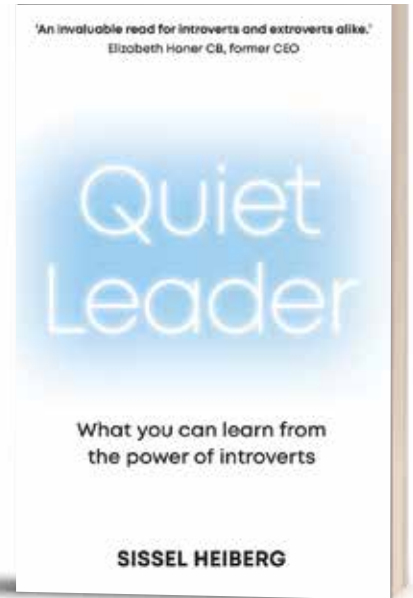
This tailoring to extroversion is also reflected in how we organise our teams and our working days, and given how introverts are wired it affects us fundamentally: since introverts prefer reflection before

speaking, it might be frustrating to feel like we can never get a word in to make our point in a discussion, or that others are not seeing the same connections that we are. Similarly, it can often be an exercise in patience to attend meetings without agendas and sit through what feels like talking with no clear purpose. It can be overwhelming to be misunderstood by those around us when they think we're shy (we are

Extroversion, as the default, happens despite the fact that up to 50 per cent of the population consider themselves to be introverted



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not—or if we are, it has nothing to do with our introversion); we might be accused of being stuck-up or aloof when we are probably just thinking deeply about the conversation we are in; or we might be told we need to be more like extroverts and not accepted for the contributions we bring. Our need to recharge energy alone is hard to achieve if our days are full of back to back meetings, or if our training courses are full of group exercises. On and on it goes, where eventually your whole week is tailored to other people's needs.

All of these taken together mean a working week that's full of adjustments, and of not being entirely ourselves, not being able to relax or to focus on the job at hand—which means we're not performing consistently at our best. All this energy to be spent on being someone we're not, to mask our true style, and adjusting to a working culture that doesn't tailor to our needs, can accumulate and cause us to feel like something is wrong but not being able to entirely identify what that is. So, if you have a rumbling that you're not optimising your performance



or aligning your working week with your personality, perhaps it's time to take a step back and identify what you can do about it.

The two core building blocks of introversion, reflection and recharging solo, affect us all to different degrees. Therefore, understand what your own unique preferences are to be able to organise a working week that fits you better. Listen to how you feel after particular days—do you feel better after a day in the office or after a day of working from home? Do you look forward to a week when you have lots of meetings or more so with a week that has built-in thinking time? Once you know what you like and what works for you, you can adjust accordingly. If you are in control of your own diary, you can move meetings to make them more spaced out. If you organise a discussion, you can book it for 45 minutes instead of 60, to give you time in between sessions (this is also useful for everyone else, as it means their next meeting is more likely

to start on time and avoid delays). If you are at the mercy of other people, try telling them what your preferences are and what the benefits could be for everyone in the group, e.g. brainstorming session, a notorious problem for introverts, have also been scientifically proven to not generate better ideas than other approaches, so suggest that you re-do how you run the session. You can ask everyone to think about the topic beforehand or allow feedback afterwards in writing. This will improve the end result and make you less stressed. If you are attending training sessions where you have no control over the structure, enquire about how inclusive their training design is—and take a few coffee breaks alone.

As introverts, we have been told for a long time that in order to get ahead, we need to be more like extroverts. But to an introvert, all of this is draining and taking away energy from where you need it to be—in being the high-achiever you really are. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sissel Heiberg is author, *Quiet Leader: What you can learn from the power of introverts*.



As the Government of India's ambitious Bharatmala project advances, its successful completion is set to leave a lasting impact on the country's infrastructure and development

♦ DR DEBASISH SUR, THE UNIVERSITY OF BURDWAN, BURDWAN AND RAJA PAUL, THE BHAWANIPUR EDUCATION SOCIETY COLLEGE, KOLKATA

MANAGEMENT

'Moving' India forward

The Bharatmala project focuses on enhancing connectivity, reducing travel times, and integrating remote areas into the economy through new corridor construction and road upgrades. Despite challenges like land acquisition and funding, it progressed with streamlined approvals, community engagement, innovative financing, and advanced technologies. By mid-2024, significant milestones were achieved, marking a crucial step towards India's sustainable economic growth and improved quality of life.

Introduction

The Bharatmala project, launched by the Central Government in October 2017 under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, is a monumental effort aimed at reshaping India's road infrastructure landscape. It aims to develop 83,677 km of highways and roads with an investment of approximately ₹7 lakh crore. Designed to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding economy, Bharatmala is a strategic endeavour to modernise and expand the country's extensive road and highway network. It recognises the critical need for efficient

transportation systems that can support growing trade volumes, facilitate smooth movement of goods and people, and integrate remote regions into the national economy. The implementing agencies of this project are (i) National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), (ii) National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), and (iii) State Public Works Department. The goals of Bharatmala are multifaceted, aiming to optimise the efficiency of goods and people movement across the country. It plans to achieve this by constructing 50 new national corridors and connecting 550 districts through national highways (NH) linkages. This ambitious initiative seeks to transform India's road connectivity and contribute significantly to its economic development.

Background and objectives

The primary objectives of the Bharatmala project are multifaceted and strategic which include:

1. Improving connectivity and

accessibility: Central to Bharatmala's vision is the enhancement of connectivity between major urban centres, industrial hubs, ports, and economic corridors across the length and breadth of India to facilitate

The Bharatmala project emerged as a comprehensive solution to address various challenges hindering efficient movement of goods and people across the country

seamless movement of goods and passengers. By constructing new roads and upgrading existing highways, the project aims to reduce travel times, lower logistics costs, and streamline the movement of goods and passengers. This strategic connectivity boost is expected to catalyse economic activities in previously underserved regions, fostering regional development and economic integration.

- 2. Boosting economic Growth:** The project's overarching goal is to stimulate economic growth by optimising transportation efficiencies. Improved road infrastructure not only accelerates the pace of commerce but also attracts investments, spurs industrial growth, and enhances overall productivity. By creating smoother logistics networks, Bharatmala aims to strengthen India's position as a global trade hub and facilitate seamless movement of goods within the country.
- 3. Safety and efficiency enhancements:** Bharatmala prioritises the upgrade of highways to meet contemporary standards of safety and efficiency. By widening roads, implementing modern traffic management systems, and enhancing road signage and lighting, the project aims to reduce accidents and enhance overall road safety. Moreover, improved infrastructure will accommodate the increasing volume of traffic, ensuring smoother and safer journeys for commuters and cargo alike.
- 4. Environmental and social considerations:** Amidst its ambitious development goals, Bharatmala is also committed to sustainable practices and minimising environmental impact.

The project includes provisions for environmental assessments and mitigation measures to ensure that road construction and expansion are carried out responsibly. Furthermore, the project aims to create employment opportunities both directly through construction activities and indirectly through boosted economic activities, thereby contributing to social welfare and inclusive growth.

Key features and components

1. Development of economic corridors:

Construction of new greenfield express ways and economic corridors spanning thousands of kilometres to connect major industrial hubs, agricultural centres, and ports across the country is an integral part of the Bharatmala project. These corridors are designed to reduce travel time and costs significantly.

2. Strengthening border and coastal roads:

Strengthening road infrastructure along India's borders and coastlines to improve connectivity in remote and strategic areas is also a vital component of the Bharatmala project. This component aims to enhance national security while facilitating smoother trade and travel.

3. Upgradation of national highways:

Upgrading and widening existing national highways to reduce congestion, improve road safety, and lower transportation costs for freight and passenger vehicles is another crucial component of the Bharatmala project.

4. Integration with international trade routes:

Another key component of the Bharatmala project includes creating robust road networks that seamlessly integrate with ports and border crossings to facilitate efficient movement of goods for international trade. This integration aims



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to reduce transit times and costs, thereby boosting India's trade competitiveness globally.

Implementation challenges

1. **Land acquisition issues:** One of the foremost challenges faced by the Bharatmala project is acquiring land for constructing new roads and widening existing highways. Land acquisition in India is governed by various laws and regulations, which often lead to delays and disputes. The process involves negotiations with landowners, compensation settlements, and sometimes faces resistance from local communities concerned about displacement and loss of livelihoods.
2. **Environmental concerns:** Building new roads and highways under the Bharatmala project necessitates careful environmental assessments and compliance with

environmental regulations. This initiative can potentially impact biodiversity, water resources, and ecosystems. To mitigate these impacts, it is essential to carry out comprehensive environmental impact assessments, put in place mitigation measures, and secure the required approvals from environmental authorities, though this process can be quite time-consuming.

3. **Funding constraints:** The scale and scope of Bharatmala require substantial financial resources. While the Indian government has allocated significant funds for the project, funding constraints remain a challenge. Innovative financing models such as public-private partnerships, infrastructure bonds, and international loans are being explored to bridge the funding gap. However, securing adequate and timely funding remains crucial to maintaining project momentum and meeting completion targets.

4. Technical complexities: The technical complexities associated with road construction and modernization are another challenge for Bharatmala. Building new express ways, upgrading existing highways, implementing advanced traffic management systems, and ensuring road safety require specialized engineering expertise and advanced technologies. Adapting to diverse geographical terrains and environmental conditions across different regions of India adds further complexity to project planning and execution.

5. Regulatory and administrative hurdles: Navigating through regulatory frameworks, obtaining necessary permits, and adhering to bureaucratic procedures can pose significant hurdles for Bharatmala. Delays in obtaining approvals and clearances from multiple government agencies can slow down project timelines and escalate costs.

6. Socio-economic impacts: Road construction projects under Bharatmala may also have socio-economic implications. Displacement of communities, disruptions to local economies, and changes in land use patterns are some of the socio-economic issues that need to be addressed sensitively. Engaging with local stakeholders, conducting social impact assessments, and implementing resettlement and rehabilitation measures are essential for minimizing negative impacts and promoting inclusive development.

Mitigation strategies and progress

Strategies to mitigate the project's challenges reflect a proactive approach by the Indian government:

1. Streamlined approval processes: Recognising the need for expedited project time lines, the government has focused on streamlining approval processes

and regulatory clearances. This includes reducing bureaucratic hurdles and enhancing coordination among different departments and agencies involved in project approvals. By simplifying procedures, the aim is to minimise delays and ensure projects can proceed swiftly from planning to execution stages.

2. Community engagement: Community engagement has been a cornerstone of the Bharatmala project's strategy to address local concerns and ensure inclusive development. Proactive engagement with local communities and stakeholders helps in understanding their needs, addressing grievances, and garnering support for project initiatives. This engagement not only fosters transparency but also promotes socio-economic development by involving local populations in decision-making processes.

3. Innovative financing: To overcome funding constraints, Bharatmala has explored innovative financing mechanisms and diversified funding sources. This includes leveraging public-private partnerships, infrastructure bonds, sovereign funds, and seeking international investments and loans. By tapping into alternative financing avenues, the project aims to secure adequate financial resources to sustain momentum and meet ambitious infrastructure development targets.

4. Technology adoption: The adoption of advanced technologies plays a crucial role in ensuring efficient project management, monitoring, and maintenance across Bharatmala's expansive network. Technologies such as Geographic Information System mapping, remote sensing, and real-time project tracking systems enhance decision-making capabilities and enable proactive risk management.



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Additionally, the use of technology aids in optimizing resource allocation, improving construction quality, and enhancing overall project efficiency.

As of mid-2024, Bharatmala has made significant progress despite facing challenges. Several new highway stretches have been completed, improving connectivity and reducing travel times, thereby enhancing citizens' quality of life

5. Environmental sustainability:

Environmental sustainability is a key priority embedded within Bharatmala's framework. The project adheres to stringent environmental norms and conducts rigorous Environmental Impact Assessments for each phase of construction.

Mitigation measures

are implemented to minimise ecological footprint, protect biodiversity, and mitigate adverse environmental impacts. This commitment to sustainable practices ensures that infrastructure development under Bharatmala is harmonised with environmental conservation goals.

Conclusion

As of mid-2024, Bharatmala has made significant progress despite facing challenges. Several new highway stretches have been completed, improving connectivity and reducing travel times, thereby enhancing citizens' quality of life. By December 2023, contracts for 26,418 km (76 per cent of 34,800 km) had been awarded, with approximately 15,549 km completed. Ongoing projects across various states are advancing, bolstering infrastructure and economic opportunities in underserved regions. However, an audit report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), released on August 10, 2023,

highlighted shortcomings in the project's implementation. The report highlighted the lack of a systematic prioritisation method and ambiguous completion time lines. By March 2023, contracts had not been awarded for 46 per cent of the length of 11 high-priority corridors. Additionally, the report noted rising sanctioned costs and substantial revisions in cost estimates. As of March 2023, 76 per cent of the projects sanctioned by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) had secured contracts, exceeding the allocated CCEA funds by 158%. Furthermore, the CAG report revealed that a substantial number of Bharatmala projects initiated tender notices without appraisal by the Project Appraisal and Technical Scrutiny Committee. Despite these challenges, the project has already improved road safety standards and transportation efficiency for goods and passengers. Looking ahead, Bharatmala remains a crucial initiative in India's infrastructure development strategy, aligned with the nation's goal of sustainable economic growth and improved quality of life. Continued focus on mitigation strategies, technological advancements, and community engagement will be essential to overcome remaining challenges and fully realize Bharatmala's potential as a catalyst for national development. As the project advances, its successful completion is set to leave a lasting impact on India's 21st-century development, establishing new benchmarks in infrastructure excellence and economic integration. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

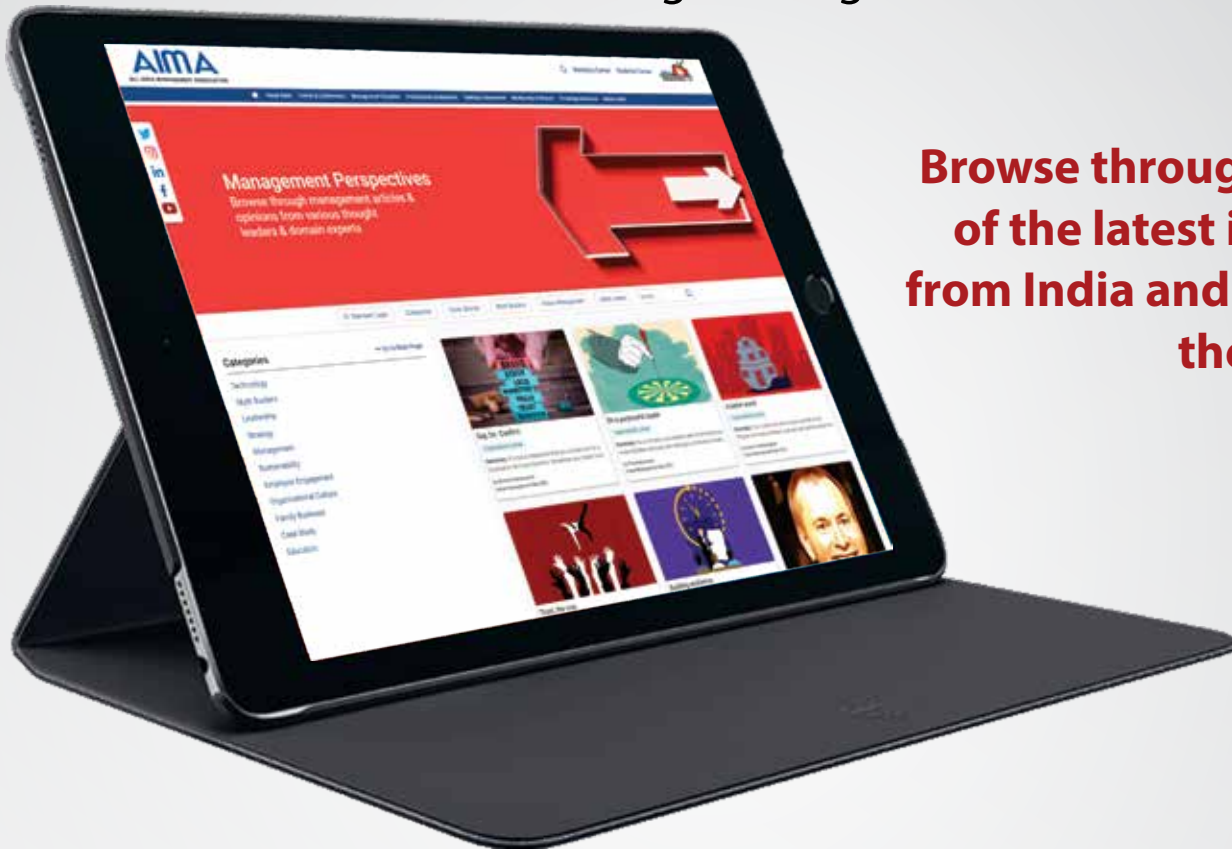
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