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12



COVER STORY

ELEVATE, ENGAGE, ENGINEER

Employee engagement—a critical ingredient for organisational success.

- ULLHAS PAGEY

12

MYTH BUSTER

FROM AN 'IDEA' TO AN 'EMPIRE'

Dismantling the myths of the startup culture.

- ASHWIN GULATI

18

STRATEGY

OVERCOME SELF-DOUBT

How to lead when imposter syndrome strikes?

- JULIE SMITH

22

THE LIBRARY

RECOMMENDED READS

26



ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

A BALANCING ACT

Foster truth to drive a cultural transformation.

- RAJEEV KUMAR MEHAJAN, PHD

28

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

STEPS TO WORKPLACE HAPPINESS

The happiest industries and jobs to work in.

- LORD MARK PRICE

32

MANAGEMENT

RESHAPING INDUSTRIES

The changing landscape of industrial management.

- DR MP SUKUMARAN NAIR

38

MANAGEMENT

OUR CRUMBLING HILL TOWNS

Manmade disasters.

42

- KRISHAN KALRA



Capacity Building Procurement Programme

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- ✓ Sessions by Industry Expert
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PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT (PDPP) | 6 MONTHS PROGRAMME *(INITIATED BY THE WORLD BANK)*

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Employee engagement: Happy employees are productive employees

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.

The recruitment process is the most significant trigger for an employee's positive or negative perception of the organisation. Employees who want to join need to feel wanted by the employer and the immediate supervisor

Employers want the employees to give their all at work and help the brand and the growth of the organization. Employees want to belong to organizations that bring the best out of them and raise their intrinsic value. The challenge is getting both sides to meet each other's

expectations. Organisations that manage to achieve employee engagement tend to perform much better than those that rely solely on contractual obligations to get things done.

Engaged employees are more productive and responsible, as they care about finishing tasks and not just about completing hours. They invest in their knowledge and skills for their jobs out of a desire to grow and strengthen contribution and tap into their personal networks for the benefit of the organisation. They identify with

the organisation and protect and promote its reputation. They even encourage other employees to do the same. Employers who make their employees feel valued reap these additional benefits.

The challenge is to accomplish employee engagement in an unstable business environment that demands continuous restructuring and refreshing. The pressure for results in a hyper-competitive market often nudges both employers and employees

towards transactional behaviour. In a high-stakes environment, mutual satisfaction and trust tend to be situational rather than principled. However, it is in this environment that employers must get employees to believe in their agenda and see their personal fulfilment in dedicating themselves to the organisation's cause.

The usual methods of employee engagement—meetings, surveys, interviews, and feedback—have their place but their impact is limited and brief. Data is useful for record-keeping but not for shaping behaviour. Employee engagement is more about building a relationship with the employee. The magic of employee engagement occurs when employees are treated as individuals and not as resources. Given their relatively weaker position in the employer-employee dynamic, they need to feel protected, respected, and valued at all times. To go beyond their contractual obligations, employees need to feel emotionally and rationally connected to their work and the organisation's purpose.

Employee engagement starts from the recruitment process. First impressions last and influence the entire experience. The recruitment process is the most significant trigger for an employee's positive or negative perception of the organisation. Employees who want to join need to feel wanted by the employer and the immediate supervisor. Employees form lasting opinions about the organisation based on the efficiency and respectfulness of the screening, interview,

The most direct route to high employee engagement is for managers at all levels to reach out to individual employees when possible and offer not just encouragement but also dignity

negotiation, offer issuance, and onboarding processes. They share their experiences with their professional networks, which can either improve or degrade the employer's ability

to attract the desired talent at competitive prices.

While payment, perks, and designation play a role in employee engagement, the key to high engagement is the employee's control over the inputs required to deliver the expected outcomes. The biggest threat to employee engagement is the gap between what is demanded of the employee and the resources and decision-making authority granted to them. Employees who feel ownership of their work and targets tend to exceed expectations. On the other hand, employees who have to constantly fight for resources and decisions tend to lose enthusiasm quickly and resign themselves to doing only what involves the least friction.

Reasonableness of expectations is also central to employee engagement. Employees take pride in working for ambitious organisations, but they also take pride in the reasonableness of the targets. Employers who set unrealistic targets, setting up employees for failure, end up with workers who develop a chronic sense of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Even employers

who pay extremely well to push employees towards instant results may face progressive organisational corrosion. The 'burn-and-bin' approach to talent produces toxicity and drains employees' physical and emotional health.

The most direct route to high employee engagement is for managers at all levels to reach out to individual employees when possible and offer not just encouragement but also dignity. Employees respond better to those leaders who address them by name and who are willing to be addressed by name. It is hard to achieve genuine employee engagement in organisations that practice feudal formality.

Winning hearts and minds is more complex than rocket science, but having highly committed employees is worth the effort. The rewards of employee engagement make up for the challenges of the process.

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Employee engagement—a crucial driver of organisational success—is often misunderstood as just an HR function. However, true engagement lies in employees feeling invested in their work, aligned with organisational goals, and motivated to contribute meaningfully. It is about fostering a deep connection, not just implementing superficial initiatives.

While leading consulting firms across the world have highlighted the correlation between engagement and business performance, the overwhelming volume of research can create ‘analysis paralysis’, making it challenging for organisations to identify the most effective strategies.

Organisations must focus on tailoring engagement strategies to their unique culture and objectives. Effective engagement involves leadership commitment, transparent communication, and meaningful work. It also requires a shift from top-down management to a participatory leadership style that empowers employees with autonomy and growth opportunities.

The role of line managers is critical here, as they directly influence daily employee experiences. As engagement continues to evolve, trends like remote work, well-being, and diversity are shaping the future. Organisations that prioritise genuine engagement will foster a thriving workforce, driving long-term success.

As Ullhas Pagey, an author and an organisation development and transformation specialist, writes in the cover story of this issue, “By elevating engagement strategies, organisations can engineer a future where employees are not just engaged, but truly empowered to achieve their full potential.”

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

Maneck Davar
Maneck Davar

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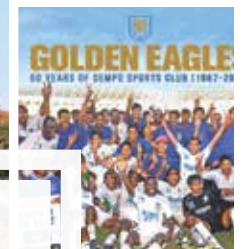
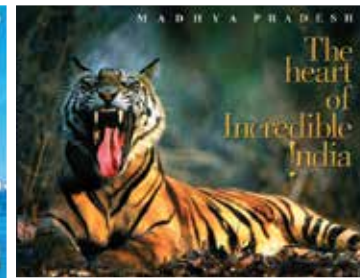
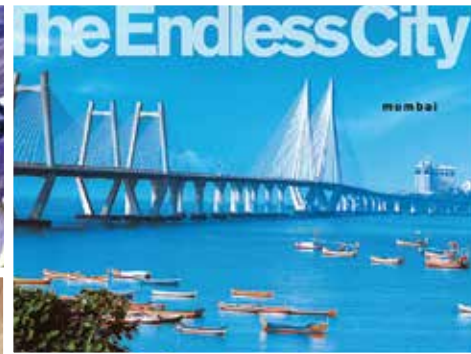
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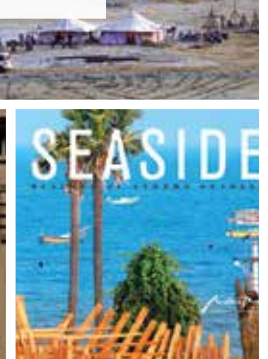
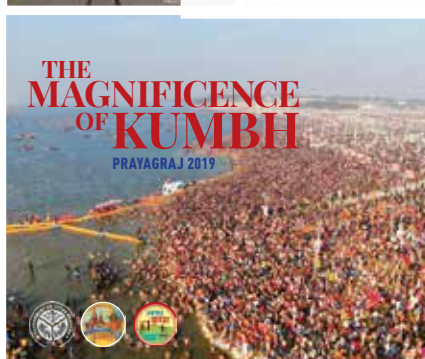
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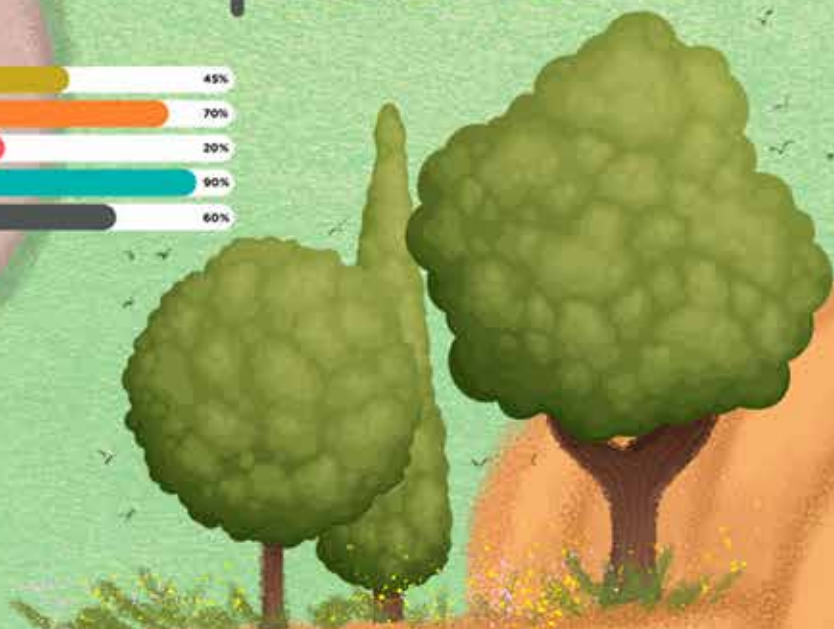
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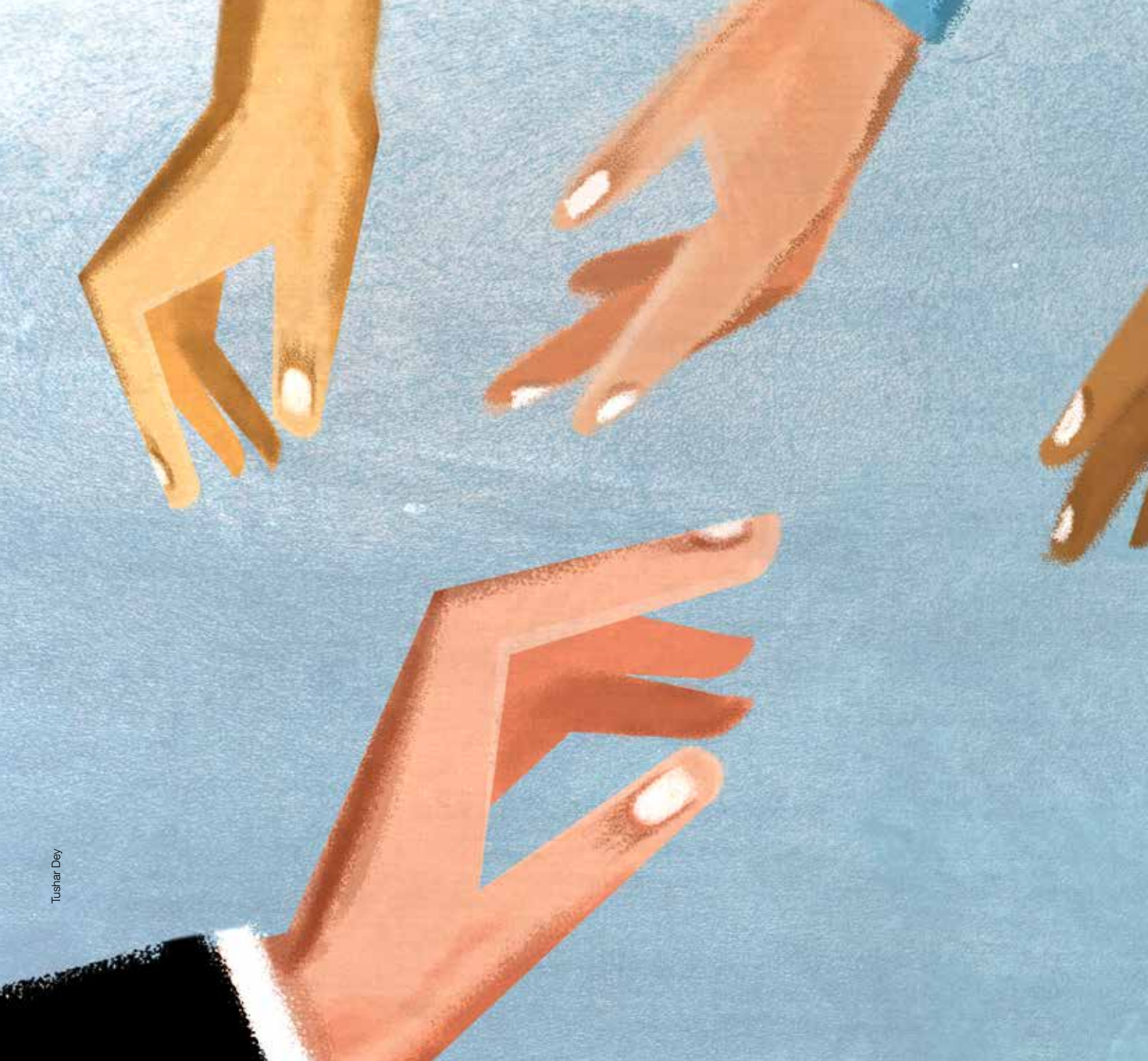
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BUILDING A THRIVING WORKPLACE







Tushar Dey

Elevate, engage, engineer

Organisations that prioritise employee engagement will reap substantial rewards and thrive in the increasingly competitive talent market.

♦ ULLHAS PAGEY, AUTHOR



In today's hyper-competitive talent landscape, 'employee engagement' has become the lingua franca of HR departments and C-suites alike. It is the buzzword whispered in strategy meetings, the metric scrutinised in quarterly reports, the holy grail sought by organisations striving for peak performance. But is this much-vaunted concept truly the sine qua non of a thriving workforce, or is it merely

a mirage shimmering in the desert of disengaged employees? Here, we would dive deep into the convoluted world of employee engagement, separating myth from reality and exploring how organisations can engineer genuine empowerment through strategic engagement initiatives.

Employee engagement, at its core, is the degree to which employees feel invested in their work, committed to their organisation's goals, and motivated to contribute to its success. It is that *je ne sais quoi* that distinguishes a merely compliant workforce from one that is truly passionate and productive. However, the term has become so ubiquitous, so laden with interpretations, that its meaning has become, dare we say, diluted. It's often conflated with employee satisfaction, happiness, or even perks, leading to a fundamental misunderstanding of its true essence. Engagement is not about ping-pong tables and free snacks; it's about fostering a deep connection between employees and their work, a sense of purpose that transcends mere financial compensation. Employee engagement is not forced camaraderie, superficial team-building exercises, or top-down mandates nor a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a nuanced and evolving process that requires a deep understanding of the specific needs and aspirations of the workforce. The perception of engagement often falls prey to confirmation bias, with leaders wanting to see happy faces rather than digging deeper into the underlying drivers of true engagement.

The consulting world has embraced employee engagement with open arms, producing a veritable deluge of research and reports. Gallup's decades of work on the topic has established a strong correlation between engagement and business outcomes, from increased profitability to reduced turnover. Their meta-analyses have consistently shown that highly engaged teams outperform their disengaged counterparts by significant margins. KPMG's studies have highlighted the importance of aligning individual goals with



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organisational objectives, emphasising the need for clear communication and a shared vision. Accenture's research has emphasised the role of technology in fostering engagement, exploring how digital tools can facilitate communication, collaboration, and feedback. McKinsey's work has delved into the specific drivers of engagement, identifying factors such as meaningful work, opportunities for growth, and supportive leadership. BCG has focused on the link between engagement and innovation, demonstrating how a highly engaged workforce can drive creativity and generate new ideas. Korn Ferry's research has explored the psychological aspects of engagement, emphasising the importance of creating a sense of belonging and purpose. Bain's studies have connected engagement to customer loyalty, showing how engaged employees are more likely to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Deloitte's research has highlighted the importance of creating a positive work environment, where employees feel valued and respected. WTW, Aon, Mercer—the list goes on—each offering their own unique

perspectives and frameworks, often focusing on specific industries or demographics. While this wealth of data is invaluable, it can also be overwhelming, creating a paralysis by analysis for organisations trying to navigate the complex landscape of engagement. The sheer volume of research can make it difficult to discern the most relevant and actionable insights.

Over a period of time, numerous engagement models have emerged, each promising to unlock the secret to a highly engaged workforce. From Maslow's hierarchy of needs to Herzberg's two-factor theory to more contemporary models focusing on autonomy, mastery, and purpose, organisations are faced with a plethora of options. The challenge lies in selecting a model that aligns with their specific culture, values, and strategic objectives. Do organisations actually adhere to these models, or do they merely pay lip service to them? The reality is often a hybrid approach, with organisations cherry-picking elements from different models and adapting them to their own context. This eclectic approach can be effective, but it requires careful consideration

Measuring employee engagement is crucial for tracking progress and demonstrating RoI. Traditional metrics like employee satisfaction surveys and turnover rates are still relevant, but they provide an incomplete picture

and a deep understanding of the underlying principles of each model. For example, an organisation with a strong focus on innovation might prioritise models that emphasise autonomy and creative freedom, while a company with a more hierarchical structure might focus on models that emphasise clear roles and responsibilities.

Measuring employee engagement is crucial for tracking progress and demonstrating RoI. Traditional metrics like employee satisfaction surveys and turnover rates are still relevant, but they provide an incomplete picture. More sophisticated approaches involve pulse surveys, eNPS (employee Net Promoter Score), and qualitative feedback mechanisms like focus groups and one-on-one conversations. The key is to identify metrics that are meaningful, actionable and provide insights that can be used to drive meaningful change. It's not enough to simply collect data; organisations must also analyse it and use it to inform their engagement strategies.

So, how can organisations engineer genuine employee empowerment through engagement? It starts with creating a culture of trust, transparency, and open communication. Employees need to feel that their voices are heard, their contributions are valued, and their development is a priority. This requires a shift from a top-down, command-and-control approach to a more collaborative and participatory style of leadership. Empowerment is not about delegating tasks; it's about giving employees the autonomy, resources, and support they need to take ownership of their work and make a real impact. It is about fostering a sense of psychological ownership, where employees feel a sense of responsibility and accountability for their work.

Despite the best intentions, organisations often encounter roadblocks on their journey to employee engagement. If senior leaders are not fully committed to employee engagement, initiatives are likely to fail. Engagement efforts must be integrated across all functions, rather than being confined to HR.

Without clear metrics and tracking mechanisms, it's difficult to assess the effectiveness of engagement.



COVER STORY



The question of who should own employee engagement—HR or line management—is a critical one. While HR plays a crucial role in designing and implementing engagement strategies, ultimately, engagement is the responsibility of line managers. They are the ones who interact with employees on a daily basis and have the greatest influence on their experience at work. HR can provide support, guidance, and resources, but line managers must be held accountable for fostering engagement within their teams. This requires equipping managers with the necessary skills and training to effectively engage their employees.

The world of employee engagement is constantly evolving. Recent trends include a greater focus on employee well-being, a recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion, and the increasing use of technology to personalise and enhance the employee experience. The rise of remote work has also presented new challenges and opportunities for engaging employees in a virtual environment. Organisations that are agile, adaptable, and willing to embrace these emerging trends will be best positioned to attract and retain top talent. The focus is shifting from transactional engagement to transformational engagement,

where employees are not just satisfied with their jobs, but also inspired by their work and connected to a larger purpose.

Employee engagement, after all, is not a magic bullet, but it is a critical ingredient for organisational success. It is not about superficial perks or feel-good initiatives; it is about creating a culture where employees feel valued, empowered, and connected to a larger purpose. As Peter Drucker famously said, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” In the same vein, genuine employee engagement can fuel an organisation’s success far beyond any tactical manoeuvre. By elevating engagement strategies, organisations can engineer a future where employees are not just engaged, but truly empowered to achieve their full potential. And in the words of Richard Branson, “Take care of your employees, and they will take care of your customers.” This simple yet profound truth underscores the empowerment imperative in today’s business world. The journey to employee empowerment is not easy, but the rewards are substantial. Organisations that prioritise engagement will be the ones that thrive in the increasingly competitive talent. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ullhas Pagey is an author and an organisation development and transformation specialist.

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From an ‘idea’ to an ‘empire’

It may be the most irresistible lure in the business world. But it is a cold, hard fact that over 97 per cent of startup companies are destined to fail. Why do generations of entrepreneurs keep trying? Why do seasoned venture capitalists keep investing? What exactly isn't working?

The failure rate seems counter-intuitive, given the brilliant, hard-working entrepreneurs who check all the boxes with impeccable business plans, access to resources, and unflagging commitment. But these incredibly impressive humans still crash and burn—not only in business, but in life.

Perhaps steering one's life into the realm of startups has become too easy. It is estimated that close to 1,50,000 startups sprout every day worldwide. With a plethora of online services at their disposal, entrepreneurs can quickly arrange nearly every facet of a business, from outsourcing product development to crowdsourcing funding. Today, you can launch a business within twenty-four hours and achieve worldwide reach with the click of a button.

It is not easy. It is not supposed to be easy. There are countless 'X-factors' hiding in the shadows—things that go beyond business plans,

beyond what's taught in books, or what investors would ever admit publicly. These are the counter intuitive myths that often defy conventional wisdom.

MYTH 1: It's not personal. It's business.

Working with countless startup entrepreneurs, I have noticed a pattern: what begins as a professional venture often transforms into a modern-day pilgrimage—a deeply personal, inward journey woven into the challenge of navigating external business forces. And that flips the myth: It's not just business. It's personal.

An entrepreneur may have the groundbreaking product, the fabulous pitch deck, an A-Team, and willing investors. But the success of the venture rests on a single question: Are you built for this? Not everyone is. The personal dynamics and sacrifices required to start a business are hugely underplayed in our culture of success. At the point of startup, you are the biggest asset of your company—and potentially the biggest liability.

Today's founder would be wise to re-envision their 'Dream Team' to include a personal coach, a therapist (or shaman), a physical trainer, and a nutritionist. Regardless of whether you think you need their guidance at the outset, chances are you and your business depend on it.

MYTH 2: You must follow your passion.

Steve Jobs famously said, “If you’re not passionate enough from the start, you’ll never stick it out.” I must respectfully disagree. In my experience, passion—though undeniably important—isn’t always sufficient to see an entrepreneur through the relentless challenges and obstacles involved in building a successful venture.

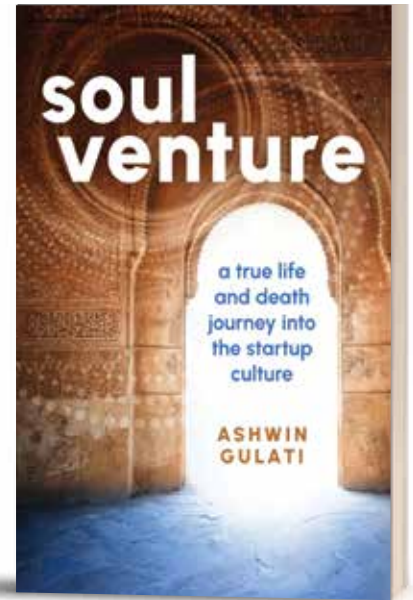
Passion is the initial spark that ignites our interest in a particular idea or pursuit. It is the feeling you get when you are first dating someone and everything is new and exciting. But that spark alone, or even the love that grows from it, is not enough to sustain a long-term partnership.

Purpose, on the other hand, plays a different role. It is the profound ‘why’ behind what we do, the deeper commitment we make to our business or the cause that propels us forward even when the initial euphoria has faded. It’s like the hard work and dedication required to make a marriage work.

One powerful tool for delving into this concept is *ikigai*, a wisdom practice rooted in the East that has gradually gained prominence in the Western world. For startup entrepreneurs, this translates to:

- What are you good at?
- What do you love?
- What does the world need?
- What can you be paid for?

So, when we hear the word ‘passion’ in entrepreneurial pitch decks, we must take caution. Because passion has a definite shelf life; purpose does not.



MYTHS 3: Innovation is always the key to startup success.

Many entrepreneurs are convinced they will beat the odds because they are bringing a disruptor, a unicorn, or a paradigm shift to the table. Maybe they are, but it is not enough. Over the years I have found the single most influential factor in determining success or failure is timing.

Timing is everything.

Companies whose business models initially drew skepticism from investors, such as Airbnb, Uber, Zoom, and CarsDirect, ultimately achieved monumental success owing to their impeccable timing. On the other hand, ventures like Webvan and Pets.com, armed with brilliant ideas, substantial funding, and dream teams, seemed poised for triumph but met an early demise. Despite its ingenious concept, Z.com faltered due to the limited internet bandwidth that hindered online video streaming at the

time. Just a year later, the advent of Adobe Flash led to the rise of YouTube, which though lacking a solid business model brought about a transformative shift in the digital landscape.

When navigating the struggles of the go-to-market phase, ask yourself: “Is the timing off because the market isn’t ready?” “Am I too early, needing to educate my customers?” “Too late, facing overwhelming competition?” “Or is my timing just right?”

MYTHS 4: You need to hire true experts.

A lot of things look great on a resume: A degree from a top university, experience at the last hot startup, a marketable skill you don’t have. Those qualities obviously have a place on your team. But to succeed in the startup trenches, you need people with ‘Scrit’—a combination of scrappiness and grit. Scrappy employees can do more with less. Gritty employees will pursue long-term goals and refuse to give up in the face of hardship. They may be difficult to work with at times, but they have unwavering focus. Scrappy employees are also adept at working with minimal resources and

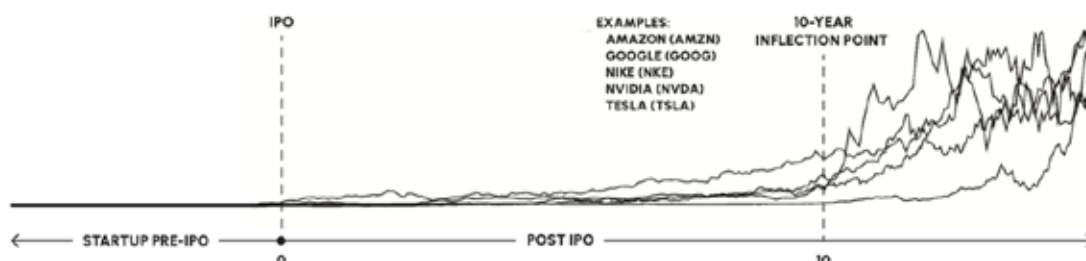
MYTHS 5: You will always be the CEO of your venture.

Elon Musk may be the richest man in the world, but he didn’t start Tesla. The company was founded in 2003 by Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning as Tesla Motors, with Musk stepping in as CEO in 2008.

In startups, the CEO—often dubbed the ‘Chief-Everything-Officer’—rarely stays long enough to see the company’s ultimate triumph. The skills needed to launch a company, achieve lift off, and drive the first \$10M in revenue are often very different from those required to scale it from \$10M to \$100M.

Becoming a technology icon is a long and gruelling journey, often marked by countless near-death experiences. The hard truth? It took Tesla 18 years to hit a \$1 billion valuation. Research shows that nearly every billion-dollar brand we know today spent roughly a decade reaching their critical inflection point, followed by another decade to achieve billion-dollar status.

Companies like Google and Amazon all share a similar trajectory—long, flat growth curves that required at least ten years of steady effort before they finally took off.

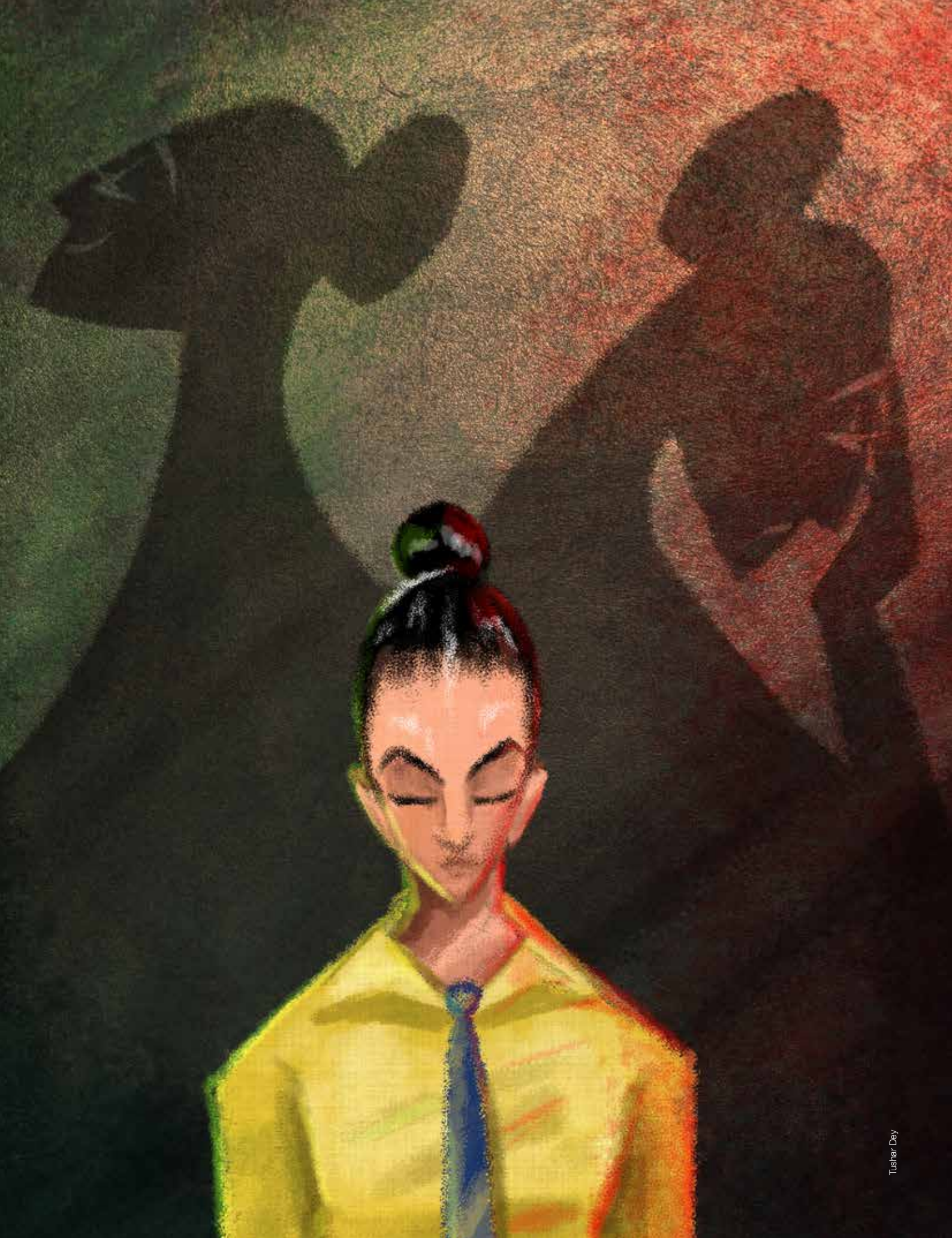


constraints, can operate on tight budgets, and will negotiate every expense to extend the company’s runway. They think big, but act small, and although they too can be challenging to deal with, their frugality makes them an asset to the team—particularly in the eyes of investors. And one caveat: though many scrappy individuals possess grit, the reverse isn’t always true.

Remember, you’re not the CEO of the company forever—you are the ‘Startup CEO’.

Bottom line? Running a startup is gruelling, heartbreaking, and yes, occasionally exhilarating. Every myth has an element of truth, but you will still have to face some hard facts to make success a reality. As the ‘3-percenters’ will tell you, it may even involve a little luck.

Good luck! 



♦ JULIE SMITH, AUTHOR, *COACH YOURSELF CONFIDENT*

Overcome self-doubt

Do you sometimes feel a nagging sense of self-doubt, worrying that you don't have the capability to address the many challenges of your role? Or have you ever worried that someone is about to tap you on the shoulder and say, "We've realised that you're not actually up to this job?"

If so, then you've had first-hand experience of 'imposter syndrome'—a term coined by American psychologists Dr Pauline Clance and Dr Suzanne Imes in the late 1970s. And you are far from alone—a recent survey by global executive search and leadership consulting firm Korn Ferry found that well over half of first-line supervisors surveyed in India experienced imposter syndrome. And the percentage increased at more senior levels, with 73 per cent of the 238 Indian CEOs surveyed reporting that the pressure inherent in their leadership role triggered a nagging sense of self-doubt.

Interestingly, deep down these CEOs know that they are not imposters—they know that they have the capability required to succeed. A full 89 per cent of them affirmed that they are fully competent and deliver what their roles

demand. What we're looking at here is not a real lack of capability, but an imagined one.

The question is how can we manage such feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt—how can we lead when imposter syndrome strikes? I have eight suggestions to offer.

1. Know that everyone doubts themselves

It is easy to imagine that our peers are oozing with confidence, and that we are the only one who worry about being found out, but this simply isn't true. As well as looking at India, Korn Ferry's survey gathered experiences from leaders in the US, UK, Middle East, Brazil and Australia, and the message was consistent: a significant proportion of leaders experience imposter syndrome. That is because self-doubt is part of the human condition. Successful entrepreneurs, politicians, experts interviewed live on TV—these people might come across as completely calm and self-assured, but, without a doubt, they have moments when they feel they cannot cope, they worry that they will say something ridiculous, they fear that they will buckle under pressure.

2. Settle yourself

When the uncomfortable feeling of being an imposter hits, try using the calming power of physical touch to take the body's stress

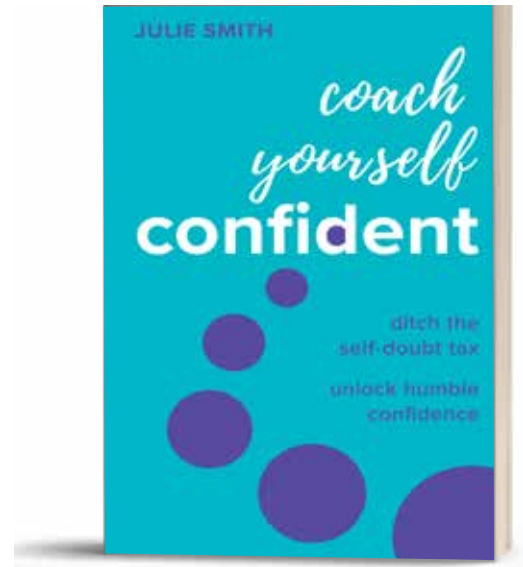
meter down a notch. Our skin is an incredibly sensitive organ, and research indicates that physical touch releases oxytocin (which helps to regulate our emotional response) and calms cardiovascular stress. Find a way to lay a hand on your bare skin. In short sleeves, this could be by purposefully folding your arms and gently holding your upper arms with your hands. In long sleeves, you might try putting a hand to the back of your neck and holding it there for a moment. This does not require any explanation to those around you; it is unlikely that anyone will notice what you are doing. You can just quietly settle yourself and set imposter syndrome aside.

3. Name your inner critic

You know that voice in your head that sometimes tells you that you are going to look like a fool? That is your inner critic, the voice of your imposter syndrome, and it lies to you all the time. Try giving your inner critic a name—it is a way to put some distance between what they say and your sense of self. Saying “Oh, Sunita is off again with her predictions of doom,” helps to diminish the impact of the inner critic’s harsh words.

4. Separate fact from fiction

When you notice that your inner critic is becoming really vocal, triggering those imposter feelings, try the simple self-leadership practice of truth telling. Take a deep, settling breath and remind yourself that your inner critic lies to you. Then shine a spotlight on those lies by writing down what your inner critic is telling you and consciously separating fact from fiction. What actually happened, what exactly was said—these are your facts. None of us has a crystal ball, so anything that is a prediction of the future is pure fiction. Neither do we have the power to read minds, so if you find yourself imagining other people’s opinions, that is fiction too.



Quieten your self-doubt and regain your confidence by replacing fiction with fact. For example, the unhelpful fiction of “They’ll wonder why on Earth they gave me this job,” becomes the truth that “This is a leadership board meeting, not a performance appraisal.”

5. Be kind to yourself

When something goes wrong at work, reach for self-kindness rather than self-criticism. You can loosen the grip of imposter syndrome by asking yourself ‘if a friend were to find themselves in the situation that I am in right now, what would I say to them?’ It is unlikely that you would tell your friend that they are a fraud, no wonder things went wrong, and that they really should be fired. Much more likely that you would help your friend to put the situation in perspective and remind them of the many things that are going right. Extend that same level of kindness to yourself.

6. Take ownership of your strengths

This is about reminding yourself of your real capability—to counter the imagined lack of capability that comes with imposter



syndrome. Grab a piece of paper and write ‘when I am at my best...’ at the top. Now fill the paper with as many ways that you can think of to complete that sentence. Finally, read what you have written (ideally aloud) to yourself. Try to really accept and enjoy these many strengths.

Gathering feedback can be powerful too. Ask some trusted colleagues to offer you written or voice-recorded feedback on what they see as your strengths. Read (or listen to) their feedback two or three times. Take your time and really try to absorb what they are telling you.

7. Distinguish being a ‘learner’ from being an ‘imposter’

Uncertainty can act as an invitation for feelings of self-doubt: “I don’t know how to deal with this situation ... but I should know.” This is flawed thinking. A more realistic take would be “I don’t know how to deal with this situation because it’s new to all of us.” There is a high degree of uncertainty, unpredictability,

and complexity in the context within which you are leading. Try to let go of the ‘should’ that feeds a feeling of being an imposter and instead embrace your ability to be curious and to learn. Rather than berating yourself that “I should know how to do this,” remind yourself that “I’m learning all the time.”

8. Create a ‘that, so this’ inventory

Think back over the years and make a note of times when you have surprised yourself—you have achieved something that seemed really hard or you have come through a challenging period. This is a reminder of what you are capable of—your ‘if I did that, I can do this’ list to reach for when you have those imposter feelings.

Experiencing imposter syndrome is uncomfortable. And it is surprisingly common. Whilst feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy are far from enjoyable, they can be overcome. These simple practices can help you to set aside those troublesome imposter feelings. ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julie Smith is founder, Talent Sprout. Julie is also author, *Coach Yourself Confident*.



Recommended reads



MONEY REMIXED: 14 STEPS TO A WEALTHY MINDSET

Author: Mark Wilkinson and Paul Grant

This book provides a practical roadmap that will help business leaders not only take control of their own work life balance, but also coach their teams into a healthy set of beliefs and habits to succeed in all areas of their life.

The authors argue that a wealthy mindset requires an attitude around achieving your purpose in life, focusing on adding value to others, and backing it up consistently with world-class service. It offers a powerful blueprint for anybody facing stress and burnout at work.



HOW TO MAKE A MILLION IN BUSINESS

Authors: Gary Beckwith

Publisher: Wrate's Publishing

The author presents a compelling and candid insight into how a family business shaped an industry, while also sharing some invaluable lessons for business leaders. The book delves deep into the triumphs and tragedies that shaped the author's life—whether it's bouncing back from disaster, innovating his way out of financial trouble, welcoming the Queen aboard their flagship vessel, or bringing his family along for the ride. The entertaining anecdotes show what really goes into creating a successful business, along with the emotional reality of stepping away from a business you love.



HOSTAGE AT THE TABLE: HOW LEADERS CAN OVERCOME CONFLICT, INFLUENCE OTHERS AND RAISE PERFORMANCE

Author: George Kohlreiser and Andrew Kohlreiser

Publisher: Wiley

In order to be truly effective, business leaders, today, must earn the trust of their teams and act as a secure base—a source of comfort, security and protection—for those around them. The book offers a new model for leadership to achieve exactly this.

The techniques outlined in the book help readers understand what makes effective leaders, what really bonds teams together and how anyone can unlock the power to influence others and instigate positive change.



BEE WISE: 12 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM A BUSY BEEHIVE

Author: Philip Atkinson

By exploring the mysterious world of bees, this book reveals some fascinating parallels with the business world and outlines some powerful insights for modern leaders.

In the book, the author lifts the lid on what happens inside a busy beehive, and examines what behaviours like swarming, the waggle dance, and pollination can teach us about business leadership. Packed with thought-provoking ideas, the book offers guidance on key modern leadership issues including making more efficient decisions, continuous learning and embracing diversity—all inspired by the fascinating behaviour of bees. It is essential reading for anyone striving to grow, adapt and inspire their teams with confidence and purpose.



MAKE WORK FAIR: DATA-DRIVEN DESIGN FOR REAL RESULTS

Author: Iris Bohnet and Siri Chilazi

Publisher: Harper Business

In this book the authors explore workplace fairness and offer innovative solutions to challenges that have persisted for generations, despite widespread efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The book presents data-backed, actionable solutions that embed fairness into workplace design. The evidence-based methods of the authors focus on changing behaviours—not attitudes—to turn good intentions into measurable outcomes without challenging deeply held beliefs. This book is highly recommended for any business leaders looking to create a workplace that allows everyone to truly perform at their best—regardless of gender, ethnicity, or any other aspect of their identity.



A GROUNDHOG CAREER: A TALE OF CAREER TRAPS AND HOW TO ESCAPE THEM

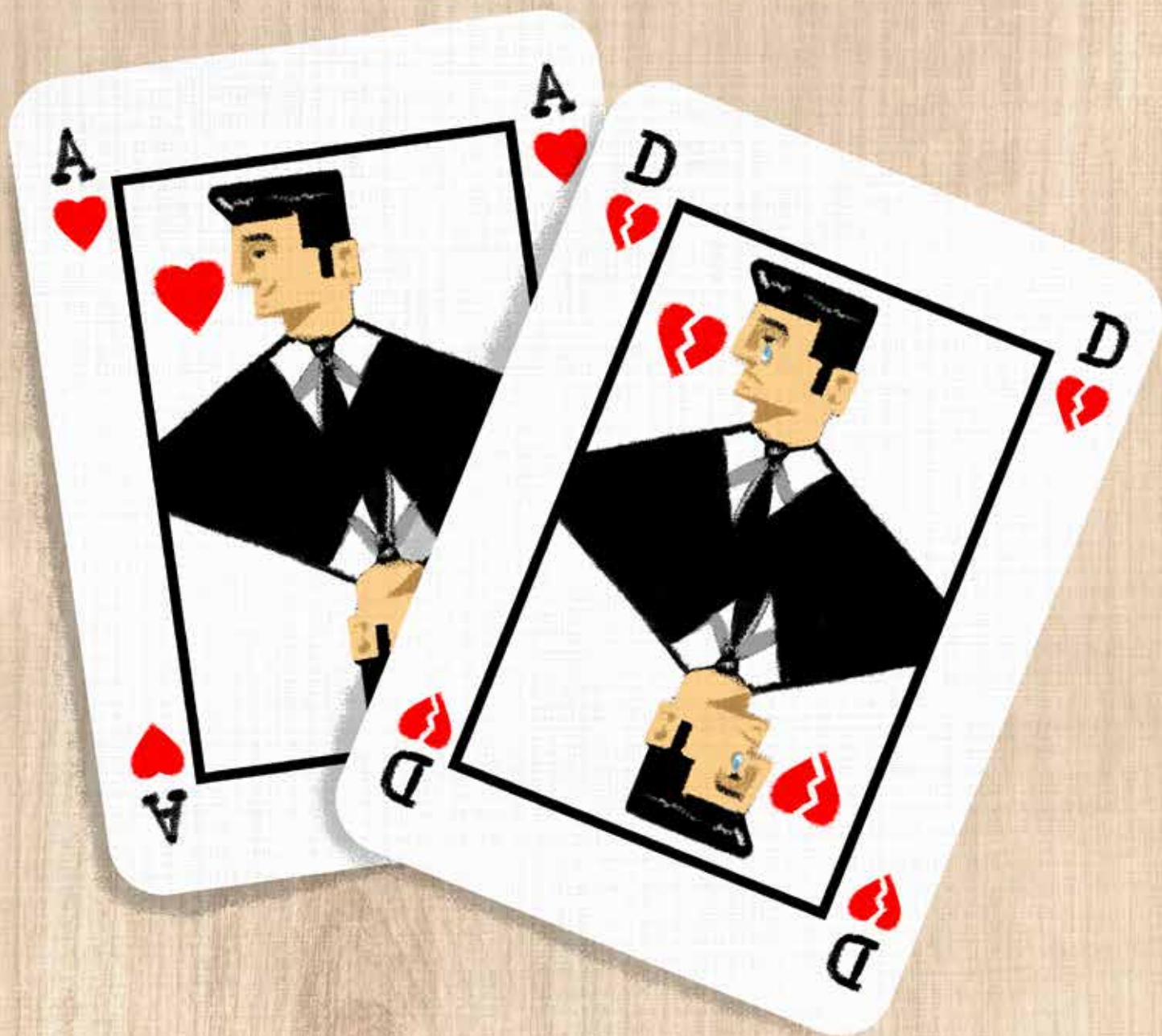
Author: Dr. Helmet Schuster and Dr. David Oxley

Publisher: Practical Inspiration

Is your job unfulfilling? Are you suffocating in endless meetings? Are you stuck in the 9 to 5 cycle? If this sounds familiar, you might be trapped in 'A Groundhog Career'.

This entertaining new book from is an eye-opening read for anyone looking to take charge of their career journey. Whether you are a senior manager or a new graduate, we all need meaning and purpose at work, and this book is a roadmap for finding a career that truly matters.

The authors use their years of experience as management consultants to shine a light on the absurdities, temptations and compromises we all face in the corporate world to show how to step into a professional life that works for you.



A balancing act

The inspiration to write this article came from a recent interaction with the top leader of an organisation—that has always drawn my attention towards its core values and employee friendly environment. The conversation, though a bit discouraging, shed light on the stark realities of organisational dynamics and decision-making. It left me pondering the deep-rooted patterns of denial and avoidance that often obstruct progress. This reflection drives the insights, for the organisations to not only have a vision for laying down the requisite plans, programmes and processes, but fostering a culture of acceptance and agility to adapt in organisational ecosystem.

Acceptance versus denial

As leaders, we have all encountered challenges that test our resolve and decision-making. But what happens when the challenge isn't external, but deeply internal—a fundamental issue undermining the health of our organisation? Over the past 40 years, serving across a dozen organisations, I've seen a recurring pattern: Leadership often faces harsh realities but chooses denial over action. Warning signs are

ignored, severity is downplayed, and blame is shifted. There is a tendency to scapegoat the system itself, dismissing issues as 'organisational behaviour' and rationalising it with clichés like “यहां तो ऐसा ही चलता है”. (That's just how things are around here)

But here's the truth: Denial only delays the inevitable. Left unchecked, these issues fester and evolve into formidable roadblocks to growth. Acceptance, while difficult, is the cornerstone of transformation. Prof. Nair, Director, Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology, quotes, “An organisation cannot afford to do the same things repeatedly and expect different results.”

Ayn Rand, the legend and my enduring muse for “integrity” since college, captures powerfully: “You can ignore reality, but you cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.”

Call to mid-segment managers

While leaders at the top often set the tone for organisational culture, you are the bridge between vision and execution, and play a pivotal role in shaping the daily experiences of employees. Yet, often you mirror the denial culture by senior leadership, either out of fear or convenience.

Why focus on Gen Z managers?

This is particularly crucial for Gen Z, who are stepping into managerial roles with fresh energy and perspectives. As digital natives, you have the tools and insights to challenge traditional and advocate for transparency and innovation. Nevertheless, you also face the risk of inheriting outdated mind-sets that prioritise comfort over progress. Though, you have distinct advantages:

Eagerness for change: Generally, Gen Z is more open to innovation and disrupting the status quo, which aligns well with the article's emphasis on breaking cycles of denial.

Tech-savvy and data-driven: Adept at leveraging technology and data to identify inefficiencies and propose solutions, as natural champions of transparency and accountability.

Diverse perspectives: Having grown up in a more connected and inclusive world, tend to value meritocracy and diverse viewpoints over proximity bias or hierarchical traditions.

What is your leadership style?

Irrespective of your seniority, fundamentally, the need is to do an introspection and reflect:

A. Are you the leader who steps up, grabs the metaphorical mic, and drops truth bombs that echo through boardrooms and beyond, igniting real conversations?

B. Or do you lean towards denial, prefer 'Yes Men' around your impressive executive table and let proximity bias promote mediocrity over merit in making choices?

If the latter resonates, it is time for a paradigm shift to break the cycle of denial.

Building a culture of acceptance

Here is how managers can contribute to the cultural shift for a healthy organisational behaviour-

Promote accountability: Own up mistakes and recognise the initiative to address issues.



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Value feedback: Dismiss the ‘Yes Man’ mentality and reward those who challenge ideas.

Model integrity: Be the example of the transparency you wish to see.

You must resist the temptation to play along, and instead, drive change from within by questioning inefficiencies and pushing for accountability. Embrace the power of vulnerability. Foster a culture where transparency, accountability, and open communication are the norm.

The balancing act

Before concluding, let me assert that leadership is rarely about extremes—being either a ‘truth bomb-dropper’ or ‘in denial’. As my colleague Dr Alberto Troccoli, Managing Director, World Energy and Meteorology Council, aptly states: “Leadership is like steering a boat through open seas under

changing weather conditions—it requires constant adjustments.”

Adaptability is the cornerstone of effective leadership. It is about knowing when to confront hard truths and when to recalibrate subtly. While assertiveness and acceptance should remain at the core, a balanced approach can add value. For instance, a ‘Yes Man’ may sometimes provide critical grapevine insights, while a well-timed ‘truth bomb’ can bring hidden issues to light. The key is to maintain balance without ever compromising integrity through denial.

A new resolve for 2025

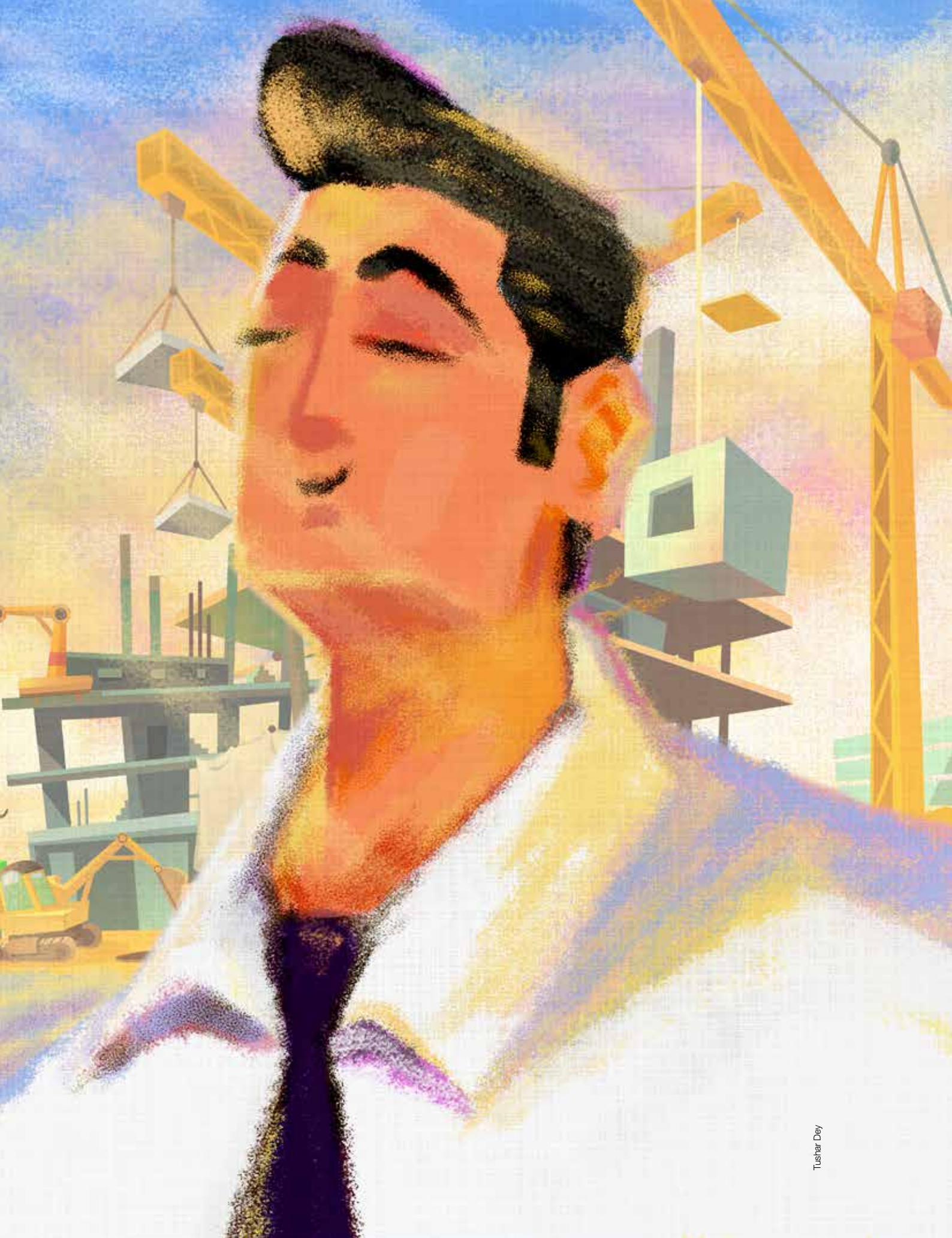
Organisational behaviour comprises ‘people’, ‘structure’, ‘environment’, and ‘technology’, and describes how people interact with one another inside an organisation. These interactions in turn influence how the organisation itself performs. As we step into 2025, let us make a collective commitment to prioritise the health of our organisations through our system’s behaviour, creating an environment where truth is valued over denial, and progress over stagnation. Especially, in the Indian context of rich cultural tapestry, the ethos of ‘satyam’ (truth) has long been revered. Yet, phrases like “यहां तो ऐसा ही चलता है” reveal a lingering acceptance of mediocrity that stifles innovation. To unlock India’s true potential as a global leader, we must challenge this mind-set, inspire accountability, and foster a culture of adaptability.

Whether you are a senior leader, a mid-level manager, or just starting your journey, your voice matters. Let us spark a dialogue and share your thoughts, experiences, or insights. Your perspective could be the catalyst for change. Join hands to amplify this resolve! ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajeev Kumar Mehajan, PhD is distinguished Professor & Strategic Advisor, TIET India. Rajeev is also the Hon’ble President of India’s Visitor Nominee — IIT Kharagpur; UPSC Panel Member, Selection of IAS & Allied Services; and Expert Member- Technical Commissions, WMO, United Nations.



Steps to workplace happiness

Happiness at work is an essential aspect of modern professional life. In India, a country characterised by its diversity and dynamic economic landscape, the search for job satisfaction varies across industries and professions. Understanding which industries are the happiest to work within can be invaluable for those entering the workforce or contemplating a career shift.

This article will see me examine the happiest industries and jobs to work in within India, factoring in a range of factors that influence the happiness of an employee within the workplace. This is taken from my new book, *Happy Economics* along with the official World's Happiest Workplaces 2025¹ List which we announced at WorkL, the leading employee experience platform I founded in January.

The comprehensive list of winners saw over 100,000 organisations enter for their 2025 awards. 52,000 companies globally made the list which can be searched by organisation name or filtered by 25 different industries, countries, and 10 categories. Over a million employees took WorkL's Happy at Work Test² to enter their

organisation into these awards. The anonymous test, which takes less than ten minutes for employees to take for free, looks at various areas that impact work life, including WorkL's Six Steps to Workplace Happiness.

What makes a happy workplace?

Happy workplaces are not just good for employees, they're beneficial for businesses too. When employees feel supported and valued, they are more engaged, productive, and loyal, making the business more commercially successful. Reduced absenteeism, lower turnover rates, and higher customer satisfaction are just some of the other advantages that come with prioritising employee wellbeing. A positive work environment attracts top talent too.

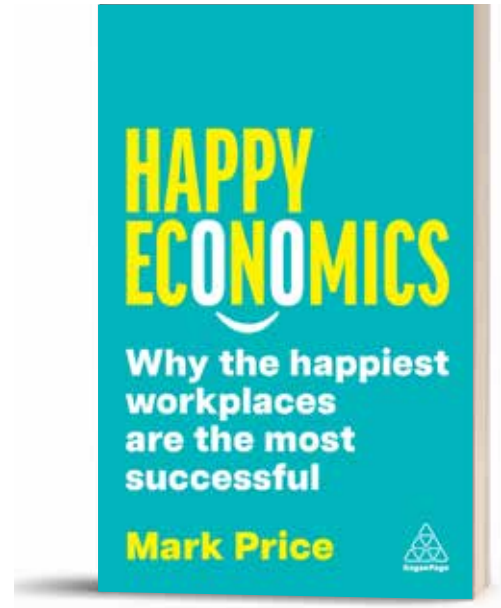
While industry trends provide insight into job satisfaction, individual preferences play a critical role.

My 'Six Steps to Workplace Happiness' outlines the key areas that both employees and employers need to focus on, to create a happier employee and workplace;

- **Reward and recognition:** Every member of an organisation should benefit from its success. A fair salary is essential—no amount of praise can compensate for underpayment.

Your compensation structure should meet expectations and motivate employees to go above and beyond.

- **Information sharing:** Withholding information can make employees feel undervalued and disconnected from the business. For a team to perform at its best, transparency is essential. Employees at all levels should have a clear understanding of the business, its strategy, performance, customers, and competitors.
- **Empowerment:** Empowering employees means involving them in decision-making, valuing their ideas, and integrating their feedback into the company's strategies. Everyone brings unique experiences and perspectives to the table, and only by considering all views can a team achieve the best possible outcome. While individuals may not be perfect, together, the team can be.
- **Wellbeing:** Employee wellbeing encompasses physical, emotional, and financial health. Addressing all three areas leads to improved engagement and productivity. A positive workplace culture can reduce absenteeism, as engaged employees tend to be healthier and more committed.
- **Instilling pride:** Employees who take pride in their work and workplace naturally become advocates, sharing their positive experiences with colleagues, potential hires, customers, and the community. Their pride will be evident when they talk about where they work. Building this sense of pride goes beyond motivational talks or performance reviews—it's about cultivating an environment where employees truly enjoy and take pride in their roles.
- **Job satisfaction:** A range of factors influence job satisfaction, but two stand out; opportunities for personal growth and the quality of the employee-manager



relationship. Employees are an organisation's greatest asset, and high engagement is essential for success. Research shows that respectful treatment and trust between employees and leadership are key drivers of satisfaction. Poor relationships with managers are often the top reason employees leave, regardless of the company's brand strength.

The happiest industries to work within in India

Before I review the happiest industries to work in within India, let us highlight the happiest companies on our list. Solar Industries India, Sumerua Software Solutions, Brigade Group, and Jindal Panther are a handful of the organisations that made the list. Congratulations to all.

Employee satisfaction is a vital indicator of a thriving industry, reflecting positive workplace cultures, meaningful work, and development opportunities. The following industries are

ranked highest in happiness levels among workers, with satisfaction rates exceeding 80 per cent.

1. Construction and building materials- 90 per cent

Topping the list, this industry offers fulfillment through tangible results, collaborative environments, and opportunities to shape the built world. Workers often take pride in the lasting impact of their projects.

2. Entertainment and media- 88 per cent

Creative freedom and the excitement of working in a dynamic, innovative environment contribute to high satisfaction levels. The industry thrives on collaboration, storytelling, and the ability to inspire audiences worldwide.

3. Real estate, rental, and leasing- 88 per cent

This sector's success stems from its interpersonal nature, offering opportunities

to connect with clients and witness direct results in property development, leasing, and management.

4. Hospitality- 87 per cent

Providing memorable experiences for travellers and diners is inherently rewarding. The industry values customer service excellence, creating a sense of purpose for its employees.

5. Energy and utilities- 86 per cent

Workers in this sector find meaning in contributing to essential services and advancing sustainability initiatives like renewable energy, which align with global environmental goals.

6. Transportation and Logistics- 86 per cent

Efficiently moving goods and people drives job satisfaction, alongside opportunities for innovation in areas like autonomous vehicles and supply chain optimisation.



7. Telecommunications and Publishing- 85 per cent

Connectivity and information dissemination empower workers in this industry, with technological advancements keeping it exciting and impactful.

8. Technology- 84 per cent

Continuous innovation, problem-solving, and the potential to influence global progress make this sector particularly rewarding.

9. Architecture and Design- 82 per cent

The ability to shape environments creatively and sustainably inspires professionals in this field.

10. Financial Services- 82 per cent

A dynamic, fast-paced environment with opportunities for professional growth and customer impact makes this industry appealing to many.

Happiest jobs in India

At WorkL we are also able to understand which jobs are the happiest within each region. India's happiest job roles include;

1. Architect- 93 per cent
2. Teacher- 90 per cent
3. Supervisor- 90 per cent
4. Manager- 88 per cent
5. Director- 86 per cent
6. Software Developer- 85 per cent
7. Administration- 84 per cent
8. IT- 84 per cent
9. Executive- 83 per cent
10. Doctor- 82 per cent

In India, the happiest industries to work in reflect a blend of purpose, growth, and work-life harmony. These industries highlight how meaningful work, innovation, and collaboration create environments where employees can thrive. As India continues to evolve as a global economic powerhouse, these industries are likely to remain attractive for professionals seeking both success and satisfaction in their careers. 

References:

- 1 <https://app.workl.com/happiest-companies/companies-list>
- 2 <https://app.workl.co/happiness-survey>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lord Mark Price is founder, WorkL and WorkL for Business. Price is also author, *Happy Economics: Why the Happiest Workplaces are the Most Successful*



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Disruptive innovation, digital transformation, and AI-driven solutions are reshaping industries, accelerating change, and redefining business models, requiring visionary leadership, reskilling, sustainability, and enhanced cybersecurity.

MANAGEMENT

♦ DR MP SUKUMARAN NAIR FIE, CENTRE FOR GREEN TECHNOLOGY & MANAGEMENT, COCHIN

Reshaping industries

Unconventional times need innovative solutions to address confronting business issues. In the present times, energy transition, digitisation, decarbonisation, and

Industry 4.0, in general, are changing the landscape of industrial manufacturing faster than ever before. It means that the changes that occur in the development process across various sectors which took 40 to 50 years for a giant leap in the past, now take less than a decade and happen almost simultaneously in different parts of the world.

The Covid-19 crisis and its aftermath illustrate this point most vividly. Most intriguing disruptions occurred in the areas of technology development and applications, material use, communications, retail, healthcare systems and services, and financial transactions. Rules of business also changed, to the extent that we saw collaboration and alignment working even among competitors and unrelated entities.

Manufacturing and service industries are undergoing a major shift—traditional mode of operation and method of business are giving way to new paradigms enabled by front-running and emerging technologies and management

practices incorporating advanced reliability and ease of doing business. Digital empowerment catalysed by AI is an outperforming enabler fostering disruptive innovation. Disruptive innovation (a term coined by Harvard professor Clayton Christensen) refers to a process in which an underrated product or service starts to become popular enough to replace, or displace, a conventional product or service.

In the disruptive new industry world, professionals aspiring to lead future enterprises shall have marked attributes towards innovation, collaboration, urge towards continuous learning and updating, and shall exhibit enhanced problem-solving capabilities. His strengths shall include cross-functional skills including IT capability, data analysis, supply chain management and the outlook shall be sustainable conduct of the business. The skillsets transcend conventional management vision and mission leading to competition and profitability. Once sustainability in operations and professional ethics in management become essential elements of private sector business, the border line between public and private sectors tends to blur and wax out. A great deal of reskilling is also required in management institutions and master class coaching towards curriculum development, updating and analysis of case studies.

Industry managers also confront issues related to data security. While current operating data is relevant for day-to-day business, historical data is useful for policy formulation and prediction of price and market trends

The effective functioning of industries involves tremendous planning and scheduling regarding procurement, production, quality control, safety, and environmental care, off sites and utilities, marketing, and logistics besides ensuring optimal use of raw materials, energy, and manpower. Aspect specific systems and tools are used to address optimisation in each of these

areas for prudent decision making. Digital transformation envisages the application of information technology (IT) or IT enabled technologies to advance existing business operations, processes, models, and strategies with the intent of making the company more productive, environmentally sustainable, competitive, and profitable. Industry segments such as manufacturing, power generation, oil and

gas, aviation, transportation etc., are taking advantage of the new industrial internet of things (IIoT) opportunity to unearth additional value from their operations.

Voluminous data is produced from various performance management and process optimisation tools employed in the facility. Unlike in the past, it is now possible to holistically review the big data and optimise performance, enhance sustainability, and advance safety at the enterprise level. Earlier, the lack of a trusted platform to collate, segregate and analyse data was a major hurdle. The emergence of IIoT resolved this situation and it has become handy to harness plant data through sensors and derive benefits including operational excellence, better manpower deployment and utilisation, cost reduction, product quality enhancement and better safety and environmental standards.

Digital twins are used in the manufacturing industry offering to increase utilisation of

capacities, improve product quality and output, forecasting deviations from the designer's intent regarding processes and operating parameters, reduce specific consumptions of energy and feedstock, improve bottom lines, and better workplace safety and achieve environmental targets. A digital twin is a virtual model of an asset or process that uses IoT sensors to monitor and capture data from physical objects, process it in real time in combination with historical data to provide an elaborate view on the performance of manufacturing equipment and plants. These models are combined with advanced visualisation technologies and data analytics to fast-track troubleshooting, forecast imminent failures, and innovate equipment and retrofit the same in an existing facility. Often, a low turn down ratio arising out of overdesign in size and capacity of the equipment is a generic problem associated with design. These data driven models in the virtual environment also provide the requisite inputs to better future designs.

Maintenance strategies are also undergoing major transformation. The shift from reactive ('run to failure') to reliability centered maintenance (RCM) was gradual and avoided costly equipment failures. Today's pro-active or predictive maintenance programs use AI-based analytics to identify the predominant factors and monitor parameters to fix variations leading to failures—abrupt or incipient.

Industry managers also confront issues related to data security. While current operating data is relevant for day-to-day business, historical data is useful for policy formulation and prediction of price and market trends. Maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the data and control over its access are important from the security point of view. Digitisation and encryption help to protect the organisation's electronic information systems from attack of hackers and prevent unauthorised access. Organisations with good governance processes



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practice security-by-design—building systems and processes able to respond to unexpected risks and emerging dangers. Employee awareness is also a crucial frontline defense, building cybersecurity consciousness and password discipline to protect against the relentless malware and phishing campaigns.

Turnarounds in industrial facilities are testing times for managers. Completion of turnarounds without time and cost overruns is dependent on ensuring that the right and necessary information, supplies, equipment, and manpower at the right time are made available. Therefore, a lot of planning and scheduling is to be done before shutting down a productive plant or equipment for purposes of inspection of vessel internals, catalyst change, equipment replacement, cleaning of fouled equipment or hooking up retrofit systems to ensure reliability of plant assets and ward off unexpected failures. Most often turnarounds incur time and cost overruns due to faulty projections based on inadequate and primitive information about the condition of equipment, delivery

schedule of critical supplies, assessment of quantum of work involved and manpower accounted. Today, with the use of artificial intelligence, real time modelling, maintenance and turnarounds, debottlenecking and troubleshooting have become handy and the targets could be achieved almost within the schedule.

Industrial labour and rules governing employment are getting adapted to the new situation. Digital workplace services combining cutting-edge technology and best-in class support services enable the workforce to work from anywhere, anytime and in a secured environment. Effective coordination of the workforce at all levels with the objective of achieving greater productivity is a daunting task. Moreover, their safety and well being (physical and mental) are also a concern. Digital communication enabled workforce solutions, planning, and prioritising daily work flows with mobile wearables, IOT and automated AI technologies encourages collaboration among supervisors and workmen and facilitates proactive problem solving.

People often ask why are Indian industrial MSMEs and other small businesses are not competitive and why they are dependent on imports from neighbouring countries? Indians successfully lead global business outside the country, but not in India, where it is wholly left to mediocrity. Is it due to, as some people claim, that the ground is left to unthinking bureaucrats and dumb politicians who cannot see beyond their noses? The ongoing disruption may probably answer them that the governance of public missions shall be left to visionary political bosses and carrying out the mission shall be entrusted with the professional administrators. Such an ecosystem will nurture confident managers with a clear perception and understanding, excellent drive, initiative and risk-taking capable of implementing the vision engraved in the Viksit Bharat by 2047. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Our crumbling hill towns

The Wayanad death toll continues to rise. Army authorities, engaged in the massive rescue operation involving nearly 1,600 personnel, including those from the Police, Navy, and NDRF, did not expect to find many more survivors. Continuing rains, in any case, did not permit the operations to be faster. There could be a loss of, perhaps, 600 to 800 innocent lives due to the unfortunate landslides. Property loss, bereaved families, and livelihoods cannot be calculated. Satellite images, from the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of ISRO had estimated that a mind-boggling 86,000 square meters of land slipped and the debris travelled several kilometers along the river, devastating many settlements on the way.

Why did this happen and could it have been avoided? Wayanad district, part of the Western Ghats, received 140 mm of rain in about 24 hours—five times its normal precipitation—during this period. The beautiful hill station, at an altitude of a little over 5,000 feet, attracts a lot of visitors and, like all our hill towns, has witnessed ongoing construction over the decades to provide for the influx. The February

2023 *Landslide Atlas of India* released by ISRO, documents around 80,000 landslides across 17 States and two UTs in the Himalayas and Western Ghats, from 1998 to 2022. Wayanad was listed in the atlas as ‘vulnerable’. An earlier landslide had also occurred around the same location. The Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) of about 60,000 square km, in the Western Ghats had been under study by a high-powered panel and their 2011 report did not receive enough attention due to the usual center-state differences. Some action could’ve been taken to ring-fence the vulnerable areas where no mining, quarrying, thermal projects, and red category industries and buildings above a certain size should not have been permitted. Union home minister asserted that a warning was given to the state about the current landslides but the Kerala CM refuted this.

The oldest mountain range in the country is the Aravalis, followed by the Western Ghats, and finally, the youngest, Himalayas. So, Western Ghats are only a little less fragile than the Himalayas and need special care. Records show that the ESA in the Ghats just cannot support unfettered construction and inflow of tourists. The problem is for all hill stations in India which are under threat of devastation because

they are all receiving several hundred times the footfalls than they were designed for. It won't be wrong to say that after independence, we have not developed a single new hill station! Our hill towns such as Srinagar, Shimla, Mussoorie, Mahabaleshwar, Darjeeling, Nainital, Kodaikanal, Munnar, Lansdowne, etc. just cannot go on supporting the hordes that go there all year long. Civic infrastructure in all these places is woefully inadequate.

In a recent article, noted environmentalist Amitav Ghosh even talked about the threat to Goa—arguably the fastest-growing city-state in the country. He cites the 2011 study, led by the great ecologist Madhav Gadgil who had warned that unless the house building, road construction, and settlement activities are halted or at the very least slowed down

drastically and the number of visitors to the ESAs is strictly controlled we should expect many more disasters all over the Western Ghats! There could either be highly priced entry tickets or a system of lotteries to visit the hills. A press report about this 2011 study had a shocking headline- “We should start weeping for Goa, just as we wept for Wayanad ... India's climate disasters are man-made.” He speaks the truth. I am sure many were rattled to read this recent story but, I am also sure that most of us would forget the dire warning very soon! With an improved forecasting system, we may be able to mitigate the losses from natural disasters but the fact remains that we need to do something to avoid such happenings.

Let there be no repeat of the Wayanad tragedy. 



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