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ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2025

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**EMPATHY IN
ACTION**
Charlotte Otter

**STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
FOR WORKPLACE
INCLUSION**

LEARN HOW TO LEAD LIKE A WOMAN

3rd LEADHERSHIP RETREAT

Paving the Way: Women, Power, and Possibility

15th - 17th January 2026, Hotel Radisson Blu, Udaipur

RETREAT BACKGROUND

The AIMA LeadHERship Retreat is a three-day offsite programme offering a unique opportunity for learning, growth, and development. With just 20 to 25 delegates, the format allows for in-depth discussions with speakers and the chance to build meaningful connections throughout the Retreat. Designed to empower women professionals with the knowledge, skills, and insights needed to thrive in today's evolving business landscape, the programme includes interactive sessions, workshops, and talks by inspirational leaders.

SPEAKERS



Sundari Nanda
Former Special Secretary
Ministry of Home Affairs



TV Narendran
Senior Vice President, AIMA
CEO & MD, Tata Steel Ltd



Vikas Swarup
Retired Indian Diplomat
and writer



Rama Kirloskar
Joint MD, Kirloskar Brothers Ltd &
MD, Kirloskar Ebara Pumps Ltd



Rekha Sethi
Director General
AIMA



Rina Dhaka
Fashion Designer



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GLOBAL ADVANCED MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Expanding Markets by
Leveraging Emerging
Technologies

16-22 November 2025
Silicon Valley, USA



Programme Director

Solomon Darwin
Executive Director, Garwood Center Corporate Innovation, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley

Programme Objectives

- Identify opportunities for profitable growth.
- Respond and adapt to the challenges in the changing landscape due to rapid global economic trends.
- Examine the latest concepts, ideas and tools to help them align their business practices with global economic developments and conditions.
- Learn to build sustainable and innovative business models.

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- Keynotes by Silicon Valley Startups and CEOs
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Participation Fee

Delegate Fee per participant: INR equivalent of USD 14000 per participant.

Inaugural Discount: USD 1000 per participant for registrations received 60 days prior to the dates of the programme.

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Strategic communication for inclusion

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.

Inclusion, whether organic or by design, is vital for an organisation in today's melting pot of a world.

However, to make inclusion cohesive and productive, conscious effort is required to set the guardrails on communication and

behaviour within an organisation. Communication must be not only respectful towards everyone, it must also be inclusive. Everyone should have access to the necessary information and opportunities to express themselves. Strategic inclusive communication is essential for creating a

Language is a key component of strategic inclusive communication. All social and professional groups tend to develop insider language, accessible only to themselves, which can be disrespectful towards other groups

sense of belonging among all members of an organisation and eliciting their best contributions.

As organisations become more diverse, communication cannot be left to individual habits or wit. Structured organisations require structured vocabulary and channels. It is vital that everyone feels psychologically safe in a diverse crowd and participates fully in collective deliberations. Any sense of being excluded from information flows, or any fear

of being mocked or punished for speaking up, can damage morale and outcomes. Structured, safe communication can raise employee engagement and productivity. It can also attract talent and stakeholders from under-represented groups, such as women, minorities, and immigrants. Careless communication is often the main reason for low diversity and high attrition in an organisation.

It is not enough for leaders to recommend or demand inclusive and respectful communication. It is important to declare it a strategic priority and establish mechanisms for its promotion and enforcement. Training, evaluation, and consequences must be put in place to ensure that everyone knows the expected communication manners and methods, and that everyone is accountable for their choice of words.

Language is a key component of strategic inclusive communication. All social and professional groups tend to develop insider language, accessible only to themselves, which can be disrespectful towards other groups. Use of jargon and abbreviations is common within departments, making communication and collaboration with other teams difficult. Organisations that allow such breakdowns tend to suffer a significant drop in coordination and performance. Encouraging the use of clear and direct expressions, understandable by everyone without expert-level knowledge, is crucial. Professional and industry-specific idioms

should be discouraged, and explanation of domain-specific terms and abbreviations should be insisted upon.

Given the legacy of gender stereotyping, it is useful to adopt gender-neutral vocabulary wherever possible, without stretching it to the ridiculous. Choosing to use ‘she’ and ‘her’ as default pronouns instead of ‘he’ and ‘his’ is neither necessary nor always effective.

In a country like India, with its extensive variety of faiths, foods, languages, accents, skin tones, and bodies, controlling inter-cultural conflicts is essential. One group’s joke can be another group’s offence. The crystallisation of people around ethnicity, region, language, or food is toxic for an organisation and must be explicitly checked. Clearly communicating disapproval of referring to people by their faith, region, skin, or even job is necessary to provide psychological safety to all and integrate a diverse workforce. While it is neither possible nor desirable to choke jokes among friends and colleagues, efforts should be

made to sensitize everyone to the limits of insulting language in the work environment.

Given the legacy of gender stereotyping, it is useful to adopt gender-neutral vocabulary wherever possible, without stretching it to the ridiculous. Choosing to use ‘she’ and ‘her’ as default pronouns instead of ‘he’ and ‘his’ is neither necessary nor always effective. The simplest approach is to remove gender from designations and work descriptions. Many organisations still have

women heads sitting behind signs that say ‘Chairman’. There is little value added to a work description by specifying whether the person performing it is a man or a woman.

When disciplining vocabulary and references, care must be taken to avoid promoting or rewarding victimhood. Common sense, to the extent it can be instilled in an organisation, must guide the application of organisational grammar. Otherwise, the purpose of inclusive communication could be subverted, and leaders could be overwhelmed by complaints and counter-complaints.

Ultimately, the ‘common sense’ in an organisation is defined by the behaviour of the leader. Imitating the leader is the path of least friction for most people. Therefore, leaders must be mindful of how they address employees, how they describe issues and people, and the manner in which they share and receive information. 

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

In today's fast-paced corporate landscape, many change initiatives, including those aimed at diversity and inclusion, face challenges to gain traction and create a lasting impact. The problem often lies in how these efforts are communicated and integrated within organisations—simply announcing a commitment is not enough; without meaningful engagement from leadership and strategic communication, inclusion finds itself at the risk of becoming checkbox rather than a core cultural value.

Strategic communication plays a vital role in fostering genuine inclusivity in an organisation. It's not about top-down messaging, but about sharing authentic stories that build empathy and connect individuals across teams and roles. Stories have long been humanity's oldest and most powerful technology for inspiring change—they break through the noise, engage hearts, and create shared narratives that align behaviours with inclusive values.

Moreover, true inclusion requires every leader and manager to take ownership—not just in words, but through concrete actions like running inclusive meetings, encouraging open conversations, and actively seeking feedback. These everyday behaviours weave inclusion into the fabric of workplace culture, making it impossible to sideline.

Leadership, supported by communicators and employee advocates, must amplify these narratives consistently to ensure inclusivity is not a fleeting initiative but a living, breathing part of how we work together. As Charlotte Otter author, *We Need New Leaders*, writes in the cover story of this issue, strategic communication brings coherence, clarity, and emotional resonance to inclusion work. It makes it a living, breathing part of company culture. If we want inclusion to live, we must make it heard and seen.

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

Maneck Davar
Maneck Davar

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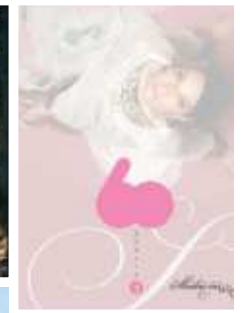
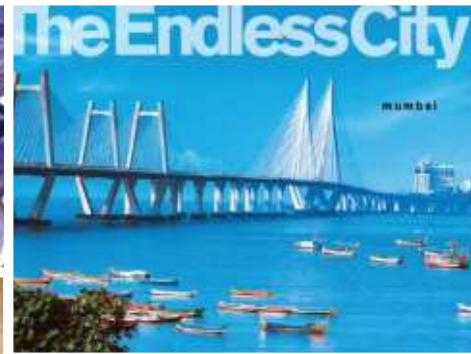
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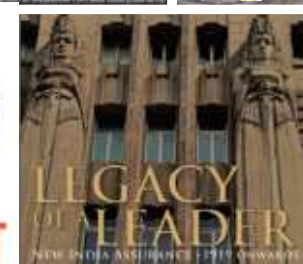
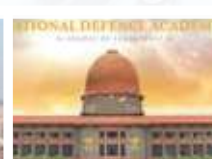
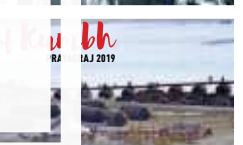
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FROM STRATEGY TO BELONGING





Empathy in action

To make inclusion work, leaders must shift from announcements to authentic narratives.

♦ CHARLOTTE OTTER, AUTHOR, *WE NEED NEW LEADERS*



Most change initiatives fail. They start with a big bang—an announcement, a company-wide meeting, some excitement—and six months later, there is little to no change in the organisation. The initiatives fail because the communication is top-down and doesn't provide context and clear signals on how to change behaviours.

And the same goes for inclusion. If it's stated as a company goal and then handed over to a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) head to manage without further engagement from leadership, then it is performative at best. One of the challenges Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts face at the moment—beyond the outright cancellation that is happening at some companies and in some geographies—is the accusation that they are siloed.

For inclusion to truly work, it needs to be threaded through every team, every meeting, every workplace interaction, and not tacked on as a convenient nice-to-have. The fact that DEI has been siloed has made it that much easier for companies to remove it overnight. Threading inclusivity through every team is a power move that binds it to company culture. And the way to get there is through strategic communication.

Getting strategic

Strategic communication is not about broadcasting company messages from the CEO's inbox.

Communicators would argue that it is often the opposite of strategic. The role of strategic communication is to help employees understand context—what Simon Sinek calls 'the why'—and change behaviours so that company culture shifts and becomes more inclusive.

And one way to get there is by listening to and telling stories.

Stories are our oldest technology

The stories we tell about ourselves and others are the connective tissue that binds us together as humans. They create empathy. And since building inclusion requires imaginative leaps to understand the life experiences of others, stories that evoke empathy are a key part of a truly inclusive work culture.

David Pullan, author of *The DNA of Engagement*, says that stories are our oldest technology. They are what we use to inspire, engage and excite each other to unite and work together. And in a world of wall-to-wall digital noise, stories play an even more important role. They remind us of life beyond the screen and of the humanity of others. They break through the blandness of so much digital communication.

But stories are much more than a fun way to pass the time.

Stories build narratives and narratives build strategy. In his recent book *The Narrative Age*, co-founder and chief strategy officer of Staffbase, Frank Wolf, says that “Narratives provide a cohesive context to individual stories.” And this is where strategic communication enters the fray. By telling stories that create strategic narratives, leaders are able to create the context for inclusive behaviours to become the norm.

For inclusivity to be threaded through an entire company, and genuinely become behavioural, individual managers also need to take responsibility. They need to learn how to run their teams inclusively, and change their behaviours without ever needing to say the

word ‘inclusivity’ out loud. If they model the behaviours, their employees and team members will start to change too.

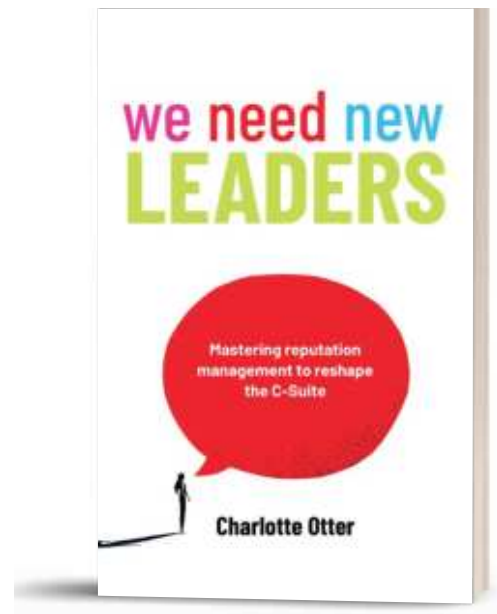
Here are some steps that individual leaders and managers can

Leaders can identify people with the most relevant experience in advance of the meeting and give them the heads-up that they might call on them

take to ensure that their behaviours become more inclusive-

- **Run inclusive meetings**

There are several ways to run more inclusive meetings that ensure that not only the loudest voices are heard. Including the purpose or the aim of a meeting in the meeting invitation is a great first step. Managers can also send their teams a pre-read or an agenda in advance and ask everyone to come prepared with their questions. This gives people time to gather their thoughts. When introducing a new topic to the team, leaders can go around the room and ask everyone for their feedback or contribution. This opens discussion beyond



the hierarchy, the most frequent talkers or the loudest voices in the room.

Leaders can identify people with the most relevant experience in advance of the meeting and give them the heads-up that they might call on them. This shines a light on experts who don't always volunteer to speak, such as the youngest team members. Managers can send a pre-read, ask everyone to write down their thoughts in advance, and then in the meeting get each person to read out someone else's opinion. This creates empathy for other points of view.

At the end of a meeting, managers can ask for feedback—either for themselves or how to improve meetings in general. By using some of these tips, leaders have the opportunity to make inclusion visible, valued, and habitual.

- **Encourage conversations**

Change largely happens one-to-one. An interviewee in my recent book *We Need New Leaders* describes how she addresses micro-aggressions. She doesn't shame someone



who, either intentionally or not, has said something hurtful. Instead she takes them aside and has a quiet conversation, asking why they said what they said and explaining to them how it lands with an individual. People often use non-inclusive language or say something out of ignorance, not intolerance, and by pointing it out gently, she is able to help them see the effect on others.

• Ask for feedback

When leaders ask for feedback—and create genuinely safe spaces for team members to provide it—this can be a powerful tool for change. Leaders often avoid vulnerability because it feels uncomfortable, but demonstrating a willingness to learn and improve helps team members feel engaged. In their book *Building a Culture of Diversity*, Priya Bates and Advita Patel say that being curious and asking for feedback builds better relationships. They say don't wait for formal reviews to get feedback; rather build it in as a regular activity after meetings or projects. By starting to demonstrate inclusivity in

behaviours, leaders and managers are doing culture work. And when done well, it shifts inclusivity from a peripheral initiative to part of core business.

• Find the amplifiers

Leadership plays a pivotal role in amplifying the right stories and signals. When leaders consistently communicate the values and behaviours that define an inclusive culture, and back those messages up with visible actions, they shape the narrative that others follow. Silence or inconsistency, on the other hand, can undo months of work.

Strategic communication ensures leaders are equipped not just with talking points, but with authentic narratives that reflect lived values. It helps them speak to different audiences in a way that resonates across identity, geography, and seniority. As one of the interviewees in *We Need New Leaders*, David Nath, says: 'Inclusion is empathy in action.'

And it's not just about leaders; there are other amplifiers in the organisation such as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that can also play a role. There are also natural enthusiasts who are willing to step up and become ambassadors. Leaders can lean on HR or the communications team to find and empower these people.

Conclusion

When organisations fail to embed inclusive values into everyday conversations, meetings, and decisions, those values become easy to sideline. Strategic communication brings coherence, clarity, and emotional resonance to inclusion work. It makes it a living, breathing part of company culture. If we want inclusion to live, we must make it heard and seen—both by telling stories that create empathy and connection and by modelling the required behaviour. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlotte Otter is author, *We Need New Leaders*.



♦ DR RAJEEV KUMAR MEHAJAN, WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANISATION, UNITED NATIONS

STRATEGY

Flying forward: sensitivity and sensibility

June 12, 2025 will be remembered with a heavy heart. The tragic accident of Air India's Ahmedabad–London flight AI 171, a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, shook not just the aviation industry but also every Indian. The aircraft was among the most sophisticated. And yet, in one shattering moment, lives were lost, families were broken, and questions were raised. In fact, the shockwaves were felt far beyond Air India. Friends of mine working across other airlines shared how a quiet gloom descended over their staff too—because in aviation, a tragedy anywhere is felt everywhere. This is not the first time aviation has faced heartbreak. Every such accident reopens old wounds, but it also carries a silent reminder: aviation is built on resilience.

From a management perspective, it was a profoundly challenging scenario. “Behind every headline number lies a family shattered, a CEO carrying the unbearable weight of lost colleagues and shaken customers, and regulators grappling with the sobering question—could this have been prevented? The emails from the Air India CEO to a frequent flyer like me; I can only imagine

the weight in his words, knowing that every reassurance must fight through his own grief and responsibility.” No wonder, as Shiv Shivakumar often reminds us, a CEO is not only the Chief Executive Officer but also the Chief Empathy Officer.

Half the safety equation

As a young pilot officer in the Indian Air Force (IAF), I learnt early that safety is never about machinery alone. The most advanced aircraft, weather radars, and check lists cannot compensate for the human element—our decisions, our culture, our accountability. That insight became the seed for my earliest writings on aviation. I once wrote in *Aerospace Safety Journal*: “Knowledge is only half the safety equation. The other half is attitude.” Time and again, investigations reveal that even when technical factors play a role, the mindset of decision-makers—at all levels—determines the fine line between a close call and a catastrophe.

Aviation psychology identifies five high-risk attitudes: Macho (I can do it all), Anti-authority (Rules don't apply to me), Invulnerability (Believing accidents only happen to others), Impulsiveness (Act now, think later), and Resignation (What difference does it make?).

Such attitudes do not belong to a cockpit or a control room—yet they slip in, unless checked by humility, teamwork, and discipline.

Equation to evolution

If half the safety equation is about systems and technology, and the other half is about people and culture, then the real challenge is balance. Aircraft, today, are more sophisticated than ever, yet human attitudes and organisational mindsets remain the decisive factor.

Every tragedy revives an old dilemma: how do we balance safety with growth? India's aviation sector is booming, with air travel now touching families who a decade ago would never have considered flying. Demand for new routes, faster clearances, and competitive fares creates invisible pressure points.

But aviation is not just another industry. Here, the cost of an error is counted in lives—be it civil or military aviation. Progress cannot be bought by discounting safety. This paradox demands strong leadership—not only from airlines but also from regulators, manufacturers, and even passengers.

Citizens and stakeholders

One might ask, "What can ordinary citizens do?" Quite a lot, actually. As passengers, we must value safety over convenience—unlearn ignoring safety instructions at all stages of flight,

especially use of electronic gadgets. Resist the urge to pressure airlines into short cuts. Understand that delays due to technical checks are not inefficiency; they are responsibility in action. Similarly, policymakers must ensure that regulation keeps pace with growth, and that oversight is independent, well-funded, and technology-enabled.

"While the interim investigation report offers technical leads, much of what citizens consumed was half-baked media speculation designed for sensation rather than substance—breaking news race—reminding us why authentic communication and trust matter in aviation safety."

Global lessons—local applications

History shows that aviation safety improves only when we treat accidents as lessons, not as blame games. The U.S. NASA's famous "wheels of accident causation" diagram illustrates the





timeless relevance—how failures rarely occur in isolation. They are usually the result of a chain—technical glitches, human lapses, organisational blind spots, and cultural pressures. Break just one link, and the accident may never happen.

For India, the lesson is clear: as we modernise fleets and expand global footprints, we must invest in safety culture—continuous training, transparent reporting, data-driven decision-making, and above all, humility.

From compliance to conscience

Every aviation tragedy is both a wound and a warning. While families grieve, regulators investigate, and airlines rebuild trust, the real tribute lies in learning. The path forward lies in acknowledging that no system is perfect, no machine invincible, and no human beyond error—it means embedding accountability, humility, and continuous improvement into every cockpit, control room, and boardroom as follows:

Leadership & accountability: Safety is not a department; it is a mindset that flows from the top.

Regulators must be anticipatory, not reactive: Rules must evolve with technology

and traffic growth.

Cultivate intrapreneurs in safety:

Employees at every level should be empowered to raise red flags.

Media/citizens blend scrutiny with

empathy: Truth-seeking should not descend into trial by noise.

In Hindi, there is a phrase: “*Hoshiyaari aur zimmedaari saath-saath chalni chahiye.*” (Alertness and responsibility must walk hand in hand.) That is the essence.

Conclusion

At its heart, aviation safety is not a checkbox—it is a covenant. A covenant that calls for vigilance from institutions, empathy from leaders, and maturity from citizens. If India is to truly honour those we lost, our collective promise must be clear: never again through neglect, never again through complacency.

We must embrace what I call “Sensitivity and Sensibility”—the sense to build robust systems and the sensibility to act with empathy, integrity, and courage when failures do occur. Because in aviation, every life saved is not just a statistic—it is a story preserved, a family kept whole, a future left unbroken. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Rajeev Kumar Mehajan, World Meteorological Organisation, United Nations.



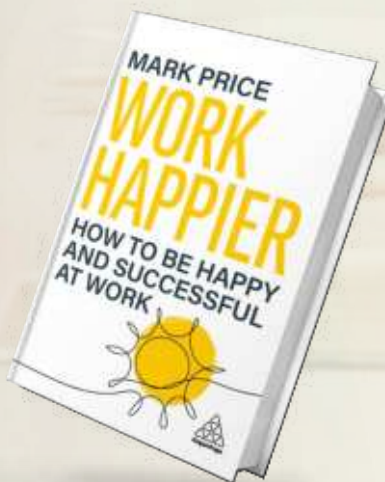
Recommended reads



BRIDGING THE GAP: AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION WITH CHINA

Author: Catherine Xiang
Publisher: LID Publishing

This is a must-read for business leaders who either work with Chinese organisations or plan to trade with China. The book provides a practical understanding of some key concepts and issues involved in communicating in today's multi-cultural world, and focuses on China as a prime example of the cultural barriers presented to non-Chinese businesspeople. It can help readers overcome hidden boundaries and communicate effectively both in interpersonal or business settings.



WORK HAPPIER: HOW TO BE HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL AT WORK

Author: Lord Mark Price
Publisher: Kogan Page

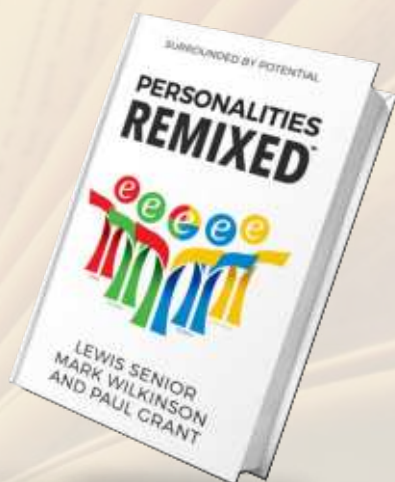
In this new book, the author argues that workplace well being shouldn't be a perk—it should be a right. Drawing upon decades of leadership experience and a wealth of exclusive data, he offers a practical, compelling framework for transforming how we think about happiness at work. He outlines what he calls the "Work Happiness Charter," or the ten rights and ten responsibilities everyone should expect and uphold at work, from the right to be recognised and respected, to the responsibility to show up with effort and honesty.



DATA IMPACT: HOW LEGACY BUSINESSES SAVE, LEVERAGE, ALIGN, SIMPLY, OPTIMISE, GROW TO WIN

Author: Ritavan
Publisher: Rethink Press

This new book sets out a proven framework for leveraging an organisation's unique strengths, align on value creation, simplify processes, and optimising for scalable, data-driven growth. It will help you to avoid costly groupthink mistakes, leverage your strengths, minimise the cost of complexity, optimise learnings, and grow by shedding the scarcity mindset and focusing on demand. It is invaluable to anyone working in a non-digital business to use data to create value faster.



PERSONALITIES REMIXED

Author: Lewis Senior, Mark Wilkinson, and Paul Grant

Publisher: Hasmark Publishing International

This intriguing new book offers interesting insights into personality diversity. It draws upon scientific research to create a practical guide to building stronger relationships, and communicating more effectively, both at work and at home. It helps readers understand their own unique personality style, and how by doing so you can build both powerful self-awareness and interpersonal awareness to communicate more effectively with others.

The book is filled with real-life case studies, drawing upon the authors' experience of helping to transform organisations, individuals and teams around the world using their renowned E-Colours Personality Indicator—from Fortune 500 companies to Olympic medallists and Formula One teams.



THE POWER TRAP: HOW LEADERSHIP CHANGES PEOPLE, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Author: Nik Kinley

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Power is something that almost everyone wants as they climb in their career. It should be the key that helps us achieve great things, but it can also be difficult to handle, and can actually make being a good leader much harder.

In this new book, the author reveals what power really does to people, and how it both affects them as leaders and the people they lead.

Incorporating the latest neuroscience, he offers clear lessons for how to successfully manage power, both for leaders to avoid its worst effects, and for organisations to ensure that the people who have power are equipped and supported to thrive with it. It is a fascinating guide that will help us all have a healthier relationship with power.



PRESENT WITH PRESENCE: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PLAN, PREPARE AND DELIVER WITH IMPACT IN ANY SITUATION

Author: Isobel Rimmer Oxley

Publisher: Rethink Press

Do you suffer from glossophobia? You're not alone. It is estimated that over three-quarters of the population experience the fear of public speaking, despite it being an invaluable skill that most of us could benefit from in our careers.

This book is structured like a practical, step-by-step 'recipe book,' packed with strategies tested in real-world corporate and high pressure environments—from planning and preparation, to delivering with impact, to making yourself truly memorable. Whether you're delivering a pitch, interviewing over Zoom, running a meeting or giving a speech at a wedding, you'll learn simple steps to present with authority and have a lasting impact on your audience.



This three-part series addresses the defining challenge of modern business leadership: how to accelerate innovation while building unshakeable stakeholder confidence. As transformative technologies reshape entire industries, executives can no longer choose between moving fast and building trust—they must master both.

TECHNOLOGY

♦ DENISE HOLT, AIX GLOBAL MEDIA AND LEARNING LAB CENTRAL
AND IRENE YAM, IY MEDIA AND [AUTHOR] BUILD A WORLD-CLASS
CUSTOMER ADVISORY BOARD

Innovation at enterprise scale

While the global technology industry fixates on LLMs and Agentic AI as the next breakthrough,

forward-thinking enterprises are quietly positioning themselves for a more fundamental paradigm shift. The convergence of Active Inference AI and the Spatial Web Protocol represents not just another technological advancement, but a complete redefinition of how digital intelligence integrates with the physical world.

For management, this presents an unprecedented opportunity. Rather than following Western AI trends that often misalign with local business contexts, enterprises can leapfrog traditional approaches by adopting co-building strategies that leverage these transformative technologies.

The Agentic AI distraction: Why the industry got it wrong

The overhyped promise

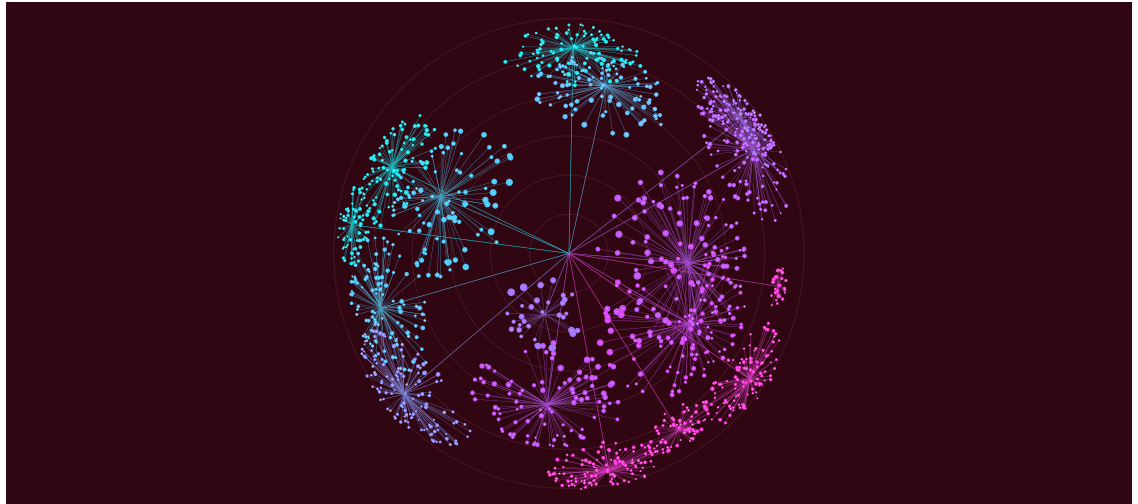
The current AI landscape is dominated by discussions of Agentic AI systems—autonomous agents designed to perform complex tasks independently. Yet for all the

excitement, these systems consistently fall short in real-world applications, particularly in the diverse and complex business environments that characterise the market.

Traditional Large Language Models (LLMs) and agent-based systems suffer from fundamental limitations that make them poorly suited for enterprises. They require massive computational resources that strain energy budgets, operate as “black boxes” that provide little transparency for decision-making, and depend on static training data that fails to adapt to rapidly changing local conditions.

Widely regarded as two of the godparents of modern AI, Fei-Fei Li and Yann LeCun have both expressed thoughtful skepticism about the current trajectory of Agentic AI. Fei-Fei Li has emphasized that spatial intelligence represents the next frontier. At the same time, Yann LeCun has pointed out that today’s AI systems still lack the ability to make their own discoveries.

For enterprises, the resource-intensive nature of these systems creates additional barriers. The computational demands conflict with sustainability goals, the lack of transparency poses challenges for regulatory compliance, and the one-size-fits-all approach ignores the nuanced requirements of different regional markets and business cultures.



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The active inference and spatial web revolution: India's strategic advantage **What is active inference AI: Beyond traditional Machine Learning**

Active Inference AI represents a fundamental departure from conventional machine learning approaches. Inspired by neuroscientist Dr Karl Friston's Free Energy Principle, it mimics how biological intelligence works—continuously learning from ongoing interactions with the environment and dynamically updating internal models based on new information.

Unlike traditional AI systems that rely on massive static datasets, Active Inference AI operates through real-time adaptation. The implications for business contexts are profound. Active Inference AI systems can adapt to local languages, cultural nuances, and business practices in real-time, while providing explainable decision-making processes that meet regulatory requirements.

Recent benchmarks demonstrate this efficiency advantage dramatically. Active Inference AI systems have achieved 99.8 per cent accuracy on everyday business tasks while using a fraction of the data and energy required by traditional deep learning methods.

What is the Spatial Web Protocol: India's

digital infrastructure opportunity

The Spatial Web Protocol, recently ratified by the IEEE as the new global public standard for the internet, introduces a revolutionary digital architecture that could transform how enterprises interact with both digital and physical infrastructure.

At its core, the Spatial Web integrates Hyperspace Transaction Protocol (HSTP) and Hyperspace Modeling Language (HSML) to create a unified framework for structuring and transmitting multi-dimensional information across interconnected spaces. For enterprises, this represents an opportunity to leapfrog traditional internet limitations and implement next-generation connectivity that supports decentralized intelligence at scale.

The protocol enables secure, real-time coordination between humans, machines, and AI systems across distributed networks, ideally suited to India's diverse and geographically distributed business ecosystem.

How to deploy Active Inference and Spatial Web Revolution

Why traditional vendor-client relationships are obsolete

The conventional "build it and they will come"

approach to technology implementation has become increasingly problematic in the era of AI. Traditional vendor-client relationships ignore the fundamental reality that AI systems must be deeply integrated with specific business contexts to deliver value.

Organisations are no longer willing to accept black-box solutions that they cannot understand or control. This shift demands a new approach: collaborative development where vendors and clients work together as partners to create solutions tailored from the ground up to specific business needs.

First step: Technical readiness assessment

Before embarking on any AI implementation, organizations must build a solid foundation of knowledge and accurately assess their current capabilities. This begins with education—taking courses and obtaining certifications in Active Inference AI and Spatial Web technologies.

The technical readiness assessment should evaluate the existing infrastructure for Spatial Web integration, identifying both opportunities and constraints. Building technical literacy across management teams is crucial for making informed strategic decisions and guiding effective implementation processes.

Decision-making and planning

The most critical phase involves identifying genuine opportunities for value creation through deep conversations with key clients about their operational challenges, growth objectives, and technology constraints. This planning should identify specific use cases that align with your industry expertise and client needs, discovering opportunities where Active Inference AI and Spatial Web integration can solve problems that traditional approaches cannot address effectively.

Identifying use cases for customer industries

Once those high-value opportunities are surfaced through strategic dialogue, the next step is to ground them in real-world applications. By aligning technical capabilities with tangible customer challenges, organisations

can begin identifying industry-specific use cases where Active Inference AI and Spatial Web technologies offer breakthrough advantages over traditional systems. Here are examples of how these technologies can be applied across industries to create measurable value and solve complex, evolving problems:

Healthcare applications

Active Inference AI presents compelling opportunities in patient care by continuously analysing real-time data to create personalised, adaptive treatment plans that evolve in response to each patient's changing condition. For early detection and prevention, these systems excel at identifying subtle patterns that indicate emerging health risks, enabling timely interventions.

Hospital operations benefit from Active Inference AI's ability to predict resource needs, streamline workflows, and manage patient flow more effectively, optimising staff scheduling and coordinating complex logistics in real-time.

Finance applications

Financial institutions can leverage Active Inference AI's real-time adaptation capabilities for market trend prediction and risk management, adjusting investment strategies dynamically based on emerging market data and regulatory changes. Regulatory compliance becomes more manageable when AI systems can adapt to changing requirements in real-time.

Manufacturing applications

Active Inference AI can optimise production lines by adapting to shifts in demand, resource availability, and employee performance, thereby enhancing overall efficiency. Predictive maintenance becomes more accurate when systems learn from actual equipment behavior rather than following predetermined schedules.

Smart city applications

Large-scale implementations demonstrate the potential for urban management through the integration of real-time data, including weather conditions, local events, and infrastructure maintenance. These systems can increase operational efficiency while reducing congestion



and emissions.

Smart CITY CASE Study: Abu Dhabi's BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

Building Abu Dhabi's SMART City: A STRATEGIC EVOLUTION IN PROGRESS

The deployment of Active Inference AI and Spatial Web Protocol in Abu Dhabi represents an ambitious multi-year initiative that is taking shape through targeted, domain-specific implementations. Rather than attempting to transform an entire city overnight, this strategic approach focuses on optimising individual systems that will eventually interconnect to create unprecedented capabilities for real-time urban management.

Currently, VERSES AI has partnered with Analog to optimise taxi fleets using Active Inference AI, demonstrating real-world applications of these technologies in urban transportation. Additional system use cases are being explored and deployed across various city infrastructure domains. Each successful implementation provides valuable insights and builds the foundation for the next phase of integration.

The ultimate vision is a comprehensive city-wide optimisation where all urban systems work together seamlessly. However, this transformation is being achieved through methodical deployment of domain-specific solutions that prove value individually while building toward the larger, interconnected ecosystem. This phased approach ensures that each implementation delivers immediate benefits while contributing to the eventual goal of a unified smart city infrastructure.

This strategic evolution demonstrates not just the individual benefits of Active Inference AI and Spatial Web technologies but also how their gradual integration across multiple urban systems will eventually create synergistic effects that transform how cities operate.

Real-time decision making represents the most significant advancement demonstrated by the Abu Dhabi project. Traditional city management systems are largely reactive, responding to problems after they occur. Active Inference AI enables the Smart City to continuously monitor and adjust operations in real-time, anticipating needs and minimizing

inefficiencies before they arise.

Data integration and simplification

addresses one of the most challenging aspects of urban management: processing massive amounts of data from diverse sources into actionable insights. Renormalising Generative Models enables the AI system to organize complex information from sensors, citizen reports, weather systems, and economic indicators into manageable structures that support immediate decision-making.

Seamless Interoperability through the Spatial Web provides the foundation for connecting all disparate systems within a city into a single, unified framework. Through HSTP and HSML, the city's infrastructure, sensors, and digital assets communicate with each other in real-time.

Human-Machine cooperation foundation

represents the most innovative aspect of the Abu Dhabi implementation. Through HSML, human laws, regulations, and guidelines can be made programmable, enabling Intelligent Agents to understand and abide by them in real-time ensuring that automated decision-making remains aligned with human values and legal requirements.

Abu Dhabi was selected because it represents an ideal testing ground for next-generation urban technologies free from the burden of legacy infrastructure. The project serves as a blueprint for urban living that addresses challenges faced by cities worldwide: population growth, climate change, resource management, and sustainable development.

The path forward: Building India's Spatial Web ecosystem

Immediate Action Items for Management Leaders

Implementation checklist

Assess current position: Begin with an honest evaluation of your organisation's readiness for Spatial Web integration, including technical infrastructure, organisational capabilities, and cultural readiness for collaborative technology

development.

Identify co-building partners: Establish relationships with technology providers, clients, and ecosystem partners who share your vision for collaborative innovation and are open to experimentation.

Develop pilot projects: Start small with high-impact use cases that can demonstrate value quickly while building organizational experience with these technologies. A good way to kick off your team is to start by identifying a domain-specific problem that can be optimized with active inference and build an agent to address it. Continue to build these domain-specific agents, and eventually, they can interact with each other, sharing their beliefs and forming a distributed collective intelligence with a hierarchy of intelligence layers. This allows them to share key beliefs without losing context, acting as a 'hive mind'. This is the result of building these agents; however, the first step is to address domain-specific problems, build individual agents, and then have the agents connect to gain greater insights into a scalable multi-agent ecosystem.

Invest in capability building: Develop internal expertise through structured learning programs that build both technical understanding and strategic thinking about AI implementation.

Take certification courses: Build foundational knowledge before attempting implementation by completing structured educational programs.

Joining the Community and Building Networks

Beyond individual organisational preparation, success in the Spatial Web revolution requires active participation in the broader community of practitioners and innovators. Join the existing Active Inference AI and Spatial Web Community to connect with other organizations implementing these technologies, share experiences, and learn from collective insights.

Within this larger community, organizations

can build smaller sub-communities focused on specific industries, use cases, or regional markets. These focused groups enable deeper collaboration on shared challenges while maintaining a connection to the broader ecosystem of innovation. Consider forming industry-specific working groups or regional implementation networks that can meet regularly to share progress, troubleshoot challenges, and coordinate on larger initiatives.

Long-term strategic considerations:

Building sustainable competitive advantages through early adoption requires thinking beyond immediate implementation challenges to consider how these technologies will reshape entire industries. Organisations that invest now in developing expertise around Active Inference AI and Spatial Web technologies will be positioned to lead rather than follow as these approaches become mainstream.

In the long term, successful implementation will require strategic consideration of Customer Advisory Boards (CABs)—small groups of diverse clients who collaborate directly in solution development rather than simply providing feedback on predetermined offerings. This co-building model represents the future of technology implementation in the AI era.

**Build a customer advisory board to co-build
Why co-building equals trust and
thought leadership**

Co-building represents the most powerful approach for establishing trust with clients while positioning your organisation as a thought leader in emerging technologies. When organisations move beyond traditional vendor-client relationships to true collaborative partnerships, they demonstrate confidence in their capabilities and commitment to client success that sets them apart from competitors who rely on standard sales approaches.

The co-building model creates trust through transparency and shared risk. Clients who participate directly in solution development gain

a deep understanding of both the technology and their organization's expertise, eliminating the uncertainty that often accompanies the adoption of new technology. This intimate collaboration showcases your team's problem-solving capabilities, technical expertise, and commitment to delivering genuine value rather than merely selling products.

From a thought leadership perspective, co-building positions your organization at the forefront of innovation rather than simply following market trends. Organizations that can successfully facilitate collaborative development demonstrate mastery not just of technology, but of the complex change management, stakeholder alignment, and cultural integration challenges that determine whether advanced technologies succeed or fail in real business environments.

**The competitive advantage of
collaborative leadership**

During periods of rapid technological change, confidence becomes a competitive currency. Executives who leverage CABs to foster co-building not only accelerate innovation but also reinforce stakeholder trust—both internally and externally. Your team's expertise is showcased in action, and your customers become witnesses and advocates of your capabilities.

While typical CAB discussions may center on product features or pricing, true trust is not easily replicated. Customers who engage in a co-building journey with your team are far more likely to champion your company, offer referrals, participate in case studies, and help establish market credibility around your leadership in emerging technology.

From a thought leadership perspective, CABs transform your company from a vendor to a trusted innovation partner. You're not following market trends—you're setting them, with your customers at your side.

And over time, a well-run, co-building-driven CAB becomes a competitive moat—a unique layer of strategic advantage that competitors can't



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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easily copy. While others focus on scaling tools, you're scaling relationships, insights, and long-term loyalty. That differentiation becomes your edge, especially in a market where trust drives adoption just as much as technology.

Conclusion: Leading the Spatial Web Revolution

While much of the global tech industry remains fixated on the hype cycle of LLMs and Agentic AI, forward-thinking enterprises have a rare opportunity: to lead with intention, not just invention. The convergence of Active Inference AI and the Spatial Web Protocol isn't simply a technical evolution—it's a strategic shift in how organisations engage, decide, and scale in real time.

In an era where velocity alone is no longer enough, building trust at scale becomes the defining leadership challenge. Co-building through mechanisms like Customer Advisory Boards offers a clear, actionable path. It not only accelerates innovation—it creates shared understanding, credibility, and long-term alignment with the very stakeholders whose confidence matters most.

The Abu Dhabi Smart City initiative proves that these technologies are no longer theoretical—they're being deployed to solve urgent, real-

world problems. Cities like Los Angeles and Miami are also investing in next-generation smart infrastructure, signaling that the momentum is global and accelerating. Organisations that begin co-building today—developing expertise, forging partnerships, and operationalising feedback loops—will establish competitive moats that others can't easily cross. Because, in the end, the most powerful innovation isn't just what you build. It's who you build it with—and how much they trust you to lead.

Next month, Series 2 explores how cybersecurity leaders are building resilience through transparency, shifting from "we'll prevent everything" promises to strategies that combine AI capabilities with human expertise to handle massive threat volumes while strengthening stakeholder confidence. [IM](#)

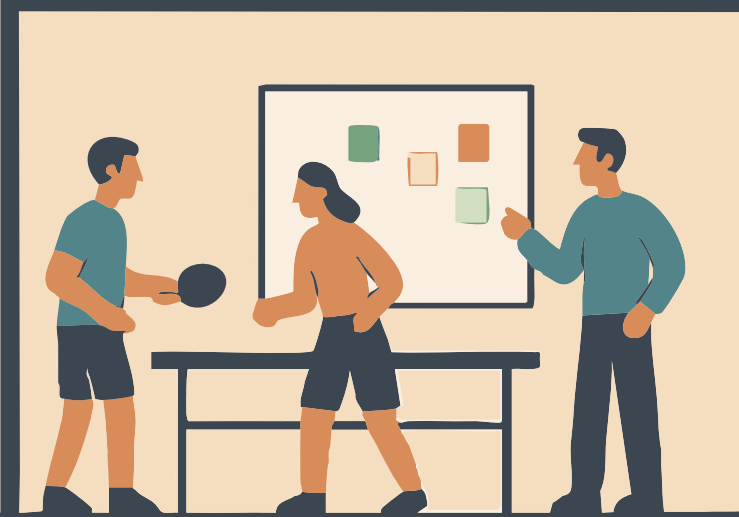
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A positive, supportive, and inclusive work atmosphere fosters greater engagement, creativity, and performance.

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

**ORGANISATIONAL
CULTURE**

Optimising the workplace

Work environment plays a crucial role in influencing employee well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. A positive, supportive, and inclusive work atmosphere fosters greater engagement, creativity, and performance, while a toxic or inefficient environment can lead to burnout, disengagement, and high turnover. This article examines key areas that impact the work environment, such as physical workspace, leadership, employee engagement, health and safety, and work-life balance. It also explores practical strategies and factors that can improve these areas, including ergonomic designs, transparent leadership, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and flexible working arrangements. The goal is to offer insights into creating an environment where employees thrive, contributing to the overall success of the organisation.

The quality of the work environment is one of the most significant factors determining employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. A positive work environment not only boosts morale but also fosters creativity,

collaboration, and efficiency. On the other hand, a negative work environment can lead to disengagement, increased stress, and poor performance. By understanding the various aspects that affect the work environment and applying strategies to improve them, organisations can create a more conducive atmosphere for both individual and collective growth.

This article discusses the key areas that impact the work environment and offers suggestions on how organisations can improve these areas to enhance employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organisational success.

1. Physical workspace and ergonomics

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Poor design and comfort:** A workspace with uncomfortable chairs, improper desk height, bad lighting, and inefficient layout can cause physical strain, discomfort, and mental fatigue, leading to reduced productivity and employee dissatisfaction.
- **Health issues:** Poor ergonomics may result in long-term physical issues like back pain, eye strain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and headaches. These not only affect work performance but also contribute to absenteeism.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Ergonomic workspace design:** Providing ergonomic chairs, desks that are adjustable for sitting and standing, and keyboards that align with body posture can prevent physical strain. Adjustable lighting or daylight exposure also helps reduce eye strain and improves mood.
- **Well-planned layout:** Creating open spaces for collaboration while maintaining quiet zones for focused work ensures a balance between teamwork and individual productivity.
- **Personalisation:** Allowing employees to decorate or personalise their workspace makes them feel more connected and comfortable, fostering a sense of ownership.

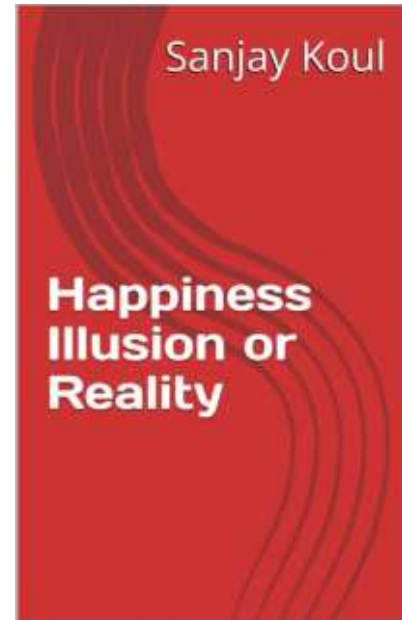
2. Health and safety

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Unsafe conditions:** If a workplace is not equipped with necessary safety equipment, emergency protocols, or clear health guidelines, it leads to increased risk of accidents, injuries, and health issues.
- **Stress and fatigue:** Constant exposure to poor air quality, noise, or overcrowding can result in stress, fatigue, and general dissatisfaction, affecting productivity and employee engagement.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Health and safety protocols:** Ensuring the workplace complies with safety standards and regulations (fire safety, electrical hazards, etc.) is essential. Regular safety drills and clear emergency exits help employees feel safe.
- **Air quality and environmental controls:** Installing air purifiers, ensuring adequate ventilation, and incorporating plants to improve air quality help maintain a healthy and pleasant environment.
- **Wellness programs:** Providing programs like fitness challenges, mental



health days, or counselling services can promote physical and mental health, leading to a happier and healthier workforce.

3. Leadership and management style

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Poor leadership:** Inconsistent, micromanaging, or distant leadership often leads to employee frustration, burnout, and a lack of trust. Poor communication from leadership also contributes to confusion and dissatisfaction.
- **Lack of direction:** When managers don't provide clear direction or goals, employees may feel lost or unsure of their role, leading to a lack of focus and engagement.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Supportive leadership:** Leaders should exhibit empathy, provide guidance, listen actively, and show a genuine interest in employee well-being. An open-door policy encourages better communication.
- **Transparency and communication:**

Regular updates on company goals, changes, and challenges help employees feel informed and included in decision-making processes, fostering trust.

- **Recognition:** Publicly recognising achievements and showing appreciation can motivate employees, making them feel valued and supported.

4. Employee engagement and motivation

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Low engagement:** Lack of motivation or enthusiasm from employees can lead to low productivity, high turnover rates, and a toxic work culture. Employees may feel like they are just going through the motions without a sense of purpose.
- **Disengagement:** When employees feel disconnected from the company's goals, they may not contribute fully, leading to a decrease in creativity and innovation.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Growth opportunities:** Offering training, mentorship, and skill development ensures that employees feel like they can grow in their roles and contribute more to the organization.
- **Autonomy and empowerment:** Giving employees the freedom to make

decisions in their roles increases their sense of responsibility, control, and job satisfaction.

- **Regular feedback:** A two-way feedback system where employees receive constructive input and also have a platform to voice their opinions leads to more informed decision-making and greater engagement.

5. Work-life balance

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Burnout:** Excessive work demands without proper time for rest or personal activities can cause burnout, leading to physical exhaustion, emotional fatigue, and disengagement.
- **Stress and decreased productivity:** Without work-life balance, employees may experience stress that affects both their personal life and work performance, reducing overall productivity.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Flexible working hours:** Allowing employees to have flexible schedules or offering compressed work weeks helps them balance personal responsibilities, reducing stress.



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- **Remote work:** Providing the option to work from home or other remote locations increases flexibility and can help employees achieve better work-life integration.
- **Paid time off and mental health days:** Encouraging employees to take vacation days or mental health breaks helps recharge their energy and reduces stress, leading to increased overall productivity.

6. Teamwork and collaboration

- **Impact on work environment:**
 - **Poor collaboration:** Lack of communication and cooperation between team members can result in inefficiency, missed deadlines, and a fragmented work culture.
 - **Isolation:** When employees are not encouraged to work together, it can lead to a sense of isolation and disconnection from the team, reducing morale and engagement.
- **Improvement factors:**
 - **Team-building activities:** Organising team-building exercises, group activities, or collaborative projects fosters trust and strengthens relationships between employees.

- **Encouraging inclusivity:** Making sure everyone has a voice and ensuring diversity within teams leads to a more cohesive and productive team dynamic.
- **Conflict resolution:** Training employees on conflict management and providing avenues for conflict resolution helps keep team relationships healthy.

7. Clarity of roles and expectations

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Ambiguity:** When roles and expectations are unclear, employees may feel uncertain, leading to mistakes, inefficiency, and frustration.
- **Overwork or underwork:** Lack of clear delegation of tasks can lead to employees taking on too much or not enough work, both of which can negatively affect performance.

■ Improvement factors:

- **Clear job roles:** Clearly defining each employee's role, responsibilities, and goals ensures everyone knows what is expected of them.
- **Setting milestones:** Regularly setting and reviewing goals helps employees understand their progress and adjust their efforts accordingly.
- **Performance reviews:** Regular evaluations provide a platform to discuss expectations, set new goals, and provide constructive feedback.

8. Recognition and rewards

■ Impact on work environment:

- **Lack of motivation:** If employees' hard work goes unnoticed or unrewarded, they may feel unappreciated, leading to low morale and disengagement.
- **Unfair reward systems:** An imbalanced reward system can lead to resentment among employees, especially if they feel their contributions are not fairly recognised.

Encouraging employees to recognise their peers creates a supportive and appreciative environment

■ **Improvement factors:**

- **Reward programs:** Offering monetary or non-monetary rewards (e.g., bonuses, extra time off, gift cards) for exceptional performance boosts morale.

- **Employee of the month programs:** Public recognition through monthly awards acknowledges employees' efforts and motivates them to perform better.
- **Peer recognition:** Encouraging employees to recognise their peers creates a supportive and appreciative environment.

9. Diversity and inclusion

■ **Impact on work environment:**

- **Exclusion:** A lack of diversity or inclusivity can lead to feelings of alienation, inequality, and discrimination among employees, reducing morale and increasing turnover.
- **Homogeneous culture:** A lack of diversity can also lead to groupthink, where creativity and innovation are stifled.

■ **Improvement factors:**

- **Inclusive policies:** Implementing policies that promote equality, non-discrimination, and respect for diverse backgrounds ensures all employees feel valued.
- **Cultural sensitivity training:** Providing workshops on cultural awareness and sensitivity promotes understanding and helps prevent conflicts.
- **Equal opportunities:** Ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement and promotions for all employees enhances the work environment by fostering fairness.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjay Koul is engineer, researcher, and writer. Sanjay is also author, *Happiness: Illusion or Reality*.

10. Workplace flexibility

■ **Impact on work environment:**

- **Rigidity:** A rigid, one-size-fits-all approach to work can reduce employee satisfaction and hinder their ability to balance work and life responsibilities.
- **Micromanagement:** Lack of flexibility in work hours or location can lead to feelings of being controlled, resulting in decreased motivation.

■ **Improvement factors:**

- **Remote work:** Offering remote or hybrid work options increases flexibility and helps employees manage their personal and professional commitments more effectively.
- **Flexible hours:** Allowing employees to adjust their hours to suit personal needs improves their work-life balance and reduces stress.
- **Technology for collaboration:** Tools like video conferencing and collaboration platforms (Slack, Teams) enable effective communication and collaboration, even in remote settings.

Conclusion

A thriving work environment is essential for the success of any organization. By addressing the factors that influence the work environment—such as physical workspace design, leadership styles, employee engagement, and work-life balance—organisations can create a supportive atmosphere that fosters productivity, creativity, and well-being. Implementing strategies such as ergonomic workstations, transparent leadership, flexible work schedules, and diversity initiatives can significantly improve the work environment. Ultimately, when employees feel valued, supported, and engaged, they are more likely to contribute positively to the organisation's goals and success. 



Jonathan Escobar Marin, CEO, ActioGlobal and author, *Lead to Beat: The Leadership Rhythm That Shapes Tomorrow*, writes on the leadership myths that kill execution.

**MYTH
BUSTER**

The rhythm of business

Strategy execution failure is not a mystery. It is a predictable outcome of believing comfortable lies about how organisations actually work. After transforming hundreds of companies across five continents, I have watched brilliant strategies die the same death—suffocated by myths that leaders refuse to abandon.

In *Lead to Beat*, I debunk the five most dangerous myths sabotaging your organisation's potential.

MYTH 1: STRATEGY COMMUNICATED = STRATEGY HAPPENING.

Not long ago, a Fortune 500 CEO proudly showed me his strategy deck. Twenty-six slides. Beautiful graphics. Distributed to thousands of employees. “Everyone knows our strategy,” he beamed. One day later, I asked his leadership team to name the priorities from that strategy they were working on. The response: sixty seconds of piercing silence.

Strategy is necessary for execution, but it is not sufficient.

The brutal truth is that your people aren't ignoring your strategy—they literally can't find it in the avalanche of PowerPoints where

silos have buried it. When the leadership team from that Fortune 500 example finally replied to my request, they listed 15–20 ‘strategic initiatives’... 15–20 yes...from each department! That meant over 120 priorities in total! That was not strategic prioritization. That was the wish list of each kingdom; a list full of activities, vanity metrics, and ambiguously defined initiatives. Sadly, very common ‘wish lists’ I must confess.

Real strategic execution demands what I call the “Wall” of Brutal Focus—a one-page visual fortress of missions with committed targets, dates, and staffing that translates long-term vision into unmissable priorities. It's not about broadcasting intentions; it's about weaponising clarity to eliminate the noise of competing agendas.

The most successful companies I have worked with operate this way. They achieve 1.6x faster growth compared to similar organisations in their markets. Their cost reduction initiatives achieve an impact 2.7x to 5.1x greater in the year's budget. Speed to market for new launches improves by 1.3x to 1.9x. They deliver all this not because they worked harder, but because everyone finally knows what actually matters, and they have multiplied their talent capable of owning

strategic goals by at least 9x. Let me cover this one in the next myth debunker.

Stop confusing announcement with achievement. Start practicing strategic starvation—deliberately starving of talent, capital, and time everything that is not a core priority.

MYTH 2: HIERARCHY = LEADERSHIP

Your organisational chart is lying to you. It shows boxes and lines, implying leadership flows downward from titles. Meanwhile, your real leaders—the ones actually driving results—are scattered across every level, often without formal authority.

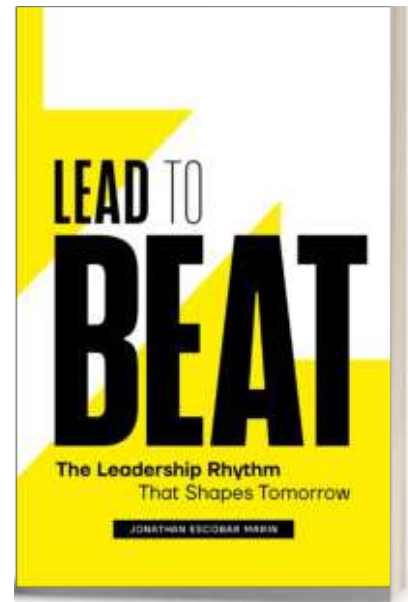
I have seen team players, trapped between hierarchies and silos, transform the performance of entire divisions. No changes to titles or reporting lines were needed. Just clarity about what needed to happen and the courage to make it happen. That's distributed leadership—ownership everywhere, not just in corner offices.

Traditional hierarchy creates leadership scarcity. You get ten leaders for 1,000 people. Distributed leadership creates leadership

abundance. You get 1,000 leaders, period.

The shift requires killing three sacred cows: First, stop hoarding decision rights at the top. Second, stop confusing position with capability. Third, stop protecting people from the responsibility they are hungry for.

When you distribute leadership, you don't





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lose control—you multiply it. Every person becomes a sensor, a decision-maker, and a driver of results. Your organisation stops waiting for permission and starts creating value.

Stop using ‘strategic thinking’ as an excuse for execution avoidance. Start treating every week as a strategic sprint toward your long-term vision

MYTH 3: WEEKLY RHYTHM = SHORT-TERM FOCUS

“We can’t do weekly synchros,” the executive team protested. “That’s too tactical. We need to think strategically, long-term.”

Eighteen months later, their five-year strategy was exactly

where it started—in a PowerPoint deck. They’d confused frequency with focus. They’d mistaken rhythm for short-sightedness.

The most strategic thing you can do is execute relentlessly in the short term. Not because the long term doesn’t matter, but because it’s built one week at a time. Impact over activity means measuring what moves the needle weekly, not what makes you feel busy.

Weekly rhythm isn’t about micromanagement. It’s about creating what I call ‘strategic velocity’—the speed at which strategy becomes reality. When you only check progress quarterly, you have already lost three months of momentum, adjustment, and acceleration.

One technology company we are currently working with shifted from monthly business reviews to weekly synchros with strategic sprints. They delivered more strategic progress in three months than in the previous three quarters combined. Not by thinking smaller, but by executing faster.

Stop using ‘strategic thinking’ as an excuse for execution avoidance. Start treating every week as a strategic sprint toward your long-term vision.

MYTH 4: ADAPTABILITY = ADAPTING TO THE COMFORT OF SOME

“We need to be agile,” leaders say, then spend five months debating changes that should take five days. They have confused adaptability with accommodation—bending to every opinion, every concern, every comfortable compromise.

True adaptability is not about making everyone comfortable; it is about making insiders uncomfortable in service of what makes customers happy. It requires what I call a Disciplined Drumbeat—a relentless rhythm of evolution that doesn't slow down for stragglers.

I watched a retail giant lose nearly a billion dollars in market value while they 'adapted' their go-to-market strategy to accommodate every director's and president's opinion. Their competitor, meanwhile, made some PowerPoint

painters furious and captured almost 15 per cent market share in 18 months.

A Disciplined Drumbeat means evolution happens on schedule, not on consensus. Every quarter, you make something obsolete. Every month, you

challenge a sacred cow. Every week, you push beyond someone's comfort zone—starting with your own.

Stop mistaking democracy for adaptability. Start practicing strategic dictatorship—where the strategy, not the loudest voice, determines direction.

MYTH 5: HIGH PERFORMANCE = NOT CARING FOR PEOPLE

The final myth is the most toxic: that driving results means driving over people. That high performance requires low humanity. That you must choose between results and caring for people.

This is leadership cowardice disguised as toughness.

The highest-performing organizations I've transformed didn't succeed despite caring

for people—they succeeded because of it. But caring doesn't mean coddling. It means respecting people enough to demand their best, support their growth, and refuse to let them settle for mediocrity.

One executive president doubled her division's performance while reducing turnover of top performers by over 60 per cent. Her secret? Brutal honesty delivered with genuine care. She shaped a culture where leaders told people exactly where they stood, what they needed to improve, and then invested relentlessly in helping those who wanted to get there.

Your legacy as a leader isn't just measured in quarters hit. It's measured in the leaders you develop, the potential you unleash, and the people who are better because they worked with you.

Stop using 'high performance' as an excuse for low humanity. Start building what I call 'growth partnerships'—where high standards and high support reinforce each other.

THE BEAT OF YOUR LEGACY

These myths persist because they are comfortable. It is easier to announce a strategy than to execute it. Easier to rely on hierarchy than to develop leaders everywhere. Easier to avoid weekly accountability than to face it. Easier to accommodate everyone in the boardroom than to drive real change on the floor. Easier to choose between performance and people than to demand both.

The rhythm of business is growing louder by the day. Yet it is breathtaking how many companies remain unfocused, unled, and slow—and they think nothing of it. Your opportunity as a leader is to reset these five myths now that you are aware of them. Many leaders like you have already done it.

The question is, will you lead to beat these myths, or will you fall behind, marching to the comfort of them? 

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AI-based innovations are revolutionising India's MSME sector through improved operational effectiveness, cost savings, and business competitiveness in the global market.

MANAGEMENT

♦ DR MANIK CHAKRABORTY, ST. XAVIER'S UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA
AND DR DEBASISH SUR, THE UNIVERSITY OF BURDWAN,
BURDWAN

AI for a competitive future

With the aim of heralding qualitative metamorphosis in the Indian MSMEs sector and sharpening its competitive edge, this paper delves into the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in turbo charging the growth and competitiveness of India's MSME sector. It sheds light on pivotal AI applications, identifies major stumbling blocks to adoption, scrutinises governmental interventions, and forecasts emerging trajectories — all while underscoring AI's immense promise as a linchpin for fostering inclusive economic prosperity in pursuit of the 'Viksit Bharat 2047' dream

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a game-changer for India's Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), inducing innovation, empowering automation, and improving operational efficiency. MSMEs are the major driver of India's economic fabric, creating nearly 30 per cent of the GDP, nearly 40 per cent of exports, and over 110 million jobs. Against this backdrop, AI-based solutions are providing new opportunities for growth, improving productivity, and facilitating data-driven decision-making. From automating

and optimising operations through predictive analytics to enhancing financial inclusion and supply chain optimisation, AI is increasingly a force for competitiveness and resilience among Indian MSMEs. As India charts its path to 'Viksit Bharat 2047'—its vision of a developed country—deployment of AI in the MSME sector will be pivotal in driving economic transformation. These smarter technologies are empowering small and medium-sized businesses to grow more efficiently, minimize costs, innovate quicker, and compete fiercely in the domestic as well as the global markets.

AI technologies relevant to MSMEs

Artificial Intelligence offers a range of technologies that can help India's MSMEs become more efficient, reduce costs, and increase competitiveness. Key technologies include:

- **Machine learning & predictive analytics:** ML can be used to predict demand, identify fraud, analyse customer behaviour, and price opportunities. Predictive analytics enables companies to anticipate trends and make data-driven decisions, minimizing uncertainty and enhancing strategic planning. Example: Staqu Technologies, an Indian MSME, provides AI insights with intelligent decision making to

small retailers.

- **Natural language processing (NLP):** Drives customer service chatbots and virtual assistants for multi-lingual conversations.
- **Robotic process automation (RPA):** Automates repetitive tasks such as invoicing, payroll, inventory management and compliance reporting. For resource-constrained MSMEs, RPA offers significant cost savings and efficiency gains through lower manual intervention and human error. Example: iThink Logistics uses AI to optimize routes.
- **Computer vision:** Computer vision is being adopted by manufacturing and retail MSMEs to enable quality control, inventory monitoring, product recognition, and surveillance. This enhances working precision and workplace safety.
- **AI in fintech:** Fintech solutions based on AI are becoming a game-changer for MSME financial inclusion. It allows for quicker credit scoring, fraud detection, and automated financial services and customised financial planning. Example: Flexiloans, an Indian fintech MSME, employs AI for MSME lending.
- **Recommendation systems:** It can personalise marketing campaigns for MSMEs and recommend products or services for customers based on their preferences. This technology leads to increased customer satisfaction, enhanced sales, and brand loyalty. Example: GIVA, which is an MSME dealing with silver jewellery, utilizes AI to suggest products.
- **Smart supply chain management:** AI allows MSMEs to develop responsive and effective supply chains by providing real-time tracking, demand forecasting, route optimisation, and supplier analysis. Example: iThink Logistics enhances MSME supply chains.
- **AI-based cybersecurity:** AI can detect threats and minimise risks in digital transactions. Example: Signzy provides AI-

based fraud protection.

- **Smart manufacturing:** AI enables predictive maintenance and quality control. Example: Fasal, an agritech MSME, employs AI for crop and weather analytics.

These technologies are now more readily accessible through cloud platforms and low-code tools, making them apt even for small businesses with inadequate technical proficiency.

Adoption of AI in Indian MSMEs: Current landscape and projections

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the backbone of India's economy, stand at a crucial juncture in this era of accelerated technological change. Adopting AI will make them contemporary and give them a unique chance to propel unprecedented growth, enhance productivity, and fuel sustainable innovation. AI adoption among Indian MSMEs is in its nascent stage but is picking up fast, particularly in urban India and technology-intensive industries such as retail, manufacturing, and fintech. Despite challenges related to limited awareness, high implementation costs, and a shortage of digital skills, adoption is being spurred by government initiatives such as Digital MSME and AI for All, as well as the growing availability of cost-effective, cloud-based AI solutions. In the coming years, AI adoption will increase manifold, which will allow MSMEs to enhance productivity, enhance competitiveness, and scale up cost-effectively—keeping in sync with India's overall vision of a \$5 trillion economy.

This study combines historical data aggregation, trend extrapolation, and qualitative expert insights to estimate AI adoption rates in Indian MSMEs from 2020 to 2025. Historical adoption rates (2020–2023) were derived from industry surveys, including KPMG-Google India's Annual Tech Survey (2021), NASSCOM-EY's sectoral analyses (2023), and IBM's Global AI Adoption Index (2022). These datasets were normalized to account for varying definitions of AI tools,

with adoption defined as the use of at least one AI-driven application (e.g., chatbots, predictive analytics). Projections for 2024–2025 follow a CAGR-driven model (25–30 per cent), adjusted for policy impacts (e.g., MSME 4.0 subsidies) and rural-urban disparities weighted using proxy indicators like internet penetration (TRAI, 2023) and UPI adoption (NPCI, 2023). Sectoral readiness prioritized industries with near-term ROI potential (e.g., retail over agriculture). To mitigate over-optimism, estimates were cross-validated against global benchmarks (e.g., China's SME adoption rates). Limitations include urban bias in historical data and exclusion of informal MSMEs due to reporting gaps.

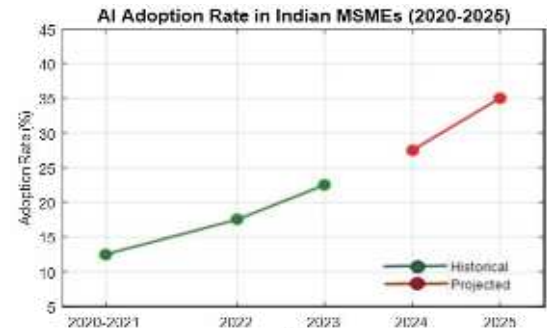
The historical and projected AI adoption rates in India and corresponding factors have been demonstrated below:

Year	AI Adoption Rate	Key Forces/Drivers
2020-2021	10–15 per cent	Post-COVID digitization push; initial adoption of chatbots and basic analytics tools.
2022	15–20 per cent	Growth fueled by affordable SaaS AI tools (e.g., CRM, inventory management).
2023	20–25 per cent	Increased use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) and government skilling initiatives.
2024	25–30 per cent (Projected)	Expansion in AI-driven manufacturing and retail use cases (e.g., demand forecasting).
2025	30–40 per cent (Projected)	Wider adoption due to 5G rollout, AI-as-a-Service models, and policy support.

Source: NASSCOM, IBM, Zinnov, KPMG-Google, and Author's calculation

The above data can be portrayed through the

following diagram:



Source: Developed by the author using MATLAB

In congruence with the global trends, Government-led AI initiatives and increased Tech Accessibility, it is estimated that by 2030, AI adoption among India's formal MSMEs will be at almost universal levels, but the informal sector will lag behind, with adoption levels projected at only 50–60 per cent, according to expert assessment.

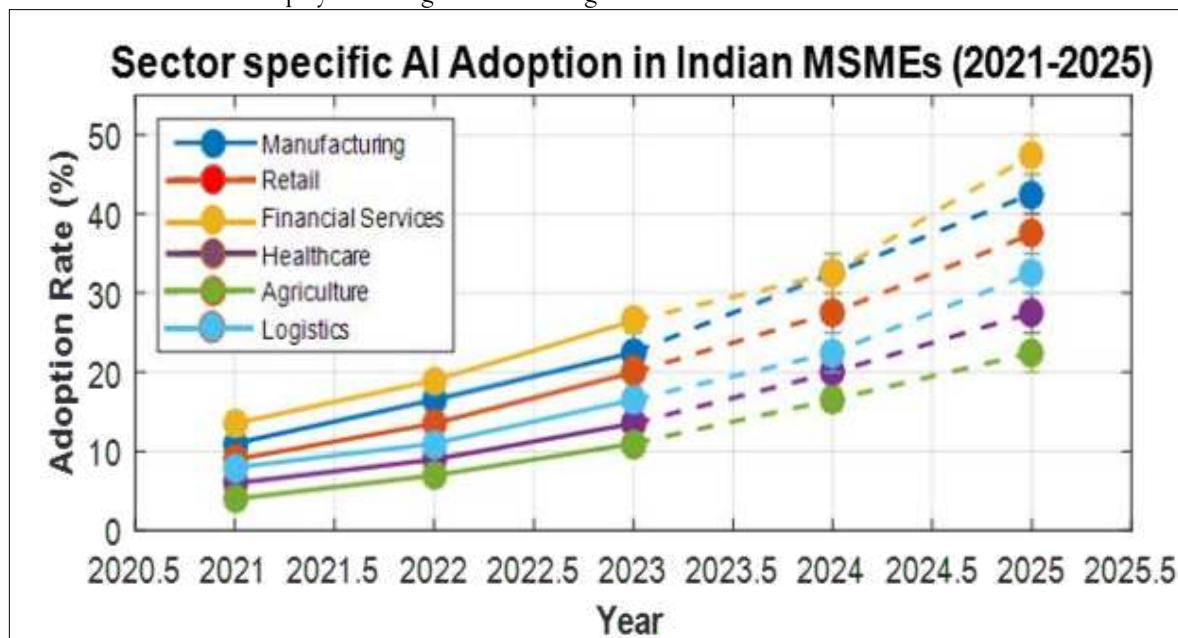


Sector specific yearly AI adoption in MSMEs (2021–2025)

Sector	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Key Use Cases
Manufacturing	10–12 per cent	15–18 per cent	20–25 per cent	30–35 per cent	40–45 per cent	Predictive maintenance, quality control, robotics automation.
Retail	8–10 per cent	12–15 per cent	18–22 per cent	25–30 per cent	35–40 per cent	Demand forecasting, chatbots, personalised marketing.
Financial Services	12–15 per cent	18–20 per cent	25–28 per cent	30–35 per cent	45–50 per cent	Fraud detection, AI-driven credit scoring, chatbots.
Healthcare	5–7 per cent	8–10 per cent	12–15 per cent	18–22 per cent	25–30 per cent	Diagnostic tools, patient management, telemedicine.
Agriculture	3–5 per cent	6–8 per cent	10–12 per cent	15–18 per cent	20–25 per cent	Crop yield prediction, drone monitoring, pest control.
Logistics	7–9 per cent	10–12 per cent	15–18 per cent	20–25 per cent	30–35 per cent	Route optimization, warehouse automation, last-mile delivery AI

Source: Various Industry Reports like EY-PwC, Deloitte India Retail Trend 2024 etc.

The above data can be displayed through the following Chart:



Source: Developed by the author using MATLAB

For MSMEs to be able to take advantage of the growth prospects that AI has to offer, and for India to reap the AI dividend, we must understand where MSMEs stand in their journey towards AI adoption today—what are the greatest opportunities and

challenges for them. NASSCOM conducted a detailed sentiment analysis of tech-enabled MSMEs and the findings of the analysis present a rosy picture of the current state of AI adoption among tech-enabled MSMEs in India.

It was re-confirmed that 94 per cent MSMEs were aware of AI's potential to drive business growth and 87 per cent of them are certain that AI can drive overall productivity. But there is a massive gap between this belief and adoption.

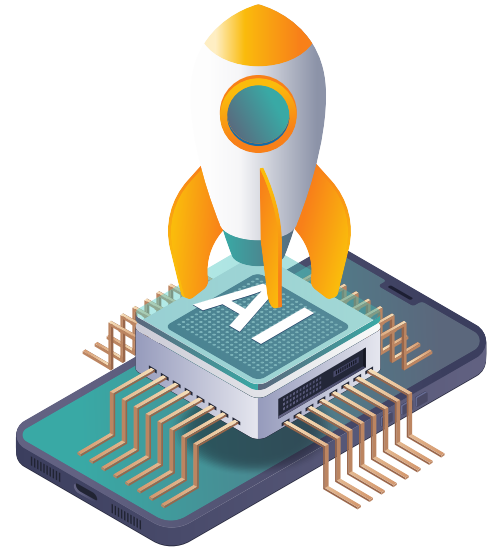
Barriers to AI Adoption in MSMEs in India

Barriers	Impact on MSMEs
High implementation costs	Many MSMEs struggle with the initial investment required for AI solutions.
Lack of AI awareness	Limited knowledge of AI benefits and applications hampers adoption.
Data privacy concerns	MSMEs must ensure compliance with data protection laws while using AI.
Limited AI skill workforce	Lack of skilled professionals restricts AI deployment in MSMEs.
Infrastructure gaps	Poor internet connectivity and digital infrastructure hinder AI adoption in rural MSMEs.
Resistance to change	Many small business owners are hesitant to adopt AI due to fear of job loss or technological complexity.
Interoperability issues	Many MSMEs use outdated or non-standard systems, which may not easily integrate with modern AI tools.
Language and localisation barriers	AI tools not tailored to regional languages or local business contexts may limit usability, especially in rural or non-English-speaking regions.

Government programmes boosting AI Adoption in MSMEs

India has launched several strategic initiatives to facilitate AI adoption among MSMEs, focusing on funding, infrastructure, capacity building, and digital transformation. Key programmes boosting AI in MSMEs in India include the following:

- **SAMRIDH scheme:** Launched by MeitY, the Startup Accelerator of MeitY for Product Innovation, Development & Growth (SAMRIDH) provides up to 40 lakh in seed funding and accelerator support to AI-driven startups. It has empowered over 300



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AI startups, enhancing MSME innovation in manufacturing, healthcare, and fintech.

- **AI for MSMEs programme:** Spearheaded by the Ministry of MSME, this programme offers AI workforce training through Technology Centers, subsidized AI tools, and financial support covering up to 50 per cent of AI implementation costs. By 2024, it facilitated AI adoption among 15,000 MSMEs, improving operational efficiency.
- **Digital India initiative:** Since 2015, Digital India has promoted AI-driven digitalisation through initiatives like AI-based e-marketplaces (GeM), paperless loan approvals (PSB Loans in 59 Minutes), and AI-powered grievance redressal systems, benefiting over 6 million MSMEs.
- **AI-ML accelerator programme:** A joint initiative of NASSCOM and MeitY, this programme offers ₹25 lakh grants, incubator support, and mentorship through partnerships with tech giants such as Google Cloud and Microsoft AI. Over 500 MSMEs across retail, agriculture, and logistics have benefited.
- **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS):** Managed by DPIIT, SISFS provides early-stage funding of up to ₹50 lakh for AI-



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- **National AI portal (indiaai.gov.in):** Launched by MeitY and NITI Aayog, this portal serves as a knowledge hub, offering AI toolkits, case studies, and funding information, accessed by over 1.2 lakh MSMEs to drive digital transformation.
- **MSME 4.0 toolkit (MoMSME, 2023):** Published by the Ministry of MSME, the toolkit provides a structured approach to enabling MSMEs to adopt Industry 4.0 technology with a focus on innovation, digital empowerment, and global competitiveness.
- **IndiaAI Mission (2024):** Initiated by the Government of India and led by MeitY, IndiaAI Mission aims to take India's AI leadership to the international forefront and make the value of AI reachable to the masses. The Union Budget 2025-26 provided ₹2,000 crore for the mission, demonstrating the nation's strong national commitment to AI-led innovation.



AI-based innovations are revolutionising India's MSME sector through improved operational effectiveness, cost savings, and business competitiveness in the global market. AI-based adoption aligns with India's aim to become a \$5 trillion economy and meet the goal of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. The future of MSMEs will rest on automation of the conventional sectors, implementation of AI technology in rural industries, promotion of low-cost AI solutions, enhanced public-private partnership, and growth in AI-based digital business. By solving current issues and taking advantage of strong government support, MSMEs will be able to tap the full potential of AI, driving innovation, growth, and competitiveness globally.

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A driver of economic advancement

In recent days, a surge of media attention has focused on the growing size of India's economy and how it compares to other major global economies. Much of this discourse stems from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) latest estimates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2024, along with its projections extending from 2025 to 2030. According to these projections, India's GDP in 2025 is expected to reach \$4,187.03 billion, just ahead of Japan's \$4,186.43 billion. With this, India is poised to become the world's fourth-largest economy, trailing only the United States, China, and Germany. Although there is ongoing debate about whether GDP is the most appropriate metric to measure economic progress, accepting it for analytical purposes opens the door to understanding the key contributors behind India's impressive economic momentum.

A combination of dynamic sectors and strategic initiatives has played a crucial role in accelerating India's growth. The service sector, especially IT, finance, and real estate, has remained a cornerstone of the economy, contributing significantly to GDP while employing a large segment of the urban workforce. Meanwhile, rapid technological advancement and the rise of e-commerce have added new energy to the

economy, creating new markets and business models. India's economic growth has also been fuelled by rising domestic and rural demand, which has led to expanded consumption and the development of broader internal markets. Strategic investments in infrastructure—particularly in transportation, energy, and logistics—have further enhanced efficiency and created a more business-friendly environment. Digital transformation has been another major catalyst. Government-led initiatives like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile) have not only promoted financial inclusion but also empowered millions through access to digital services, propelling the economy forward. Policy reforms have also played a vital role. The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) unified India's complex tax system into a single framework, while the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) helped streamline business operations and improved investor confidence. Global geopolitical and economic shifts have worked in India's favor as well. Strategies like 'China Plus One' and the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) have encouraged multinational corporations to diversify their operations and invest in India as a reliable alternative. Amidst these factors, one

initiative stands out as a transformative force—Make in India. Launched with the objective of revitalising the manufacturing sector and reducing dependence on imports, this initiative has been a critical driver of India's journey toward a self-reliant or Atmanirbhar Bharat. It encapsulates the broader vision of strengthening domestic capabilities, attracting investment, and firmly positioning India on the global industrial map.

Objective of the Make in India initiative

The Make in India initiative was launched on September 25, 2014, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the ambitious goal of transforming India into a global manufacturing hub. At the launch event held in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, the Prime Minister addressed an audience of global CEOs, redefining the meaning of FDI—not just as Foreign Direct Investment, but also

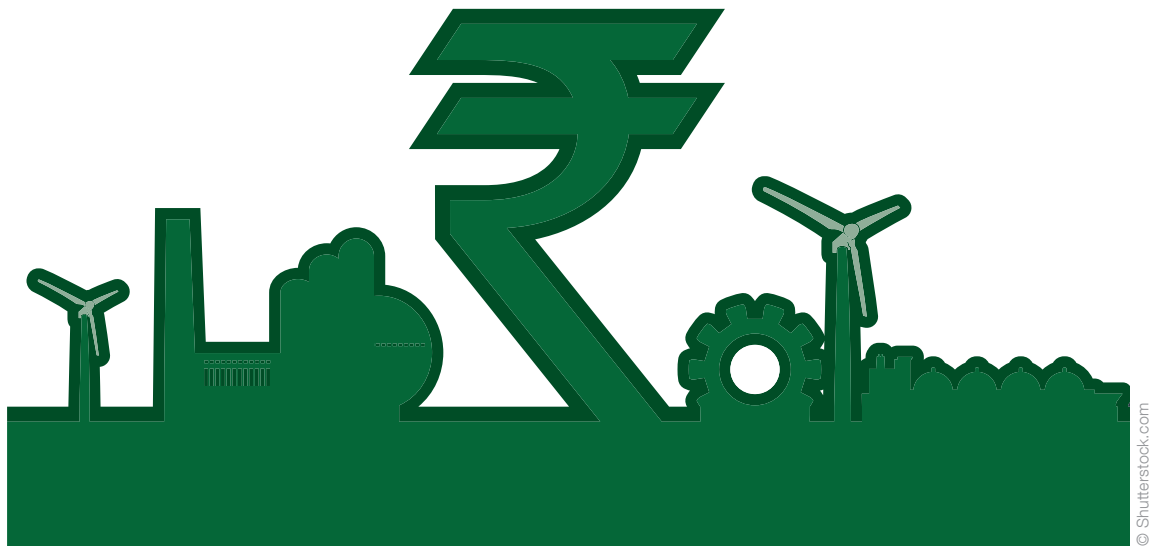
Make in India aimed to encourage both domestic and international companies to set up manufacturing operations within the country, while also attracting large-scale investments into the sector

as First Develop India. His message was clear: India should be seen not merely as a market, but as a land full of opportunities. The vision behind Make in India was multi-dimensional. It aimed to encourage both domestic and international companies to set up manufacturing operations within the country, while also attracting large-scale investments into the sector. The initiative placed strong emphasis on improving infrastructure and the ease of doing business to create a more conducive environment for industrial growth. At the same time, it sought to reduce the nation's dependence on imports, promote exports, and generate employment

through enhanced skill development. Beyond economic growth, Make in India also focused on fostering innovation and promoting sustainable manufacturing practices. Although the initiative initially faced criticism for not meeting some of its ambitious targets, its long-term contributions to India's economic development are becoming increasingly visible. The foundations laid by this program have been instrumental in strengthening India's industrial base and enhancing its position in the global economic landscape.

Key initiatives and objectives under Make in India

To realise the ambitious goals of Make in India, the government launched several targeted programs aimed at strengthening the manufacturing sector and accelerating economic growth across multiple dimensions. One of the flagship components of this strategy is the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, designed to boost India's manufacturing capabilities and enhance export competitiveness. The PLI schemes aim to attract substantial investments, encourage the adoption of cutting-edge technologies, and improve overall operational efficiency in key sectors. Complementing this, the Semicon India Program, launched in 2021 with a budget of ₹76,000 crore, marked a major push toward building India's semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem. By offering capital support and encouraging international technological partnerships, the program seeks to position India as a global player in high-tech electronics. On the infrastructure front, the government launched PM GatiShakti on October 13, 2021. This holistic initiative is focused on building efficient, multi-modal connectivity to support the vision of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. PM GatiShakti brings together 36 ministries under a unified digital platform to ensure coordinated and time-bound



infrastructure development. Closely tied to this effort is the National Logistics Policy, introduced on September 17, 2022. It aims to streamline India's logistics sector, reduce costs, and enhance supply chain efficiency—key requirements for a globally competitive manufacturing landscape. The National Industrial Corridor Development Programme further complements these efforts by aiming to build advanced industrial hubs and smart cities. These corridors are expected to significantly boost industrial productivity and create employment while modernizing urban infrastructure. In addition to large-scale industrial initiatives, the government also focused on promoting entrepreneurship through the Startup India initiative, launched on January 16, 2016. This program was designed to build a vibrant startup ecosystem by offering regulatory support, funding opportunities, and incubation networks, thereby transforming India into a nation of job creators rather than job seekers. Simplifying India's complex tax structure was another key step in making the business environment more conducive. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on July 1, 2017, replaced multiple indirect taxes with a single unified tax

system. This reform helped create a common national market and reduced compliance burdens for businesses across states. Finally, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), launched on April 11, 2016, under the broader Digital India campaign, has revolutionised digital payments. It has not only made transactions faster and more secure but also fostered financial inclusion and become a cornerstone of India's growing digital economy. Together, these initiatives form the backbone of Make in India, driving growth, innovation, and competitiveness, and steadily paving the way for India's emergence as a global manufacturing powerhouse.

Success stories of Make in India

Despite facing initial hurdles and criticisms, the Make in India initiative has gone on to achieve several remarkable milestones that underscore its long-term impact on the Indian economy. By July 30, 2024, a total of 755 applications under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes had been approved across various sectors. These approvals translated into realized investments amounting to ₹1.23 lakh crore by March 2024 and led to the creation of approximately eight lakh

jobs, offering a tangible boost to both industry and employment. One of the most significant achievements has been in the semiconductor sector, which has gained substantial momentum. Landmark projects like Micron's ₹22,000 crore facility and Tata's joint venture with Taiwan's Powerchip in Dholera have marked India's serious entry into high-tech manufacturing. Currently, five major proposals—with a total combined investment nearing ₹1.52 lakh crore—are in progress, reflecting growing global confidence in India's technological capabilities. India's

Make in India initiative has been a significant driver of India's economic advancement, influencing key sectors that contribute to GDP

Ease of Doing Business ranking has seen a dramatic improvement. From a low rank of 142 in 2014, the country surged to 63rd position by 2019 in the World Bank's Doing Business Report, reflecting a more business-friendly

regulatory and procedural environment. Foreign investments have also flowed in steadily. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India increased from \$45.14 billion in 2014–15 to \$70.95 billion in 2023–24, with a record high of \$84.83 billion in 2021–22. Over a ten-year span, FDI inflows rose by 119 per cent, with more than 90 per cent of it coming through the automatic route, signifying improved investor confidence and a streamlined approval system. In the realm of digital payments, India has emerged as a global leader. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) now accounts for 46 per cent of the world's real-time payment transactions. In just the first quarter of FY 2024–25 (April to June 2024), UPI processed transactions worth an astounding ₹81 lakh crore, reinforcing India's status as a digital powerhouse. On the trade front, India recorded its highest-ever exports, reaching \$778 billion in 2023–24,

showcasing the country's growing competitiveness in global markets. Meanwhile, the country's startup ecosystem has blossomed. As of September 25, 2024, India is home to 148,931 DPIIT-recognised startups, making it the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world. These startups have directly generated employment for over 15.5 lakh people, contributing to innovation, job creation, and economic dynamism. Collectively, these achievements highlight the far-reaching impact of Make in India—transforming challenges into opportunities and helping reshape India's global economic standing.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the Make in India initiative has been a significant driver of India's economic advancement, influencing key sectors that contribute to GDP and positioning the country on the brink of becoming the world's fourth-largest economy. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed. A substantial portion of the workforce remains employed in the informal sector, and income inequality continues to be a pressing concern. While GDP serves as a valuable macroeconomic indicator, it does not fully reflect the complexities of inclusive development or social well-being. Still, from the perspective of economic strategy and industrial progress, Make in India has undeniably acted as a catalyst in elevating India's standing in the global economy and shaping its path toward long-term growth. ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

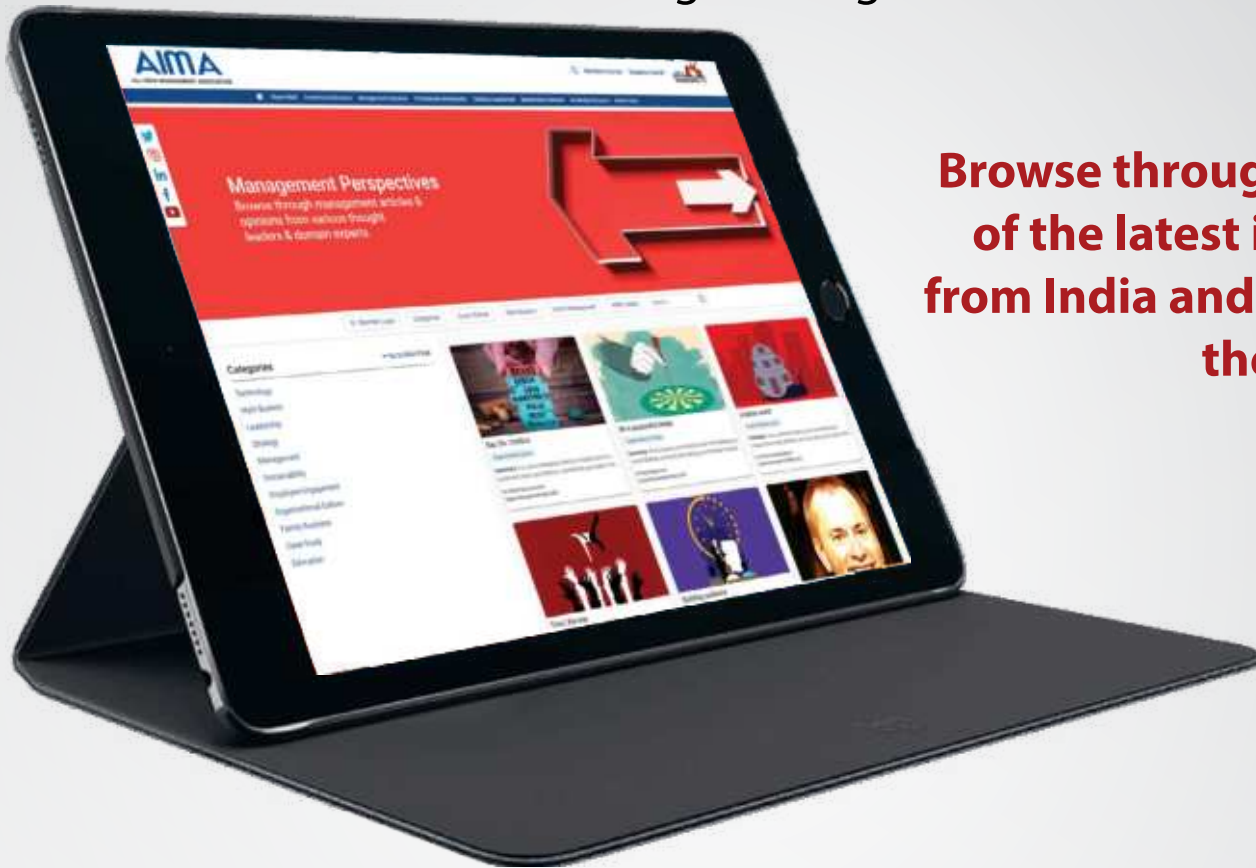
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₹40,000 + GST (without accommodation)
- **Target Group:** Serving & New Vice Chancellors
- **Focus:** Visioning under NEP 2020; Global Trends in University Governance; Innovation & Research Funding Models; Branding and Digital Transformation in HEIs
- **Certification:** Joint Certificate from AIMA & AIU

For further details, please contact:

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