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JANUARY 2026 VOLUME 65 ISSUE 1 PAGES 50 ₹60

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## THE ANTICIPATORY BOARD

Governing in an age of uncertainty

## LEAD CHANGE BEFORE IT HAPPENS

Marianna Zangrillo and Thomas Keil

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indian management
THE JOURNAL OF THE ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
VOLUME 65 I ISSUE 1 I JANUARY 2026

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# The Anticipatory Board: Where foresight becomes governance

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

Boards are entrusted with a dual responsibility: to protect enterprises from risk and to help them move forward. For a long time, these two objectives could coexist comfortably. Risk was largely visible, change was incremental, and the future could be approached through careful extrapolation of the past. That context has changed. Today, boards are increasingly required to take positions on emerging shifts long before outcomes are certain. In such an environment, the real dilemma is no longer whether to support change, but whether to act on probability rather than wait for clarity.

**Beyond oversight and compliance, boards must now help organisations prepare for futures that cannot yet be modelled with precision**

Having engaged with boardrooms from both sides of the table, I have seen how easily uncertainty can become a reason for delay. Boards are understandably cautious. They are designed to test assumptions, challenge optimism, and avoid irreversible errors. Yet, in fast-changing industries, excessive caution carries its own risk. The cost of waiting is often invisible until it becomes irreversible.

The experience of Kodak is a reminder. The company recognised the potential of digital photography early, yet treated it as a future problem rather than an immediate strategic choice. The concern was not ignorance, but hesitation. The board struggled to reconcile an emerging probability with the certainty of an existing, profitable model. By the time the future became clear, the window to shape it had closed. The lesson is not that boards must always move early, but that anticipation requires timely commitment, not just awareness.

This places a higher burden on boards than in the past. Beyond oversight and compliance, boards must now help organisations prepare for futures that cannot yet be modelled with precision. Boards exist not only to oversee performance and compliance, but to help organisations prepare for futures that do not yet have balance sheets. This requires a shift in emphasis — from asking only "Are we delivering against plan?" to also asking "What assumptions does this plan rest on, and what could render them obsolete?" That kind of questioning is uncomfortable, particularly in successful companies. It challenges past decisions and familiar models. But it is precisely where boards add the most value.

From experience, the most effective board conversations are not about predictions, but about preparedness. They focus on questions such as: What capabilities would we need if this scenario plays out? How reversible are our current decisions? Where do we need to build optionality? These are strategic questions that respect management's role while sharpening organisational readiness.

**Exposure to technology, sustainability transitions, global value chains, and new consumer behaviours helps boards distinguish between noise and meaningful signals**

At the same time, boards cannot do this in isolation. Anticipatory governance works only when there is deep trust between the board and management. Management must be willing to surface weak signals, emerging risks, and uncomfortable truths, even when these do not yet show up in quarterly numbers. Boards, in turn, must create space for management to surface early signals without fear of overreaction, while retaining the independence to challenge, probe, and redirect when required.

Equally important is the composition of the board itself. Diversity of experience matters, not as a matter of optics, but of perspective. Exposure to technology, sustainability transitions, global value chains, and new consumer behaviours helps boards distinguish between noise and meaningful signals. Without this breadth, it becomes easy to dismiss unfamiliar developments as temporary or irrelevant.

Ultimately, the board's duty is not to demand certainty where none exists, but to help management act responsibly in its absence. And management's responsibility is to bring the board into the journey early but when choices are still open.

In my opinion, the most effective boards focus on readiness ensuring that the organisation has the capabilities, choices, and resilience to respond as probabilities evolve. They accept that some decisions will be made without full clarity, and that course correction is a strength, not a weakness.

In an era where change is continuous, the role of the board is no longer limited to protecting yesterday's value. It is to help the organisation engage with tomorrow thoughtfully, early, and with the courage to act before certainty arrives. IM

*The opinion expressed is personal.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Dear Readers,

Economic shocks, technological disruption, climate risk, social expectations, and regulatory change—boards are being tested as never before, as they grapple these and many more challenges, while stakeholders demand resilience, purpose, sustainability, and innovation. In this context, the most effective boards are not those that simply respond well to crises, but those that anticipate them—the anticipatory boards.

An anticipatory board does not claim to predict the future with certainty. It cultivates awareness, curiosity, and disciplined foresight. Such boards develop the habit of scanning the horizon for weak signals—subtle regulatory shifts, early changes in customer behaviour, emerging technologies, or evolving societal expectations. They understand that these faint signals often precede major inflection points.

Anticipatory boards challenge assumptions, explore multiple (often, worst case) scenarios, and regularly test the organisation's strategy against plausible futures. They foster a culture where management feels safe to surface uncertainty, experiment, and learn early.

Ultimately, the anticipatory board is not defined by foresight alone, but by preparedness. It recognises that while the future cannot be controlled, readiness can be built—one signal, one conversation, and one deliberate decision at a time.

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**

JANUARY 2026 VOLUME 65 ISSUE 1



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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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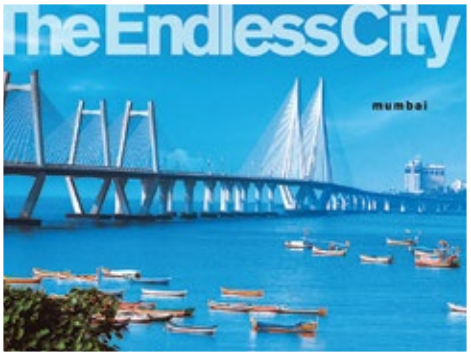
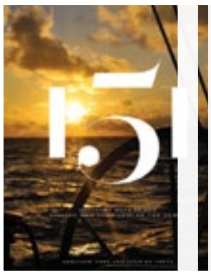
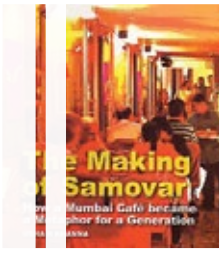
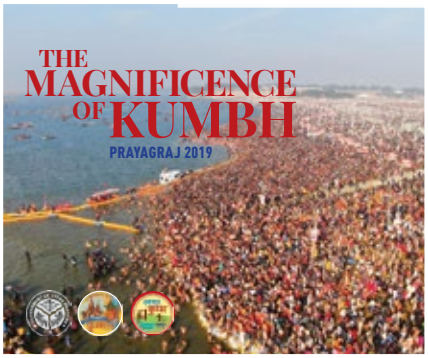
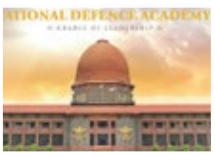
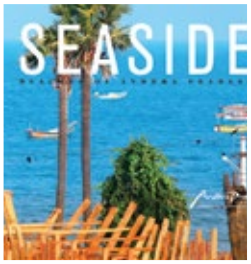










# VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Armaan Hoyvoy

# Lead change before it happens

In an era of constant disruption, the most effective boards are those that anticipate change rather than react to it.

✦ MARIANNA ZANGRILLO AND THOMAS KEIL, CO-AUTHORS, *THE NEXT BOARD*

Around the world, organisations are dealing with a paradox: the future has never been more uncertain, yet the expectations placed on boards have never been higher. Stakeholders demand resilience, purpose, sustainability, and innovation, even as global markets, supply chains, regulations, and technologies shift faster than most governance structures were designed to handle.

In this environment, the most effective boards share a distinguishing trait: they lead from anticipation, as reaction or waiting for clarity are no longer an option. They build the capacity to sense change early, interpret weak signals, and position the organisation ahead of disruption, because we live in the era of the anticipatory board.

### What defines an anticipatory board?

Being an anticipatory board does not mean fortune-telling, because no board can claim to know the future with any real precision, and behaving as though it can usually creates little more than a comforting illusion. What these boards do well, instead, is cultivate the instincts and everyday habits that help them stay just a little ahead of events as they unfold and be ready as soon as needed. They pay attention to the faint signals many others overlook, a passing policy remark that hints at a regulatory shift, a change in customer sentiment that feels deeper than a momentary mood, or a quiet technological advance in one corner of the market that could soon ripple outward.

They do not wait for 'certainty', because experience has taught them that certainty almost always arrives too late to be useful. And critically, these boards understand that anticipation matters only if the organisation can act on it. They therefore place equal emphasis on building agility and resilience across the enterprise, ensuring that management and teams are able to pivot quickly when shifts emerge, even in long-established firms that may need to respond with the speed of a start-up.

Rather than relying on mathematical methods, anticipatory boards tend to share a handful of qualities that shape how they think and operate:

- **A sharpened awareness of signals.** They train themselves to notice early tremors. A regulation still

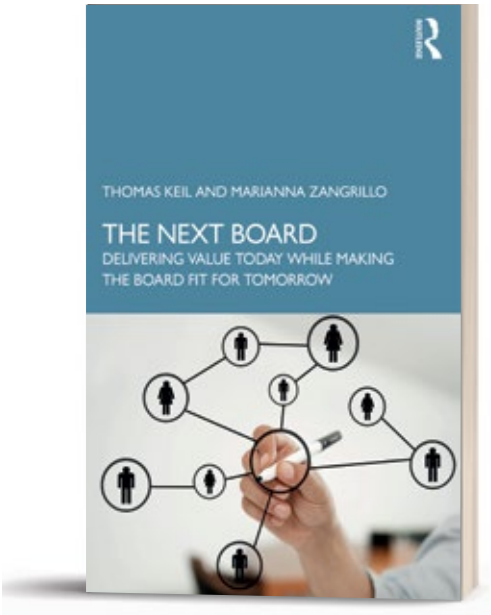
in draft form, a soft warning in the data, or a new competitor emerging from an unexpected direction, and none of these are brushed aside, but are treated as early clues worth understanding.

- **The ability to make meaning from complexity.** Awareness alone carries a board only so far, because directors also need to connect shifts across markets, geographies, and diverse stakeholder groups. When they examine risk, they consider how one development may spark another and build a more complete understanding rather than treating each issue as isolated.
- **A commitment to strategic flexibility.** These boards recognise that rigid long-range plans can become constraints rather than guides, so they think in terms of pathways instead of fixed tracks to stay responsive to shifting conditions. Flexibility becomes a strategic posture as they constantly ask how quickly the organisation could adapt if the landscape moved unexpectedly.
- **Governance processes that match the pace of reality.** Their governance style is built to keep pace with events, relying on quick, focused committees and short, meaningful deep-dive discussions that surface important issues without slowing decisions. The predictable annual rhythm is replaced by a more agile cadence that feels connected to what is happening beyond the boardroom.

**The strongest boards draw regularly on policy thinkers, regional specialists, and technologists, rely on clear dashboards that track only the signals that matter, and ask for forward-looking scenarios instead of backward-leaning reports**

### Building a board designed for foresight

- **Broaden the board's cognitive range.** The most forward-looking boards build themselves almost like multidisciplinary teams, widening their talent base to include a diverse set of directors who understand digital ecosystems, cybersecurity, public policy, emerging markets, sustainability, and social impact. This is not diversity for its own sake, but a way to sharpen the board's ability to detect early shifts and challenge assumptions with confidence.
- **Rebuild how information reaches the board.** While a board cannot anticipate what it cannot see, dealing with information design can be a strategic advantage rather than an administrative task. The strongest boards draw regularly on policy thinkers, regional specialists, and technologists, rely on clear dashboards that track only the signals that matter, and ask for forward-looking scenarios instead of backward-leaning reports.
- **Make scenario thinking a habit, not**



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**an event.** Scenario planning becomes meaningful only when it is part of the board's rhythm, so anticipatory boards rehearse "what if" situations several times a year to test their strategic posture. By exploring upsides and downsides, tracing second-order effects, and identifying when a pivot would be required, they build the reflexes they will need long before real disruption arrives.

- **Reframing the board–management relationship.** An anticipatory board works with management as an open-eyed partner rather than a distant reviewer. It creates an environment where early warnings, subtle tensions, and incomplete signals can surface without hesitation, because this steady, unfiltered exchange of insight becomes the only way to avoid blind spots, deepen collective judgment, and respond to emerging shifts before they become real organisational risks.
- **Embedding agility into governance.** To stay ahead of fast-moving realities, anticipatory boards build lightweight structures, such as short task forces, rapid briefings and tightly scoped committees, that allow them to explore new developments without slowing core responsibilities. Furthermore, they ensure that learning flows quickly, decisions stay responsive, and the governance rhythm keeps pace with the external world instead of lagging behind it, turning agility into a practical, everyday habit rather than an abstract aspiration.

## The anticipatory board in practice: Six behaviours

Boards that excel in anticipation often show similar behaviours across industries and regions:

- They ask, "What might change?" instead of "What is the plan?" Plans assume a steady world and anticipation assumes movement.
- **They treat resilience as strategy, not overhead.** Multiple suppliers,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Marianna Zangrillo** is co-author, *The Next Board: Delivering Value Today while Making the Board Fit for Tomorrow.*

distributed talent, and strong digital foundations become protective advantages.

- **They engage deliberately with the outside world.** Directors step into policy forums, industry discussions, and academic conversations to widen their lens.
- **They see technology and data ethics as central governance issues.** AI raises questions about risk, trust, opportunity, and societal expectations, all squarely within the board's remit.
- **They maintain emotional steadiness.** They avoid swinging between extremes, and their calm gives the organisation confidence in turbulent periods.
- **They keep long-term purpose in view.** Financial results matter, but not at the expense of reputation, trust, or sustainable growth.

**Boards do not need perfect foresight; they need the discipline to catch early signals, connect them fast, and shift direction before clarity arrives.**

## The Indian context: Why anticipatory boards matter even more

India's corporate landscape is being reshaped by rapid economic expansion, a vast digital ecosystem, renewed industrial policy, and the country's growing geopolitical weight, creating conditions where boards must read shifts earlier and act faster than ever before. In 2025, Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani described the environment as "a perfect storm" of global tariff tensions, AI disruption and energy-system transitions, urging Indian firms to strengthen innovation, supply-chain diversification and digital architecture.

Such a message underscores why anticipation is now central to governance. Companies such as Mahindra, which bet early on electric mobility, and Tata Communications, which moved swiftly into cloud-first global infrastructure, illustrate how boards that interpret weak signals before they become mainstream position their organisations ahead of change.

For Indian companies, early sensing, fluid information flow and a willingness to move before the full picture emerges are no longer optional; they are the foundations of resilience and strategic advantage in a market where inflection points appear quickly and often without warning. It would be safe to say that India's fast-shifting geopolitical landscape further increases the need for anticipatory governance.

And as global alliances evolve, supply chains get reorganised, and new regional partnerships take shape, opportunities will surface across manufacturing, services, digital infrastructure, and clean energy. Boards must help organisations develop the agility to realign their geographic footprint, partnership portfolios, and even business models so they can seize these openings before they become widely recognised.

## Conclusion: Leading before change arrives

Boards do not need perfect foresight; they need the discipline to catch early signals, connect them fast, and shift direction before clarity arrives. When this mindset is backed by diverse expertise, strategic flexibility, and open dialogue with management, uncertainty becomes advantage rather than threat. The boards that stand out will be those that stay steady in ambiguity, act on small shifts, and lead with confidence before the path is fully visible. Anticipation is no longer optional, it is the core requirement for governing in a world that moves faster than traditional decision cycles can follow. IM

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Thomas Keil** is co-author, *The Next Board: Delivering Value Today while Making the Board Fit for Tomorrow.*

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*As the era of the 100-hour workweek fades, the '100-crore mindset' reframes success around cognitive leverage, strategic depth, and exponential impact rather than brute effort.*

✦ ULLHAS PAGEY, AUTHOR

STRATEGY

# The 100-crore mindset

The archaic paradigm of the '100-hour workweek', that gruelling, performative crucible of exhaustion once fetishised by the Silicon Valley vanguard and Wall Street titans, is finally and definitively reaching its asymptotic limit. It is a deprecated operational model, a relic of a scarcity mindset fundamentally ill-suited for the hyper-connected, hyper leveraged economy we now inhabit, a brute force mechanism that yields diminishing marginal returns. The contemporary competitive arena no longer rewards mere trench warfare effort; it mandates strategic guerrilla warfare of the intellect. The new north star for the global echelon of value creators is not the time on task metric but the quantum leap in cognitive throughput encapsulated by the '100-crore mindset'. This shift represents a non-negotiable pivot from quantitative input to qualitative outcome, from linear scaling to exponential impact, demanding an immediate resequencing of our enterprise DNA.

To understand this seismic shift, one must first de-construct the mythos of the 100-hour grind. It was, at its core, a zero sum game of personal capital, a belief that maximal physical presence equated to maximal organisational velocity. This fallacy, rooted in the industrial age's sweat equity calculus, has proven to be a catastrophic drain on human bandwidth, leading to widespread burnout contagion and an undeniable atrophy of high level strategic ideation. The true cost, the unseen collateral damage, was the stifling of deep work, the sacrifice of the epiphanic breakthrough in favour of the perpetual incrementalism of the overextended calendar. We are no longer remunerating individuals for clocking in; we are compensating them for unlocking value at scale, for moving the proverbial needle not by a millimetre of sheer effort, but by a meter of intellectual arbitrage.

The '100-crore mindset' is the apotheosis of this new intellectual regime. It is a philosophy that views every hour invested not as a unit of labour, but as a lever for achieving an order of magnitude return on invested capital, or ROIC, where the 'I' is not merely financial, but cognitive and temporal. The 'crores', a term evocative of monumental financial scale, serve as a potent metaphor for non-linear wealth creation, for the kind of impact that fundamentally re-rates an entire market vertical. This mindset operates on the

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principle of radical optionality, aggressively decoupling effort from reward. It is about building asymmetric leverage, where one hour of focused, high value decision making the keystone domino move, outperforms a thousand hours of low leverage, operational wheel spinning.

This new ethos demands a fundamental recasting of the leadership operating system. The CEO must transition from being a fire-fighting conductor of a sprawling, busy orchestra to an architectural custodian of a highly tuned, autonomous enterprise ecosystem. The focus shifts to talent density, not headcount sprawl. The mandate is to hire individuals who naturally possess this multiplicative cognitive processing capability, the kind of unicorn talent whose single strategic intervention is a force multiplier for the entire P&L. This requires ruthless prioritisation, a cultural imperative to say no to anything that does not directly contribute to a 10x outcome, effectively sun-setting all vestigial projects and operational overhead that merely sustain the status quo. The business model itself becomes a self optimising algorithm, constantly iterating on value proposition and delivery mechanism, fuelled by data-driven conviction rather than anecdotal sentiment. The successful enterprise of tomorrow will be characterised by its cognitive agility, its ability to rapidly re platform its core competencies in response to market inflection points, a capability fundamentally absent in the perpetually fatigued organisation.

The '100-crore mindset' is the engine of this agility. It necessitates a systemic calibration of risk tolerance, moving away from a punitive culture of failure to one that celebrates intelligent experimentation and views every setback as a rich data harvest for the next disruptive pivot. The ultimate deliverable is not just profit; it is perpetual competitive advantage derived from superior intellectual capital.

To operationalise the '100-crore mindset' at the individual contributor level, one must adopt a personal scarcity framework for time. Think of your calendar not as a

**The future belongs to those who do not trade hours for dollars but trade intellectual capital for generational impact. The narrative has moved beyond the simple accumulation of tasks; it is now about the intentional architecture of breakthrough**

passive receptacle for meetings, but as a strategic asset to be deployed with the precision of a surgical strike. This requires a mastery of deep work, the ability to engage in professional activities performed in a state of distraction free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit, creating new value, improving skill, and which are difficult to replicate. This is where the magic happens, where the alpha generation occurs. It is the antithesis of the context switching endemic to the email and chat culture, that constant fragmentation of attention that makes high level synthesis impossible.

The toolkit for this transformation includes aggressively ring fencing dedicated flow state blocks, deploying asynchronous communication protocols to escape the tyranny of the instant reply, and a steadfast refusal to engage in non-essential cognitive overhead tasks. Success in this new climate is not about doing more; it is about being more effective at the highest possible leverage points.

The new corporate athlete is a master of mental compression, capable of processing vast amounts of complexity and distilling it into a single, elegant, and highly potent strategic hypothesis. This is the ultimate form of productivity. The velocity of insight now surpasses the volume of activity as the primary determinant of enterprise value.

The individuals who embody this mindset are not simply employees; they are internal venture capitalists, constantly scouting for opportunities to deploy their intellectual capital for maximum yield. They have transcended the transactional nature of the traditional work contract to embrace an ownership mentality that ties their personal outcomes directly to the audacious financial and strategic goals of the organisation. Their engagement is not mandated; it is an organic outpouring of self actualisation expressed through peak performance. This shift requires a reciprocal trust from the organisational apex, a belief that granting autonomy over the how is the non-negotiable prerequisite for demanding excellence in the what. This sovereignty of the knowledge worker is the foundational bedrock of a high 'crores' culture.

The '100-hour workweek', by contrast, was merely a compliance mechanism, a blunt instrument of control that inherently distrusted the intelligence and intent of its workforce. It demanded subservience to the clock; the '100-crore mindset' demands cognitive supremacy and an unflinching commitment to scale. It's the difference between operating a factory and orchestrating an ecosystem of exponential growth.

The future belongs to those who do not trade hours for dollars but trade intellectual capital for generational impact. The narrative has moved beyond the simple accumulation of tasks; it is now about the intentional architecture of breakthrough. It is an elegant, yet unforgiving, calculus where only truly scaled thinking can survive the relentless gravitational pull toward mediocrity. The long hours were an admission of inefficiency; the new mindset is a testament to strategic elegance.

"Leadership is no longer about setting the pace; it's about architecting the context in which extraordinary performance becomes the inevitable outcome, focusing relentlessly on the cognitive density of the decisions, not the caloric expenditure of the hours." – Indra Nooyi, former Chairperson and CEO of PepsiCo IM

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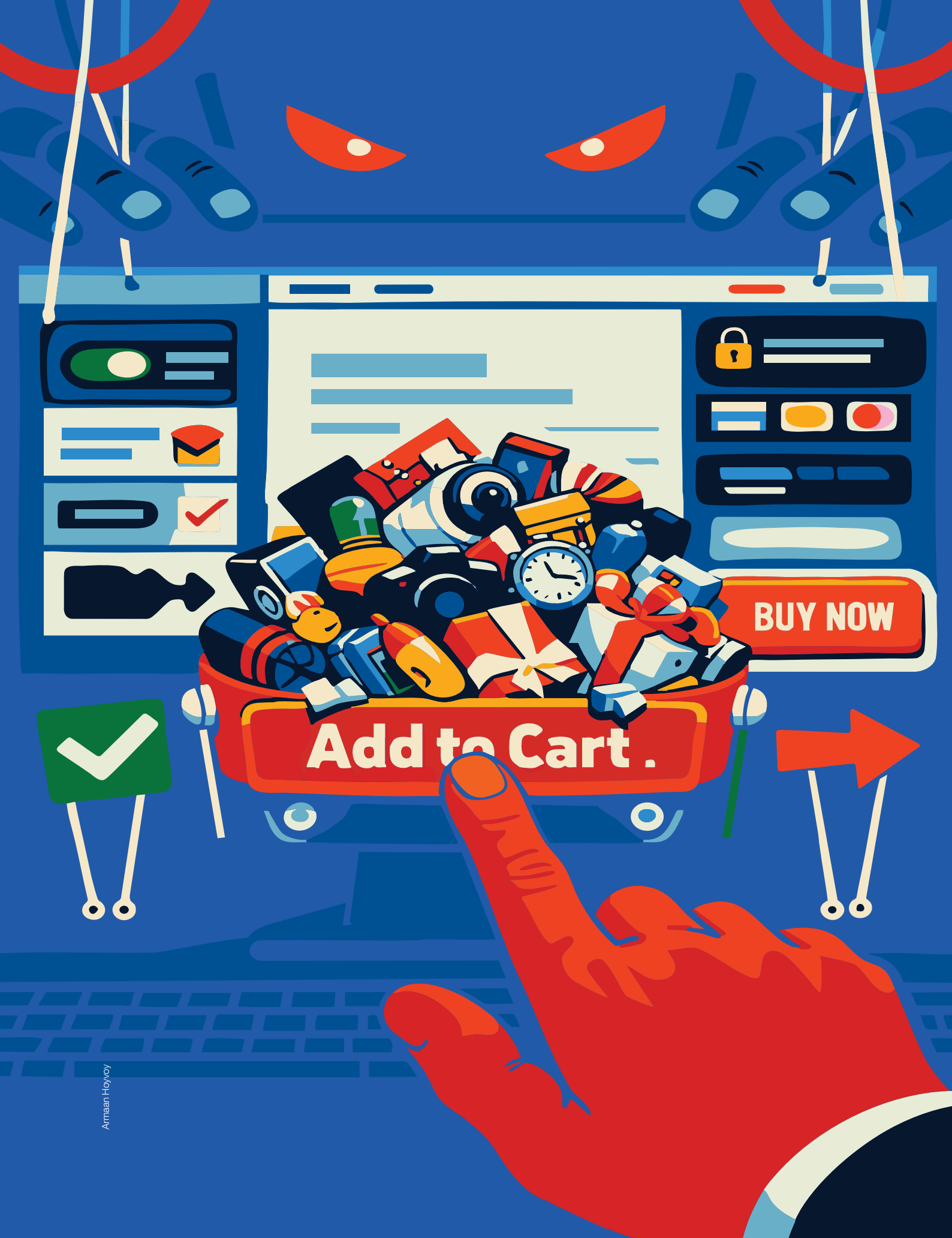


Armaan Hoyvoy

*As e-commerce platforms increasingly shape consumer choices, dark patterns in UI/UX design manipulate behaviour, erode trust, and challenge India's evolving legal and regulatory framework.*

✦ SOHOM BANERJEE, JAIPURIA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, NOIDA AND DR SUMANTA DUTTA ST XAVIER'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), KOLKATA



# Dark patterns

In a time when e-commerce is taking over retail, online platforms' user interface design has grown to be a potent tool for influencing customer choices. Intentional design strategies known as 'dark patterns' influence users into making decisions they might not have otherwise made (Kim et al., 2023). Although these tactics could increase the platforms' short-term revenue, they seriously jeopardise the welfare, autonomy and trust of consumers (Di Porto & Egberts, 2023).

The use of manipulative interface design must be examined from a legal, economic, and social perspective in India as internet usage and digital commerce increase (Raj et al., 2025). Harry Brignull originally used the term "dark patterns" in 2010 to refer to user interface (UI) designs that deceive or pressure users into doing things they don't want to do, like making unwanted purchases, signing up for subscriptions, or sharing personal information (Brignull, 2011).

Formally speaking, dark patterns are UI/UX design decisions that, through unfair persuasion, coercion, or deceit, diminish or eliminate true user choice. They take advantage of decision heuristics and cognitive biases (OECD, 2022). Dark patterns frequently appear in e-commerce during the subscription process, product discovery, cart checkout, and privacy consent dialogues (Raghavan, 2025). Many of these patterns are labelled unfair trade practices or deceptive marketing in regulatory discourse, particularly when they impose hidden costs, coerce, or mislead.

Dark patterns have been specifically acknowledged by India's Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) as being covered by unfair trade practices under the 2019 Consumer Protection Act (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, 2025).

## TYPES OF DARK PATTERNS IN E-COMMERCE

Thirteen distinct dark patterns in e-commerce settings have been identified by Indian regulators (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, 2025). We elaborate on them and provide examples below:

| Dark Pattern | Description/ mechanism | Indian example or hypothetical scenario |
|---|---|---|
| False urgency/ countdown timers | Imposing artificial time limits to push purchase decisions (e.g. "Offer ends in 00:05:00"). | A flash-sale banner on an Indian shopping site says, "Only 2 left! Hurry, offer ends in 3 minutes," though inventory is actually sufficient. |
| Basket sneaking/ Cart Add-ons | Automatically adding extra items (e.g. gift wrap, insurance) to the cart without explicit user consent. | A ticket booking site auto-adds ₹1 'donation' in the cart (a known example from BookMyShow). (Varma, 2025) |
| Confirm Shaming | Framing the 'no' or 'opt-out' option in guilt or shame – e.g. 'No, I don't want to save money." | On a checkout page, "Yes, I want faster delivery" is prominent; "No thanks, I'll wait longer (save money)" is downplayed or phrased negatively. |
| Forced action/forced continuity | Requiring a user to do some irrelevant task in order to proceed (e.g. "You must sign up for a newsletter to checkout"). | A site forces users to click through unrelated prompts (e.g. rate an app, mark a survey) before confirming payment. |
| Subscription traps | Making cancellation difficult or hidden. | After a free-trial of a streaming service, users find it hard to locate the 'cancel' button hidden several screens deep. |
| Interface interference/ visual interference | Design layout or visual highlighting steers users toward a choice (e.g. default pre-tick, misleading buttons). | The 'Accept All' cookie consent button is large and bright; 'Manage Settings' is in small grey text. |
| Bait and switch | Advertising something (like a discount) that changes when a customer tries to buy. | A '20% off' deal disappears once a user clicks 'Buy Now' and changes to '10% off'. |
| Drip pricing/ hidden Fees | Revealing additional charges only at the last checkout stage (e.g. 'service tax', 'convenience fee'). | A food delivery platform quotes low rates up front, but later adds delivery or packaging fees. |
| Disguised advertisements | Ads made to look like organic content or recommendations. | 'Top Picks for You' section showing sponsored products disguised as curated editorial content. |
| Nagging/ persistent prompts | Repeated pop-ups or reminders that annoy or pressure the user toward a desired choice. | A coupon pop-up that keeps reappearing at every click. |
| Trick wording/ misleading language | Ambiguous or manipulative phrasing to mislead. | "Click here to continue with default settings" where default means sharing data or opting into services. |
| SaaS billing / rogue billing | Opaque recurring billing in subscription services. | A subscription app charges annually without clear disclosure, with auto-renewal by default. |
| Rogue malware/ surprise upsells | Using hidden background scripts or forced installs upselling extras. | An 'install update' prompt secretly bundles add-ons or toolbars. |

**Source:** Compiled by authors

The above list is not all-inclusive; with AI-driven personalisation, more hybrid or emergent dark patterns might appear.

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## Psychological and behavioural mechanisms

Dark patterns covertly sway consumer choices by taking advantage of a variety of well-researched behavioural and psychological processes. One such technique is the dearth and dread bias, which states that when people believe a resource is scarce or poised to run out, they're more likely to act instantly. Customers are frequently pushed to make snap choices by this fear of missing out. In a similar vein, the anchoring effect is powerful: the first price or option offered creates a mental benchmark, which is then used by later upsells or hidden costs to justify further expenditure.

The inherent bias, sometimes referred to as the status quo bias, is another prevalent method. Given that it appears less complicated than proactively changing the selection, customers frequently persist with predetermined or default options, such as an opt-in box that is already checked for newsletters or extensions. Framing effects, in which the wording of a choice affects perception, are strongly connected. For instance, even though both claims express the same value, telling a customer, "You lose ₹100," elicits a more profound psychological reply than stating, "You gain ₹100."

Dark patterns consistently shift the equilibrium of power in decision-making by using these psychological mechanisms. The platform's architecture subtly guides users towards conclusions that maximise the interests of businesses, frequently at the cost of the welfare of customers, rather than allowing them to make free and rational decisions.

## Impacts on consumer trust, behaviour and welfare

Dark patterns weaken autonomy and alter preferences, thereby impacting consumer decision-making. Individuals may end up buying things they never planned to purchase, unintentionally signing up for subscriptions, or agreeing to divulge far more personal information than they would have in a neutral setting. In such instances, the platforms'

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'revealed' choices do not any more accurately represent the preferences of users, but rather the route of least resistance created through deceptive design.

The damages are frequently cumulative and monetary. Real financial losses result from forced continuation following free trials, additional costs that are only disclosed at the very end of the checkout process, and subscription catches that make termination difficult. The stress, which heavily impacts lower-income consumers who have fewer wiggle room in their budgets, is made worse over time by the recurrence of even seemingly minor incidents.

Once lost, trust is hard to regain. Users lose faith in the website—and e-commerce in general—when they sense they have been coerced or pushed into platform-specific outcomes. Enduring loyalty-driven business models are undermined by this harm to one's image. The expenses are not just financial either; customers must expend mental and time figuring out fine print, avoiding scams, terminating auto-renewals, and submitting grievances. Even after refunds are later received, such inquiry, learning, and cognitive costs lower overall welfare.

The aforementioned impacts are exacerbated in India due to the quick enrolment of new online customers with a wide range of literacy rates. The authority imbalance among platforms and customers increases when people are less tech-savvy and more comfortable with interface norms, making them more susceptible to exploitation. Techniques that compromise eternal consumer welfare for short-term monetary boosts run the risk of undermining the hope of broad digital commerce in the absence of robust protections and accessible design standards.

## Legal and regulatory landscape in India

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) is in charge of regulating, investigating, and punishing unjust trade practices in India under the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 (CP Act) (Zee News,

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**On the business front, platforms, particularly smaller ones, have to pay real costs for creating new funnels, keep up with audits, and deal with legal hazards**

2019). Many dark patterns fit this unfair-practice definition as they trick, induce confusion, or add hidden costs to users without clearly saying so. Section 47(2) is important because it covers actions that "take advantage of the consumer's inability to protect his own interest." If deceptive structure is used in an ad which is inaccurate or deceiving, Section 89(8) may also apply. This section has effects that may involve fines and jail time.

The CCPA released the Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns on November 30, 2023. The rules listed 13 patterns that are not allowed and told e-commerce platforms, advertisers, and sellers to stop using them. The CP Act gives such Guidelines the force of law towards unfair trade practices. This means that platforms are responsible for redesigning UI/UX flows to get rid of manipulative aspects (Kaushiki & Sehgal, n.d.).

The CCPA sent out an Advisory on Self-Audit on June 5, 2025, telling e-commerce sites to check their user interfaces for dark patterns within three months and send in declarations of compliance. The Advisory makes insider evaluations routine, which enhances the regulatory structure. Yet, legal experts warn that it has 'soft-law' aspects and doesn't have obvious penalties or enforceable consequences (Thakur, 2025).

## Challenges and gaps in regulation

India's present attitude to dark patterns continues to have some big holes. The 2025 self-audit recommendation and the CCPA's 2023 Guidelines don't say what the consequences are for each illegal manoeuvre, which makes things unclear when it comes to compliance. Regulators also have problems in the real world: keeping an eye on UI flows that change quickly across dozens of apps and websites takes a lot of resources, and numerous customers don't know enough about technology to recognise deceptive interfaces or ask for help.

On the business front, platforms, particularly smaller ones, have to pay real costs for creating new funnels, keep up with audits, and deal with legal hazards. Likewise, the extent of jurisdiction remains: companies located outside of India or catering to Indian users across borders may evade through gaps in regulation, making it harder to hold them accountable in a timely manner. IM

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Armaan Hoyvoy

*'Relationship currency' is key to getting more of what you want as an entrepreneur.*

✦ RAVI RAJANI, AUTHOR, *RELATIONSHIP CURRENCY*



# The human advantage

What do you desire in this phase of your life as an entrepreneur? Not what your peers, team, or investors want for you. What do you truly want from your business? Maybe it is being perceived as a transformational leader, driving sales growth at your company, or increasing employee retention. The million-dollar question is this: how do we achieve said desire through an aligned path?

In a world increasingly shaped by AI, it is easy to believe that automation and machines are the answer. However, the answer lies in something that's been under your nose this entire time: relationship currency. Remember, another human being holds the keys to your kingdom; they are what unlock the door to your desire(s). Yes, that's correct—human beings. Not growth hacks or secret playbooks.

Think about it like this: if you want to raise money, there's another human being you're going to have to connect with who's going to write you a check. Whilst you receive funding, they receive an opportunity for wealth creation. If you are looking to sell more of your product or service, there's another human being who holds the purse strings.

Whilst you receive top-line growth, those buyers receive a transformation that solves their million-dollar problem. And if you want to rally your people around a common vision, you need to collectively connect with a group of human beings and inspire them to take action. Whilst you receive buy-in for your mission, they experience more meaning and fulfilment in their careers.

Authentic relationships include two human beings willingly building and strengthening the connective tissue required to form a meaningful bond—without experiencing an imbalanced energy exchange. These last three words are everything. Here's why: whilst someone holds the keys to your kingdom, you also have the keys to theirs. Meaningful relationships are not a one-way street.

Here's an example you might resonate with. Have you ever heard of Aaron Krause? He's the founder of Scrub Daddy, those smiley-faced sponges you see in your local grocery store or supermarket. In the 'earlyish' days,

Krause knew he was onto something but was unable to get his product into retail stores because he was missing one key ingredient: the 'who'. He had the 'how' down due to his investor's mind, entrepreneurial flair, and manufacturing experience. However, no matter how amazing his product or experience was, he needed another human being—the 'who'—to help him meet his desires. Krause knew he needed the right investor, with the right relationships, to explode his business. Enter the TV show Shark Tank.

**If somebody has the keys to your kingdom, you might just hold the key to theirs. This is the power of relationship currency**

Fast forward to the scene where he's just delivered his nail-biting pitch in 2012, and a bidding war has ensued. Daymond John makes an offer contingent on Lori Greiner's involvement in the deal. Why? Because John knows this product is in Greiner's area of excellence and that she has the strategic relationships to take it all the way. Greiner (A.K.A. the "Queen of QVC") can smell John wanting to ride her coattails and profit off her hard-earned relationship currency. The result? She dismisses him in a flash. In Greiner's own words, "...connections are everything." In the end, Krause accepts Greiner's proposal of $200,000 for 20 per cent equity. Whilst Krause lands a strategic relationship to open himself up to retail stores, Greiner adds a diamond in the rough to her portfolio (which, eventually, led to a 250–300x return on her investment). Remember, if somebody has the keys to your kingdom, you might just hold the key to theirs. This is the power of relationship currency.

So, where do you begin? "We're in the people business serving coffee, not the coffee business serving people." Those thirteen words were once uttered by Howard Behar, the former president of Starbucks, indicating a powerful mindset: being people-centric is a way of life.

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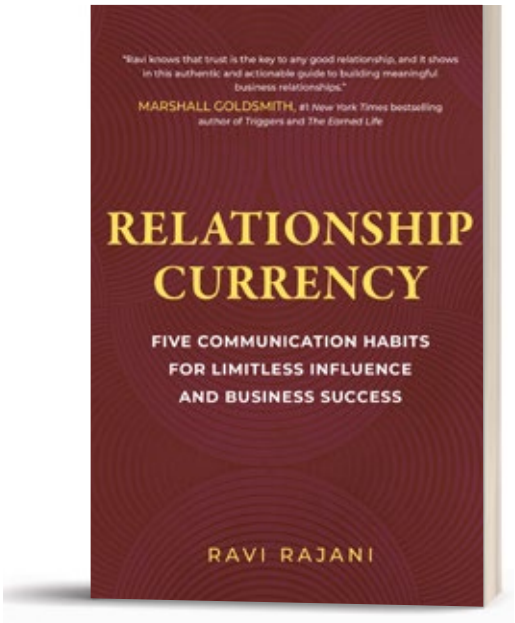


Hit pause from reading this article and try it on for size, my friend. You're in the people business doing what? This is your starting point for humanizing your next conversation, meeting, pitch, or presentation. As you embody this mantra over time, you'll uncover a deep knowing that authentic relationships are everything in business (and life).

Whilst many entrepreneurs prioritise automation without connection, growth without introspection, and conversations without intention, focus on earning the one currency that matters most in this world: relationship currency. Your future employees, investors, partners, customers, or team are craving authenticity grounded in one thing: trust. Your job is to be interested in what they are emotionally invested in, help them achieve more of what they desire, and operate like a trusted guide. Do this right, and you'll build trusted relationships for life.

Whatever you desire, in this season of your life, is simply a by-product of focusing on the one thing that's currently priced at a premium in today's economy: human connection. IM

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Armaan Hoyvoy

Dean E Carter, co-author, *Employee Experience Design: Co-Creating Work Where People and Organizations Thrive* describes how leaders around the world are moving from top-down programs to experience by design.

MYTH BUSTER

# Designing work, not decorating it

This article reflects insights from the authors' collective work on Employee Experience Design, drawing on examples and lessons that apply globally, with India emerging as a leader in progressive thinking and innovation in how work is designed.

**Myth 1: Employee experience is about ping pong, perks, and parties—not profit.**

This is the classic misconception I hear most often. Across the world, many leaders still equate 'employee experience' with a cool office, quirky events, and a snack wall. Those 'perks' don't create a great workplace. They decorate it.

But experience isn't about adding more perks; it's about designing the conditions where people can do their best work. In Employee Experience Design, my co-authors, Samantha Gadd and Mark Levy, and I outline a roadmap for intentionally co-creating thriving experiences built on 3 foundations: clarity, fairness, and the freedom to do good work. We see this as a critical mindset shift in how the has been traditionally approached by HR.

In organisations that intentionally shape experiences around those foundations, employees feel trusted to perform. And when teams trust how decisions get made, when processes don't slow them down, and when managers know how to support rather than supervise, the whole system gets stronger - with productivity and innovation rising naturally. When experience design becomes the invisible infrastructure of performance, it connects humanity to results.

In India, where the entrepreneurial spirit runs deep and competition moves fast, the companies winning today are those who understand that profit follows purpose, and both depend on experience by design. And it's important to remember that Employee Experience Design, or EXD, is designing with people and for them. When you get those things right, innovation and retention follow.

Every time!

**EXD takeaway:** Perks are decor. Employee Experience Design is impact.

### Myth 2: HR is in the Employee Experience driver's seat.

This myth persists because historically HR owned culture, talent, and engagement. HR definitely plays a role, but HR alone can't own experience. Too much of what shapes someone's day at work happens in meetings, workflows, and relationships, all outside HR's direct reach. Employee Experience is not a function. It's an ecosystem, shaped moment to moment by every leader and every teammate.

**When experience is shared leadership, not an HR initiative, it becomes a part of the organisations operating rhythm. People stop waiting for 'headquarters' to fix things. They start building what they need**

Many global organisations, especially those with strong hierarchical traditions, still build programs at the top and cascade them down. But employees don't respond to that anymore. They want a voice. They want context. They want to help shape how work gets done.

One of the core ideas in Employee Experience Design is shifting HR into more of a product leadership role. HR creates the frameworks and the clarity, then teams co-create the solutions. This approach fits particularly well in high-growth environments where people are used to thinking creatively and solving problems quickly:

- setting the North Star,
- enabling frameworks,
- and creating the conditions where teams design solutions together.

When experience is shared leadership, not an HR initiative, it becomes a part of the organisations operating rhythm. People stop waiting for 'headquarters' to fix things. They start building what they need.

**EXD takeaway:** In entrepreneurial cultures, co-creation of experiences with employees, not for them, isn't an option; it is essential.

### Myth 3: We handled this a few years ago.

This one comes up surprisingly often. A lot of organisations believe they completed a culture transformation or launched annual engagement campaign that should carry them for a while. But work doesn't stay still. People don't stay still. Technology definitely doesn't stay still. In Employee Experience Design, experience is not something you 'finish'. It is a living system. And when markets shift as quickly as they do today, old programs become outdated as people, markets, and technologies change. The organisations that launched culture programs three or five years ago often discover that:

- skill demands have shifted,
- managers face new pressures,
- technology transformed workflows,
- and employee expectations have drastically evolved.

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**Companies that rely only on a once-a-year engagement score miss what is happening in real time. They also miss the chance to respond before problems become patterns**

Companies that treat experience as ongoing design stay resilient. They respond to new challenges quickly because they expect change and are built to adapt. Companies that treat experience as a one-time initiative end up reacting instead of leading.

This is where India has a bit of an advantage. Many Indian companies already operate with an iterative mindset, ship fast, learn fast, adjust fast. That same rhythm works beautifully in employee experience design. In the book, we describe an EXD cyclic rhythm of Imagine → Prepare → Design → Experiment → Measure. It is a loop, not a checklist. In these environments, the EXD rhythm fits perfectly because it never assumes the work is over. It assumes the work continues.

**EXD takeaway:** The organisations that treat experience as a continuous improvement practice stay resilient, relevant and moving forward. The ones that treat it as a one-and-done initiative or campaign risk falling behind as the world speeds by.

### Myth 4: An annual engagement survey is enough.

A once-a-year survey is like a single snapshot. It captures one moment in time, but experience is like a movie, it is constantly unfolding. Imagine taking a photo in New Delhi in June, then using that photo to tell people on your team what to wear in January. What would be their experience?

Companies that rely only on a once-a-year engagement score miss what is happening in real time. They also miss the chance to respond before problems become patterns. Every organisation I've seen make real progress has shifted from heavy annual surveys to smaller, more frequent listening tools. Short pulses. Feedback forums. A regular rhythm of checking in.

High-performing organisations are

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moving from measurement to momentum, something we detail extensively in EXD. Organisations that make real progress build faster, lighter feedback loops. They listen more often, not with long surveys but with short check-ins, quick pulses, and conversations that make feedback part of the way work gets done.

**In countries where digital adoption is accelerating faster than culture can adapt, the opportunity is enormous. India is one of the most important testing grounds for this idea**

They build:

- rapid listening loops,
- lightweight check-ins,
- digital forums for input,
- and transparent "you said, we did" communication channels.

This matters even more in high-growth markets. In India, where new skills emerge quickly and business cycles move fast, waiting twelve months to listen simply doesn't make sense.

Data is helpful, but it does not create engagement by itself. Design does. Listening matters when people see that what they say leads to visible change. And once that happens, trust rises.

**EXD takeaway:** Don't wait for another annual survey. Ask, Listen and Adjust to create real-time actionable insights, build trust, and thrive.

### Myth 5: Technology will make work less human.

This fear is global and justified. Automation and AI can depersonalise work when introduced- without intention. But designed well and with intention, technology can amplify what makes us human.

In EXD we emphasise that technology is a design tool, not a substitute for humanity. The right systems design around things we all seek - clarity, meaningful work, and fairness. And ultimately, this give people more space to spend more time and energy being creative, curious, clever - and being wildly productive humans at work and home.

In countries where digital adoption is accelerating faster than culture can adapt, the

**The real risk is not AI itself. It is letting AI shape work without our hands on the wheel of experience design. The opportunity is ours**

opportunity is enormous. India is one of the most important testing grounds for this idea. With rapid digital adoption and a massive AI talent base, Indian companies can show the world how to design technology that strengthens, rather than erodes, human connection—how technology and humanity can advance together.

The core truth is- the risk isn't technology itself. The actual risk is letting technology creep into the design of work without anyone asking the basic questions like the ones we ask in the book: What does this mean for clarity? For fairness? For belonging? For autonomy? If we fall asleep at the wheel, we may unknowingly and quietly give away our power to shape work ourselves. The real opportunity for innovators and entrepreneurs is to show the world that progress, profit, productivity, and humanity move elegantly forward – by intentional co-creation of experiences at work.

**EXD takeaway:** The real risk is not AI itself. It is letting AI shape work without our hands on the wheel of experience design. The opportunity is ours.

### The opportunity ahead

Employee Experience Design is not a feel-good initiative. It is not decoration. It is the foundation of organisational performance. And companies around the world, are discovering that when you treat experience as something you design with people, not something you hand down to them, everything gets better: speed, innovation, retention, trust, results. Because the future of work isn't built on programs. It's built on shared purpose, clarity, trust, and the intentional co-creation of employee experiences.

And when we do, organisations don't just become more human. They become more resilient, more innovative, more profitable… and we all thrive together. IM

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Armenan Hoyvov

*Workplace spirituality enhances employee well-being, performance, and organisational culture by fostering a more motivated and harmonious work environment.*

✦ SANJAY KOUL, AUTHOR, *HAPPINESS: ILLUSION OR REALITY*



# Spirituality in the workplace

Spirituality in the workplace has emerged as a critical concept that not only enhances employee well-being but also cultivates a positive organisational culture and boosts overall productivity. Workplace spirituality is distinct from religious practices, focusing on integrating universal values such as purpose, ethics, mindfulness, and compassion into professional settings.

This article explores the definition of workplace spirituality, its key components, its impact on employee performance, and the overall benefits it brings to organisations. By examining real-world examples and offering practical strategies for implementation, this article highlights how fostering a spiritually conscious workplace can lead to increased motivation, creativity, reduced stress, and improved interpersonal relationships. The article concludes by emphasising the importance of aligning organisational values with employees' personal beliefs to create a purpose-driven, sustainable, and harmonious work environment.

Workplace spirituality, employee well-being, organisational culture, mindfulness, ethical leadership, productivity, values-based culture, work-life balance, compassion, ethical decision-making, *Sanatana Dharma*.

## Introduction

Spirituality at the workplace refers to the integration of spiritual values, practices, and principles into the work environment. It is about creating a work culture that encourages personal growth, compassion, mindfulness, ethical behaviour, and a sense of purpose. Unlike religious practices, which focus on specific faiths, workplace spirituality is more universal and can be embraced by people of all belief systems.

Spirituality at the workplace can be defined as the practice of fostering a work environment that encourages employees to align their inner values, sense of purpose, and ethical principles with their professional roles. It involves integrating elements such as mindfulness, compassion, integrity, personal growth, and a sense of meaning in the workplace, helping employees connect with their deeper sense of self and contribute to the collective well-being of the organisation.

It is about creating a culture where employees feel supported in their holistic development—spiritually, mentally, and emotionally—allowing them to work with passion, integrity, and a sense of higher purpose.

Notably, in the context of *Sanatana Dharma*, workplace spirituality can resonate deeply with values of *dharma* (duty), karma (action), and *seva* (service), providing a moral and ethical foundation for employees and organizations alike. This article explores the importance of workplace spirituality, its practical applications, and how it aligns with ancient wisdom found in *Sanatana Dharma*.

**With globalisation, diversity in the workforce, and the rise of corporate wellness movements, spirituality in the workplace became increasingly recognised as a critical factor in organisational culture**

### Evolution of spirituality at the workplace

The concept of spirituality at the workplace has evolved over time, but it gained more attention in the late 20th century. While the integration of values like ethics and integrity in work can be traced back to ancient civilisations and religious teachings, the formalisation of workplace spirituality as a concept is more recent.

Here is a brief time line of its development:

- **Pre-20th century:** Early forms of workplace spirituality were largely shaped by religious teachings and cultural values. Concepts such as fairness, honesty, and service were deeply embedded in many cultures' business practices and ethics.
- **Early 20th century:** The early labour movements and the rise of industrialisation led to a greater focus on workers' rights and the well-being of employees, but the emphasis was largely on social and economic factors rather than spiritual or ethical dimensions.
- **1960s-1970s:** The counter culture movement and the rise of personal growth and self-help philosophies in the West brought attention to spiritual and holistic approaches to life, including the workplace. During this period, figures like Abraham Maslow, who introduced concepts of self-actualisation, and Carl Jung, who explored the integration of the unconscious mind, laid some groundwork for a more holistic view of the individual that influenced later workplace practices.
- **1980s-1990s:** The idea of workplace spirituality began to formalise with the publication of books and research articles. One pivotal moment was the 1992 book *The Soul at Work* by Frances Hesselbein and Marshall Goldsmith, which discussed how spirituality in the workplace could enhance organisational performance and employee well-being. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee wellness programs also started integrating aspects of spirituality, focusing on values, ethics, and a broader sense of purpose in the workplace.
- **2000s and beyond:** With globalisation, diversity in the workforce, and the rise of corporate wellness movements, spirituality in the workplace became increasingly recognised as a critical factor in organisational culture. Leaders and companies began recognising that focusing on employees' spiritual needs (like a sense of purpose, belonging, and inner growth) could lead to improved employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Mindfulness, work-life balance, and emotional intelligence also became integral parts of the conversation around workplace spirituality.

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## Significance and strategies for implementation

Spirituality at the workplace is not about imposing religious beliefs but about cultivating a work culture based on values such as ethics, respect, mindfulness, and selfless service. It leads to a more engaged, productive, and compassionate workforce, while also contributing to the greater good of society. By integrating spiritual practices, companies can not only improve their bottom line but also create a work environment that supports holistic growth, both professionally and personally.

A spiritually aware workplace is one where compassion and empathy are valued. When leaders and employees show care and understanding toward one another, it fosters stronger interpersonal relationships and a supportive environment. This practice reflects the value of *seva* (selfless service) in *Sanatana Dharma*, where the well-being of others is prioritised. Compassionate organisations create a culture of inclusion and mutual respect, reducing workplace stress and improving team dynamics.

- **Importance of spirituality in the workplace**
  - **Aligning work with purpose:** Spirituality at the workplace helps employees view their work as part of a greater purpose, making it more meaningful. When people connect their tasks with a higher mission, it fosters engagement, dedication, and fulfilment.
  - **Ethical foundation:** Spirituality strengthens ethics and integrity. With principles such as honesty, respect, and fairness, it fosters trust and transparency, essential qualities for a harmonious workplace.
  - **Holistic well-being:** Spiritual practices like mindfulness, meditation, and self-reflection promote mental and emotional well-being. They also improve decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and stress management.

- **Spiritual practices in the workplace**
  Incorporating spirituality in daily work routines does not necessarily mean religious practices but can involve universal practices that promote inner peace, ethics, and mindfulness:
  - **Mindfulness and meditation:** Practices like meditation and mindfulness at the workplace help employees manage stress, increase focus, and improve emotional regulation. Google's mindfulness program, which includes meditation sessions, helps employees manage work-related stress and fosters creativity.
  - **Mindful communication:** Encouraging employees to listen actively and speak with empathy can improve communication and reduce workplace conflicts.
  - **Gratitude practices:** Encouraging gratitude practices, such as taking a moment to appreciate colleagues' contributions, helps build positivity in the workplace.
  - **Regular breaks for reflection:** Encouraging employees to take short breaks for reflection, yoga, or quiet contemplation can foster clarity and reduce mental fatigue.
- **Spiritual leadership**
  Spiritual leadership involves guiding people with values such as integrity, humility, empathy, and compassion. It is centred around the idea that leaders should serve and uplift others.
  - **Leaders as role models:** Leaders who practice spirituality serve as role models for their employees. They exhibit qualities such as patience, calmness, and resilience, influencing the work culture in positive ways. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, is known for incorporating spiritual values into his leadership. His approach emphasises empathy, collaboration, and inclusivity, which has transformed the

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company culture.

- **Servant leadership:** This concept focuses on leaders putting the needs of employees first. A spiritually conscious leader aims to nurture employees' growth and well-being, leading to a more motivated and engaged workforce.

■ **Organisational benefits of spirituality at work**

- **Improved employee engagement:** Employees who feel aligned with the company's values and vision are more likely to be engaged and committed. This translates into greater productivity and job satisfaction.
- **Positive work environment:** Spirituality fosters a work environment based on respect, fairness, and cooperation, which enhances collaboration and reduces conflicts.
- **Better decision-making:** Spiritual principles, such as mindfulness and ethical reflection, help employees and leaders make thoughtful and ethical decisions, reducing mistakes driven by stress or short-term thinking.
- **Increased creativity and innovation:** When employees feel safe, respected, and inspired by their purpose, they are more likely to come up with creative solutions to challenges.

**Allowing employees to manage their time can support their mental and emotional well-being, which contributes to greater spiritual alignment.**

■ **Spirituality and corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

Spirituality often extends beyond the workplace into corporate CSR efforts. Companies that incorporate spiritual values tend to place a strong emphasis on giving back to society.

- **Social impact:** Spirituality at work often motivates businesses to engage in projects that benefit communities, the environment, and societal well-being. Employees feel more connected to the company's CSR initiatives when they align with their personal values. For example, Tata Group (India) is known for its strong spiritual and ethical values, and it has a long history of corporate social responsibility initiatives that focus on education, health, and sustainability.

## Strategies for implementing spirituality in the workplace

■ **Create a values-based culture:** Start by defining and communicating the core values of the organisation. Ensure that these values promote ethics, empathy, and compassion.

■ **Mindfulness training:** Provide employees with opportunities for mindfulness or meditation practices. You can bring in experts for workshops or create spaces where employees can relax and reflect.

■ **Encourage servant leadership:** Promote leadership that serves the well-being of employees. Encourage leaders to support their teams, show empathy, and prioritise ethical decision-making.

■ **Offer flexible work conditions:** Allowing employees to manage their time can support their mental and emotional well-being, which contributes to greater spiritual alignment.

■ **Promote team building:** Organise team-building activities that encourage collaboration, trust, and respect. This can include community service projects or team retreats focused on mindfulness.

## Potential challenges in integrating spirituality at work

■ **Diverse beliefs:** A workplace is likely to have individuals from diverse backgrounds with varying beliefs. It is important to

**Spiritual practices enhance resilience, helping employees cope with workplace stress, change, and challenges. This makes them more adaptable to evolving work environments**

ensure that spirituality at work is inclusive and non-dogmatic, focusing on universal values like compassion, honesty, and integrity.

- **Misinterpretation:** Employees might misinterpret spiritual practices as religious mandates, leading to resistance. It is essential to focus on practices that foster well-being, ethics, and personal development, without imposing specific religious practices.

- **Workplace hierarchies:** In some hierarchical organisations, leaders may resist adopting practices that emphasise servant leadership or shared decision-making. Overcoming this resistance requires gradual cultural shifts and leadership development programs.

### Related concepts and practices

- **Emotional intelligence (EQ):** Emotional intelligence is crucial for both leadership and teamwork in a spiritual workplace. EQ involves understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions in a way that fosters effective communication and collaboration.
- **Work-life integration:** Spirituality at work promotes balance and integration between personal and professional life. Encouraging employees to maintain boundaries and self-care practices contributes to greater well-being.
- **Resilience and adaptability:** Spiritual practices enhance resilience, helping employees cope with workplace stress, change, and challenges. This makes them more adaptable to evolving work environments.

### *Sanatana Dharma* scriptures insights

*Sanatana Dharma*, with its rich spiritual and ethical teachings, offers profound insights that align with the concept of spirituality in the workplace, though it may not explicitly address modern workplace dynamics. However, its principles can be adapted to create a spiritually enriching work environment. Several key teachings from the *Vedas, Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and other scriptures can be related to the concept of workplace spirituality:

- *Dharm***a (righteousness and duty) – *Bhagavad Gita*:** The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises the importance of performing one's duty (*karma*) without attachment to the results. In the context of the workplace, this can be understood as fulfilling professional responsibilities with dedication, integrity, and a sense of purpose. It highlights the concept of working selflessly, focusing on the process rather than becoming overly attached to outcomes, which is a key aspect of spiritual fulfilment at work.
- ***Karma yoga* (path of selfless action):** Karma yoga teaches that every action can be a form of worship if done with a sense of duty and selflessness. In a workplace, this means performing one's tasks with full sincerity and ethical commitment, treating all work as an opportunity to serve society and contribute to the greater good. Work, when done with devotion and in alignment with one's higher purpose, becomes a spiritual practice, contributing to personal and collective growth.
- ***Seva* (selfless service):** *Seva* is another key principle that can be applied to the workplace. In *Sanatana Dharma*, the act of serving others without expecting anything in return is considered a sacred practice. At work, this can manifest as helping colleagues, working for the collective well-being, and contributing positively to the environment.

- ***Sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia):** The Bhagavad Gita describes three gunas (qualities or tendencies) that influence human behaviour:
  - *Sattva*: represents purity, wisdom, and harmony.
  - *Rajas*: represents activity, desire, and passion.
  - *Tamas*: represents inertia, ignorance, and lethargy.

  In a work setting, fostering *sattva* (purity and harmony) leads to a more peaceful and productive environment. Managers and leaders can encourage qualities of *sattva* by promoting ethical behaviour, creating a balanced work-life environment, and encouraging mindfulness and self-reflection.

**Managers and leaders can encourage qualities of sattva by promoting ethical behaviour, creating a balanced work-life environment, and encouraging mindfulness and self-reflection.**

- ***Bhakti* in work:** *Bhakti*, or devotion to a higher power, can be integrated into work by doing one's tasks with reverence and devotion. In *Sanatana Dharma*, the concept of doing everything as an offering to God is prevalent, which can translate into treating work as a form of devotion and a way of connecting with the divine. This can help individuals at the workplace stay focused on ethical values, compassion, and humility, viewing their work as part of a larger spiritual mission.
- ***Ahimsa* (non-violence):** *Ahimsa* is a fundamental principle in *Sanatana Dharma*. In the workplace, this translates into fostering an environment of respect, kindness, and non-exploitation. It involves being compassionate and considerate towards colleagues, promoting mental and emotional well-being, and avoiding any form of harm, whether physical or psychological.
- **Equality and respect for all:** *Sanatana Dharma* emphasises the oneness of all beings, transcending differences in social or economic status. At the workplace, this means respecting every individual, regardless of their position, background, or role.
- **Detachment and non-attachment:** *Vairagya* (detachment) is the key to spiritual growth. In the workplace, this means performing duties without excessive attachment to success, failure, or the material rewards. When one is detached from the outcomes of their actions, they can work with greater freedom and clarity.
- ***Santosha* (contentment):** *Santosha* encourages satisfaction with what one has. In the workplace, this can help employees avoid constant dissatisfaction or competition, leading to a more cooperative and peaceful atmosphere.

## Conclusion

Workplace spirituality offers a powerful framework for creating a work environment that nurtures purpose, ethical behaviour, mindfulness, and compassion. By integrating these principles, organisations can foster a culture that promotes well-being, reduces stress, enhances productivity, and strengthens interpersonal relationships. Spirituality in the workplace is not merely a trend but a sustainable approach to achieving long-term success by aligning personal values with organisational goals. Companies that embrace spirituality will benefit from a motivated, engaged, and loyal workforce, leading to improved organisational performance, innovation, and growth.

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Armaan Hoyvoy

*India's unemployment debate often misses a vast, vibrant workforce that thrives beyond official statistics.*

✦ KRISHAN KALRA, ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION



# The unemployment mystery

To make any comments on the topic of 'unemployment in India', I first did some research on the internet, which has almost all official data from the government and also various interpretations by economists and others. The best I could find was a wide range between 4 to 8 per cent. ILO's global figure being 5 per cent and not seeing India in the list of 'top ten countries with high unemployment figures'; also learning that our rank is in the 80s—I wasn't overly worried. Incidentally, the 'top 10' also include Greece at rank 9 with 11 per cent unemployment and Spain (ranked 10) 12%. The 'dubious distinction' list doesn't have Bangladesh and Pakistan! I also found that (i) some 1.5 lakh junior doctors are unemployed and in the same paragraph about 'our need for 21 lakh additional doctors by 2030' (ii) 83 per cent of the engineers are jobless. At this point—not wanting to get more confused— I gave up.

I think we are treating all those who are not satisfied with their jobs and feel they deserve better (which is universal and seems largely true) as unemployed; so it is more a question of people not finding the right job and a situation where we need to do better matchmaking in the job market. It is understandable that new graduates accept the first offer they get and then realise that either they are not in the right place or they deserve better. Also, I feel, governments are just not able to get at definitive figures of the unemployed. It is indeed very difficult to do so because the enumerators have to go only by the figures furnished by employers or from the PF offices. However, the point I am trying to make is that we are missing millions of persons in the country who are either casually employed by someone or gainfully working as small entrepreneurs in myriad vocations. Let me explain.

The biggest chunk—around 25 to 30 million—comes from what are generally known as 'gig workers'—those involved in jobs lasting a specific task and time. We could even call them independent contractors or free lancers earning a living without a regular employer-employee relationship. Gig jobs came into the public domain during the dreaded COVID-19 period—mainly for delivery of food, groceries, and medicines—and not just stayed on, but thrived, as people realised the advantages.

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**All these people are gainfully employed but none will feature on the official statistics; and I haven't even named half the trades they ply**

Today we see them all the time zipping around delivering food, groceries, medicines, and business parcels, and more. Looking at the valuation of Zomato (1.9 lakh crore as of March '25) they must be using a lot of delivery boys and girls and even the estimate of total 25-30 million gig workers in the country is perhaps a gross understatement! I am quite sure not more than 15-20 per cent of them are on the payrolls of the big companies; and the rest have no safety net and don't make it to employment statistics.

Next, let us look at the self-employed micro entrepreneurs. I live in Gurgaon, in a colony adjoining MG Road, the stretch between IFFCO chowk (crossing of MG Road with NH8) and Sikanderpur. If I take a walk on the slip road, I see 100s of these gutsy entrepreneurs selling a variety of reasonably priced food. There are elaborate mobile dhabas dishing out tandoor fresh naans and daal bukhara; they also carry a table and a couple of chairs. Then there are handcarts dishing out a variety of street food. On an average, each outlet employs one or two helpers. So, just imagine the numbers employed—including the entrepreneur—all over the country, near every cinema or mall or office blocks. I call them 'gutsy' because, apart from managing their own business, they have to manage the people from municipalities and the police, also. Then there is a whole segment of other roadside vendors, many of whom have a decent number of loyal customers.

All these people are gainfully employed but none will feature on the official statistics; and I haven't even named half the trades they ply. The unemployment situation in our country is certainly not alarming. Yes, many people are not in jobs merited by their skills and that is a situation which will always be around in an economy that is thriving. IM

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