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ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

MAY 2025

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MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACES,
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Mental health in the workplace

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.

Psychological security is the key to mental health in the workplace. It starts with acceptance of the individual, without reference to physical traits, mannerisms, social membership, or any other personal peculiarity that has no bearing on one's work or role

The world has shifted from an exaltation of toughness to a greater sensitivity to suffering, especially in the workplace. 'Don't complain, don't explain' and 'don't ask, don't tell' are no longer the guiding principles of an ideal workplace. Organisations have learned that employee stoicism imposes costs in terms of output, involvement, burnout, and employee turnover.

The COVID lockdowns awakened corporations to the phenomenon of employee mental health, and they have learned to account for its costs and benefits. Mental health management has become particularly important as Gen Z enters the workforce, bringing with them significant social and economic anxieties as well as personal freedom aspirations.

The transition from a grunt economy to a cognitive economy has made the individual more important. Now, business owners and managers want their employees to be present not only physically but also mentally. They worry about employees being distracted, depressed, anxious, and exhausted. They can no longer afford even a few employees to bring down the mood and motivation of the group. It is no longer wise to tell employees to leave their troubles

at the gate. It is now the responsibility of the business to invest in the mental peace, focus, and sharpness of employees.

Employees are people too. They have lives before and after work. They have personal aspirations and obligations, problems, and pursuits. Employers can no longer hope to monopolise their time, attention, and energy without the risk of suboptimal output and damage to the employer brand.

Mental health begins at the top. Rational, reasonable, and sociable behaviour from leaders percolates down to middle management, which gets the real work done. Where middle managers are stressed and anxious, the larger organisation cannot be healthy. To keep employees in good mental shape, it is essential to ensure that middle managers remain calm and care about the mental state of their workforce. It helps to train middle managers in mental health dos and don'ts.

Psychological security is the key to mental health in the workplace. It starts with acceptance of the individual, without reference to physical traits, mannerisms, social membership, or any other personal peculiarity that has no bearing on one's work or role. Any overt or covert stigmatization for not being 'one of us' can place unnecessary strain on the individual and interfere with their focus and motivation. Employees who enjoy being in the office with their colleagues and managers tend to be significantly more productive and innovative than those

burdened with work and personal troubles.

Managing employee mental health is more about fostering a healthy workplace environment and practices than about regimenting wellbeing-promoting programmes, such as meditation and yoga

Employees' mental health in the workplace is closely linked with the consistency and clarity of instructions. Employees who are routinely subjected to competing or conflicting instructions tend to develop chronic anxiety. Clarity and control over tasks are critical for employees to work with minimal stress. Reasonableness and predictability in collaboration are also vital for employees' mental health. Constant uncertainty in workflow can drain employees emotionally.

Managing employee mental health is more about fostering a healthy workplace environment and practices than about regimenting wellbeing-promoting programmes, such as meditation and yoga. While such activities work for some, others rely on social interaction to release stress and receive psychological support from peers. It is important for organisations to provide time and space for employees to socialise. Many business owners and managers may fear that socialisation among employees could lead to trouble, but most organisations would benefit from an enthusiastic workforce rather than a muted one.

Employee mental wellbeing is a vital resource and a critical competitive advantage. It is not about mollycoddling employees at the employer's cost. It is about gaining extra output and avoiding the cost of suboptimal work and high attrition. Energetic, focused, and contented employees ultimately reflect in the P&L and balance sheet. 

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

As organisations continue to evolve in a fast-paced business landscape, leadership has to bear in mind that the stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression associated with the demands of working in such a pressurising environment can significantly impact the mental wellbeing of employees, thereby, also hampering productivity, creativity, and overall workplace morale.

Creating a mentally healthy workplace starts with having open dialogue. And such a dialogue can only take place when employers foster an environment where employees feel safe discussing their mental health, without fear of stigma or judgment. This includes providing access to mental health resources such as counselling services, employee assistance programs, and training for managers to recognise signs of distress.

Flexible work arrangements, realistic workloads, and regular check-ins can also help prevent burnout. Moreover, encouraging a culture of empathy, where rest and balance are seen as strengths rather than weaknesses, promotes long-term engagement and satisfaction.

Leadership plays a key role in setting the tone. When leaders model healthy boundaries and speak openly about mental wellbeing, it signals to employees that it's okay to seek help and prioritise self-care.

Ultimately, mental wellbeing is not just about preventing harm—it's about enabling people to thrive. A workplace that actively supports mental health fosters stronger teams, higher retention, and a more resilient workforce. In today's world, investing in mental wellness isn't just the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do.

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

Maneck Davar
Maneck Davar

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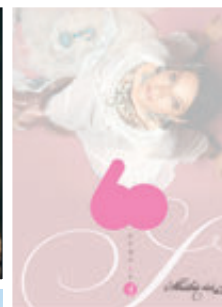
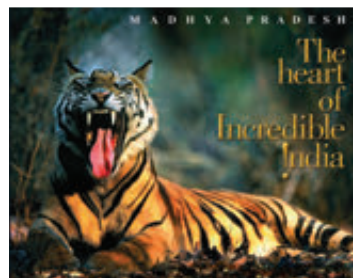
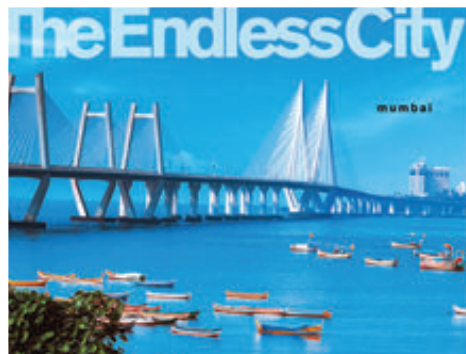
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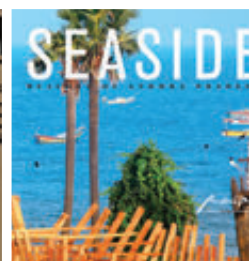
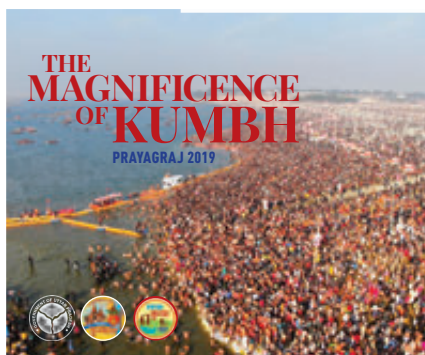
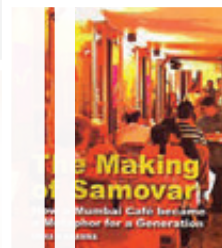
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WORKPLACE WELLBEING







Tushar Dey

Supportive workplaces

Organisations should capitalise on the established conversations to offer tangible support to employees facing wellbeing challenges.

◆ ZOE SINCLAIR, THIS CAN HAPPEN



Over the past five years, we have seen mental wellbeing grow from an emerging conversation to an established topic in APAC. At This Can Happen, we have held virtual conferences in the region since the COVID-19 pandemic started, bringing together local leaders in workplace wellbeing to understand how companies can

best support the mental health of their employees. Over this time, we have seen awareness grow around the importance of mental wellbeing at work, taking its place as a strategic priority and focus area for regional HR teams.

Now, companies should capitalise on these established conversations to drill down and offer tangible support to employees across the various mental wellbeing challenges that they might be facing. Why? Because the statistics here are staggering, and highlight the need for immediate work to be done:

- Globally, an estimated 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety at a cost of US\$ 1 trillion per year in lost productivity (WHO).
- 15 per cent of working-age adults were estimated to have a mental disorder in 2019 (WHO).
- Businesses that create a culture of open communication and mental health awareness see a 20 per cent increase in employee retention rates (MHFA).
- However, there is also some positive news. Since 2020, investment in wellbeing has risen by 27 per cent on average among Asia Pacific employers (Aon), highlighting its growing level of importance and attention.

Here are some thoughts on initiatives that can put your words into action to truly support the mental health of your employees, ultimately creating healthier, more supportive workplace communities-

- **Tackling stigma and creating psychological safety over taboo topics:** Overall, mental wellbeing conversations across Asia are much more commonplace than they were pre-2020, but taboo still exists around certain topics in particular. Through our content and connections in the region, we have seen themes such as the menopause and its impact upon employee wellbeing, alongside conversations around diagnosed mental ill health in the workplace, for example, remain stigmatised. As a result, employees facing these challenges don't speak up about the issues that they are facing, and consequentially, might not receive the help that they need.

In fact, in our 2024 APAC Delegate Survey, more than half of respondents said that mental health remains a taboo to speak about in their workplace. More work needs to be done to tackle stigma across all forms of mental health and foster psychological safety at work, which is defined by CIPD as 'how confident we feel to take appropriate risks at work because of our relationships with colleagues and managers'.

Concerted efforts to raise levels of psychological safety in the workplace will encourage employees to speak with their managers and colleagues about specific challenges that they might be facing, in order to receive the best support from their workplace and ultimately increase trust and connection between the employee and employer.

- **Leadership vulnerability:** With the above point in mind, leadership vulnerability can be one of the most impactful ways of distilling psychological safety across an organisation, leading from the top in terms of tackling taboo in having these sometimes difficult conversations at work.

Through our content, we have been fortunate enough to meet brilliant leaders in APAC who are very much leading the charge here, and helping to cultivate happier, healthier, and more supportive workplaces for all. Jeffery Tan, for example, is Group General Counsel, Chief Sustainability Officer, Director of Legal & Corporate Affairs and Company Secretary of Jardine Cycle & Carriage Ltd;

he spoke at our recent, on-ground event in Singapore with true passion and authority on mental wellbeing in the workplace, leading by example in helping to create a kind, empathetic and psychologically safe environment for all at his company.

Corporate leaders across the region could take a similar approach, helping to create a level of acceptability across the whole business by speaking about their own challenges with mental wellbeing, and helping to normalise the conversation at an organisation-wide level.

- **Year-round support:** Our 2024 APAC Delegate Survey also showed us that 81 per cent of employees surveyed are currently feeling stressed at work. Whilst efforts around awareness days such as World Mental Health Day are brilliant—and certainly a way to drive discussion around wellbeing in the workplace—activity should not solely be focused on this, with radio silence for the rest of the year—and this is highlighted by statistic showing the levels of stress faced by employees in the region, year-round.



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Consider how developing a year-long mental wellbeing strategy can help to create a healthy, supportive workplace community. Activity can absolutely be heightened around key awareness days or weeks to drive conversation further, but having a constant drumbeat of activity across the year as a whole will help your staff to feel safe, supportive and looked after. Employees have mental health every day of the year, and support offered to them should be reflective of this.

- **Nuanced strategies and initiatives:**

When it comes to mental wellbeing, we know that one size doesn't fit all. Mental health does not sit in isolation from an employee's identity, and the respective challenges and hurdles that this might bring along the way.

Employers should be prepared to offer nuanced support to their staff that is reflective of their diverse workforce and the various challenges they might be facing. Look at mental wellbeing from the point of intersectionality, understanding how employees who are carers, neurodivergent,

or non-office based, for example, might have specific wellbeing needs that do not fit into a 'broad is best' approach.

- **Provide mental health training for managers:** By virtue of encouraging conversations about mental health at work, it is essential for managers to be equipped with the right tools and resources to have these conversations with their line reports and colleagues. Offer mental health-specific training for managers in your workplace to understand the core skill of empathetic listening, and for them also to understand how and when to appropriately signpost employees to relevant support for the challenges that they might be facing.

The above five points are only thought-starters on initiatives that can foster a mentally healthy and supportive workplace community. Consider engaging directly with your workforce to understand their specific needs, challenges, and wants when it comes to wellbeing support, so that this can sit at the heart of any plans, strategies, or initiatives that you develop. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zoe Sinclair is founder, This Can Happen.



The human potential to keep learning is limitless; the only barrier is a pessimistic belief that learning is no longer possible.

♦ PHILIP ATKINSON, AUTHOR, *BEE WISE*

STRATEGY

Buzzing with wisdom

Were you aware that honey bees take on seven different jobs in their short lives and only fly to gather nectar in the last few days of their life, or that male bees can't even feed themselves and are starved to death by the female worker bees at the end of their useful life?

In this article, Philip Atkinson lifts the lid on a busy beehive and uses that as a metaphor to gain leadership and learning insights relevant for everyone today.

After a female worker bee hatches and leaves her egg, what comes next is a multifaceted and busy 'career' directed by hormonal changes as well as the needs of the hive. In the winter this career will span several months, but during the summer, all that hard work will be compressed into a lifespan of just a single short month, on average, thirty-four days.

First, as soon as they hatch, the young female worker bees specialise in becoming a housekeeper bee. They are trained by the previous generation of slightly older adult bees to look after all the cells, making sure they are clean and keeping the larvae and the brood

warm. They exclusively perform that role for the first few days of their life. They then take time to train the previous cohort of bees that have just hatched to do the same.

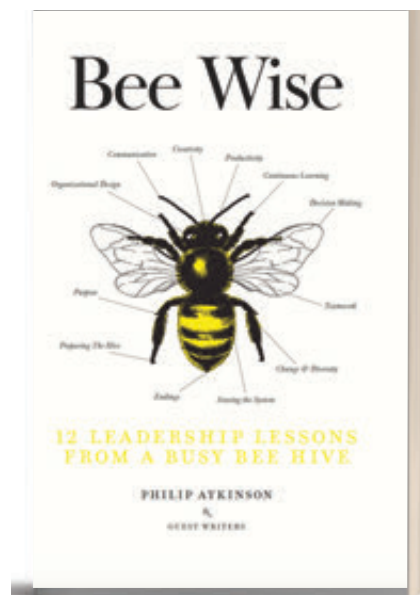
Then they spend the next three to five days doing a completely different role, acting as a nanny to feed the older larvae with pollen and honey. They specialise and focus on this second task before 'retraining again' to become an expert in a different specialty, a nurse.

The nursing role is to look after and feed the young worker bees. This continues with the bees next specialising as builders where they use their wax glands to build the perfect hexagonal six-sided cells. They then focus on security at the front of the hive for the first time and welcome the new bees coming back from their foraging. If you have ever been stung by a bee near a hive, it will probably be a security guard that has given up its life to protect the hive. Their final role is to be a forager. When we marvel at a bee pollinating a beautiful cherry tree or balcony flowers, what you are seeing is a bee at the end of its lifespan, foraging and pollinating for the last two to three days of its life. Be kind to them. It is the end of their life's work.

Throughout the life of a bee, all individuals perform all the main functions within a hive. In case there is a crisis—maybe

a hive is damaged, and the honey cells need rebuilding—the worker bees can be reallocated to specific roles at short notice to serve the needs of the colony. There's an interesting parallel here for us to consider. Life is constantly changing and so will our careers, so to avoid getting lost and overwhelmed by all these changes, we need to stop and look at the world through two different lenses: a short-term lens and a long-term lens. The short-term lens requires us to focus on what we are doing right now and to make sure we're good at it. Therefore, we need to put energy into effective learning and changing our behaviour in a sustainable way.

The long-term lens asks us to keep an eye on the horizon and be aware of what's changing in our external environment. We all need to be more aware of the system beyond our current role and organisation because if we've been inside one organisation for a long time, the risk is that it shapes our expectations, hopes, and fears. If ever we have to leave, we may find ourselves lost. Everyone will experience this at some point in their career, especially during organisational transformations, transitions, or headcount reductions. So, it is important to establish our set of values and goals based on who we are, not on the ones provided by our



workplace. As part of our career evolution, ask yourself what it is I am most interested in. Where do my passions lie? Notice what you like doing and what you don't. Does my work give me joy?

Through your self-reflection, if you realise you are no longer interested or curious about your role, you are probably in the wrong place; it is time to consciously make a move and get out. To turn your research lens back on yourself is a difficult, scary, and



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intimidating process. But it is important: your career is your responsibility, not the company's. Anita Rolls from the Career Intelligence Academy believes we all need to be the CEOs of our careers. She reminds us that, like running a business, we need to work in our career as well as on our career. She proposes a model of four metaphorical hats we need to wear to drive our career and lead a fulfilling life in today's changing world:

- The Chief Operations Officer (COO) hat helps us deliver value in our current role in a way that's sustainable and enjoyable for us too.

We also need to work on our careers and make sure we make time for the following:

- The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) hat gives us clarity on how we will measure success and what is most important to us in our career and life overall.
- The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) hat is all about showing up, not showing off—cultivating our brand and network based on who needs to

know what we can and want to do.

- The Chief Innovation Officer (CIO) hat ensures we keep learning and developing our own valuable skills and capabilities, so we can keep reaching more of our potential and stay relevant to the needs of society and the job market.

There is no longer such a thing as a job for life in a big organisation and if ever you have to leave that big organisation, it shouldn't come as a shock or a surprise. Therefore, do not take anything for granted, do not stay static, and do not assume the world's not changing. Be curious about what's going on for you as an individual; be curious about what's happening across society and in your industry. And keep being open-minded, keep learning and keep training.

Everything you know today you have learnt, and your potential to keep learning is limitless. The only barrier is a self-defeating belief that learning is no longer possible. So, like the bees, keep moving. Keep learning. Keep adapting. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip Atkinson is the founder, Hive-Logic. Philip is also author, *Bee Wise - 12 Leadership Lessons from Inside a Busy Beehive*.



A customer advisory board (CAB) is a tech secret to growing your company, opines Irene Yam, a customer advisory board expert. Irene is also author, *Build World-Class Customer Advisory Boards*.

**MYTH
BUSTER**

Accelerate your customer network

Since the 1980s, technology companies have had customer advisory boards (CABs) to validate roadmaps. However, CABs can be much more strategic than tactical. Often, founders or newly appointed C-suite leaders are asked by their venture capitalists to have a CAB but are not given guidance on how to run one.

Here are five myths that founders or entrepreneurs have about CABs.

MYTH 1: A CAB IS A SALES EVENT.

Many leaders who decide to have a CAB turn the board into a sales event, rather than hosting a strategic meeting where the C-suite can open up about their business challenges, ask for assistance, listen to their customers' feedback, and be able to validate business strategies and priorities.

Focusing on the CAB as a sales event is natural; every founder automatically sells, but all that time spent "selling" to your customers can devalue your brand. Instead, use the CAB to share your strategies, goals, and plans for the future.

Examples of why technology companies have CABs: When a start-up pivoted to a new product category, it sought to learn why customers had selected their solution over

the most significant competitor. Was it price, innovation, or ease of use? And what positioning or messaging resonated with the customer? The founders wanted to ask about the customers' challenges and find the root causes. During the CAB, they unlocked reasons and aided its start-up with precise product positioning.

A mid-size company set its sights on building a global enterprise platform. Before cutting sales and marketing and investing in R&D to build the next innovative, secure cloud platform, the C-suite, particularly the COO, wanted to validate product prototypes with its customer advisory board members from different industries. They confirmed many of their plans by listening to and talking with ten customers at a time from different-sized companies and industries.

MYTH 2: THE BEST CABS HAVE ONLY C-SUITE CUSTOMERS.

Most executives request that only their C-suite customers be invited; leaders naturally want to connect with others in C-suite positions. The team will feel confident telling their board directors that they have secured C-Suite advisors as their brain trust.

However, having only C-suite executives on the board may not give you a complete

viewpoint of your customer. Many buyers are vice presidents or director-level; these customers may have been past super admins of these products and have significant insights. A mix of C-suite and middle management CAB members will give you and your board members a 180-degree and balanced viewpoint.

Additionally, having only C-Suite board members may not support your CAB's short and long-term company goals.

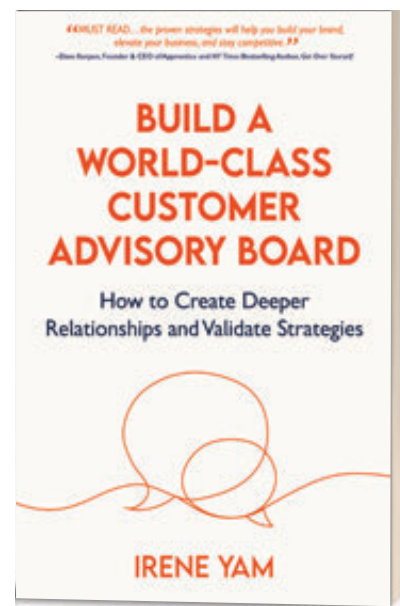
It is very important to consider the CAB goals first. Back to the start-up example, they wanted customers who were the decision-makers rather than the title for their CAB. For the mid-size company looking to invest heavily in R&D, it was not the C-suite customer but customers with domain expertise and experience deploying the technology who would best provide use cases and validate the R&D roadmap.

MYTH 3: CAB MEETINGS MUST HAVE DETAILED PRESENTATIONS TO IMPRESS THE BOARD.

The number one complaint from customers who attend CAB meetings, primarily during a virtual CAB meeting, is the number of presentation slides.



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“During the CAB, their executives gave too many presentations. They only asked us questions until the end; it felt like a webinar.”
“The executives could have talked less and engaged with us in discussions.”

From the point of view of a new founder or head of product, they were looking to impress the board members by telling them how many features they had on their roadmap. While the intention was sincere, board slides are meant to foster discussion, learning, and the ability to gather insights from their customers.

Curate CAB board slides to help open customers up to dialogue. These discussions often yield deeper insights from your board and spark new ideas, innovation, and exciting moments that help businesses confirm their strategies or discover new opportunities.

MYTH 4: PLANNING A CAB ADJACENT TO AN INDUSTRY EVENT IS A PRAGMATIC USE OF TIME AND BUDGET.

All companies are looking to conserve budgets,



especially travel and entertainment. Most of my clients ask to run their customer advisory board at an industry event, whether it be during the conference or a day before or after the conference.

While this might make financial sense, these CAB meetings can become rushed and lackluster. Customers often have so many distractions—meetings, sessions, and networking events—that it's hard to capture their undivided attention. Many customers will access their devices during your CAB to check on the next meeting or if someone they asked to meet has gotten back to them.

If you want to be pragmatic with your budget, consider scaling down your CAB by having it in a city where your customers reside. Plan a one-day CAB at a centralised venue where you meet all day. Balance the CAB agenda with smaller breakout groups and include a memorable experience.

MYTH 5: THE CAB MEETING YIELDS THE MOST RETURN.

Early in my career, I focused strictly on the CAB event. Only when I worked closely with a seasoned CEO did I see that the post-CAB phase had the most significant impact on the company.

As soon as the company had twelve

customers, we created a small board of eight customers. We even flew in a customer from Europe to San Francisco. After the CAB, each start-up leader connected with customers—sometimes it was just to check in on their account or to validate an idea or offering. And vice-versa, customers also called the CAB C-Suite team to ask questions on how to customise their investments to maximise the solution. These conversations often times turned into alpha features.

These customers soon became our most faithful advocates. As this company grew, the CAB customers became references for other customers. What stood out was our CAB members were happy to support our rounds of venture capital funding and some even joined our Pre-IPO investment tour, which increased our valuation.

The CAB accelerates trust through the bond of being on your board, whether taking calls with financial or industry analysts to validate your technology, venture capitalists for more funding, or acting as your customer reference to boost your brand and growth.

Without a customer advisory board, it can take months or, often times, years to build these connections with your customers. Start a CAB to accelerate these strategic customer connections. **IM**



Leading the leap

As India sets its sights on becoming a \$5 trillion economy, the nation stands at an inflection point where leadership competencies will determine the trajectory of growth. The interplay of strategic vision, digital transformation, entrepreneurial dynamism, and global collaboration will be instrumental in propelling India towards economic pre-eminence. Leadership in this era must be visionary, agile, and deeply rooted in inclusive and sustainable development principles, ensuring that growth benefits every sector and segment of society.

A transformative economic vision is the bedrock of national progress. The ability to position India in the global economic hierarchy demands leaders who can synthesise macroeconomic trends with microeconomic reforms. The ambition is not merely to attain a numerical GDP target but to structurally evolve into one of the world's top three economies. This requires a convergence of strategic policy, investment in frontier technologies, and a commitment to enhancing competitiveness. Aligning individual, corporate, and national aspirations within a unified economic framework would ensure

momentum in the right direction.

The foundation of a thriving economy is its innovation ecosystem. Research and development must transcend traditional silos and permeate every industry, from manufacturing to services, biotechnology to artificial intelligence. India must cultivate an ecosystem where startups, academia, and enterprises collaborate to fuel indigenous innovation. Government initiatives such as 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' should not only focus on self-reliance but also on technological supremacy in fields like semiconductors, AI, and quantum computing and upcoming 6 G technology. An economy that thrives on knowledge creation rather than mere consumption will sustain long-term economic leadership.

At the heart of this transformation is digital leadership. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has underscored the power of AI, automation, and blockchain in redefining industries. Indian leadership must steer digital inclusion initiatives, ensuring that cutting-edge technologies reach every corner of society. The AI revolution in India should be driven by scalable solutions in governance, finance, healthcare, and agriculture, harnessing the power of big data for precision decision-making. Digital transformation is not just

India must strategically build international partnerships, leveraging cross-cultural leadership skills to integrate into global value chains

about technology adoption but about embedding data-driven strategies into policy frameworks and corporate strategies.

Agility and adaptability are indispensable in an era of economic flux. Leaders must embrace lifelong learning to navigate evolving business landscapes. The ability to pivot

swiftly in response to global economic shifts ensures resilience. Organisational learning cultures must be fostered, where continuous skill development is the norm rather than an exception. In a rapidly shifting geopolitical and economic environment, only those who internalise adaptability as a core leadership trait will thrive.

A \$5 trillion economy must be inclusive, ensuring that the dividends of growth reach all. Equitable wealth distribution, employment generation, and rural upliftment should not be peripheral concerns but central tenets of economic planning. The focus must be on empowering MSMEs, fostering skill development, and bridging the urban-rural divide. Digital banking, fintech solutions, and microfinance play a crucial role in ensuring financial inclusion, making capital accessible to small entrepreneurs and rural enterprises. The

democratisation of economic opportunities is the surest path to sustainable prosperity.

Global leadership is no longer an option but a necessity. India must strategically build international partnerships, leveraging cross-cultural leadership skills to integrate into global value chains. The ability to negotiate trade pacts, attract FDI, and enhance ease of doing business will determine India's competitive edge. Economic diplomacy should be at the forefront, with a focus on increasing India's share in global exports and attracting high-value foreign investments. The synergy between domestic growth strategies and global economic positioning will dictate long-term success.

A sustainable future necessitates responsible leadership. Economic expansion cannot come at the cost of environmental degradation. Green energy, circular economies, and carbon-neutral strategies must be embedded within the broader economic vision. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and Net-Zero commitments are steps in the right direction, but they must be backed by scalable green infrastructure, incentives for sustainable enterprises, and regulatory mechanisms that encourage environmental stewardship without stifling innovation.

An entrepreneurial mindset must be deeply



embedded in India's economic DNA. Risk-taking should be celebrated, and failure viewed as a stepping stone rather than a setback. A culture that fosters calculated risks, resilience, and rapid scalability is crucial for transforming startups into global enterprises. India's unicorn ecosystem has showcased immense potential, but the next phase of growth must focus on sustainable scaling rather than valuation bubbles. Policy frameworks should ensure that regulatory complexities do not stifle innovation but rather enable a thriving startup culture.

Strategic thinking and meticulous economic planning are indispensable for actualising

A sustainable and inclusive economic model is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity

the \$5 trillion dream. Leaders must develop robust economic frameworks that balance short-term imperatives with long-term objectives. The role of data-driven decision making in shaping policies, business strategies, and national economic direction cannot be overstated. From GST reforms

to Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, economic structuring must ensure efficiency, predictability, and competitiveness. The ease of doing business must be continuously improved, minimising bureaucratic friction and maximising investment potential.

Resilience must be a core national competency. Economic uncertainties and global disruptions from financial crises to pandemics are inevitable. The ability to preempt, mitigate, and rebound from crises differentiates robust economies from fragile ones. Building resilient financial systems, diversifying economic dependencies, and fostering adaptive regulatory policies ensure that external shocks do not derail progress. National resilience is an interplay of strong institutions, forward-thinking leadership, and an economy that can self-correct in the face of disruptions.

A sustainable and inclusive economic model is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity. The challenge lies in balancing high growth with environmental and social sustainability. Circular economies, renewable energy investments, and sustainable industrial practices must become mainstream. Green finance, carbon credits, and incentivisation of sustainable businesses should form the crux of India's economic transition. The alignment of economic ambition with environmental responsibility will define the sustainability of India's growth trajectory.

Enhancing India's global competitiveness is paramount. The nation must position itself as a preferred investment destination by simplifying regulatory processes and ensuring policy stability. Foreign Direct Investment must be strategically channelled into high-value industries that enhance India's technological and industrial base. Exports should be bolstered through targeted incentives, ensuring that Indian enterprises integrate seamlessly into global supply chains. National branding must be reinforced, projecting India as a hub of innovation, quality manufacturing, and service excellence.

Access to capital is the fuel for economic acceleration. Financial inclusion must be deepened, ensuring that startups, MSMEs,





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and rural enterprises have seamless access to credit. Digital banking and fintech innovations have already made significant strides, but further simplification of regulatory frameworks is needed to attract global capital inflows. Initiatives such as new labour codes, GST reforms, and PLI schemes are steps towards fostering an investor-friendly environment. Economic leadership requires ensuring that financial systems facilitate rather than hinder entrepreneurial ambitions.

As India marches towards its \$5 trillion goal, leadership will define the pace and permanence of this progress. A visionary economic blueprint, fused with digital prowess, sustainability, inclusive growth, will determine whether India can transcend its aspirations and cement its place among the top three global economies. The interplay of strategic foresight, entrepreneurial agility, and global collaboration will shape the nation's economic destiny.

The transition to \$5 trillion economy cannot be achieved through incremental improvements alone. It requires what economist Joseph Schumpeter termed 'creative destruction'—the continuous cycle of

innovation that renders old industries obsolete while creating new ones. India's innovation ecosystem, while showing promising growth, needs to fill critical gaps in research commercialisation and deep tech development.

In an era marked by rapid geopolitical realignments and technological disruptions, our leadership class must cultivate "telescopic economic vision"; the ability to simultaneously track global macroeconomic trends while maintaining focus on grassroots development.

The loom of tomorrow weaves no tapestry for the passive. To inherit its vibrant threads, one must forge their own shuttle, sharpen their individual skill to a keen edge. The future, as Toffler foretold, yields only to the adept, the nimble, the relentlessly self-cultivated. No inherited fortune of knowledge suffices; each soul must excavate their potential, polish their talents until they gleam, ready to meet the swift currents of change. For, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." The future is a crucible, demanding not mere existence, but the honed capability and competency to shape its very form. **IM**



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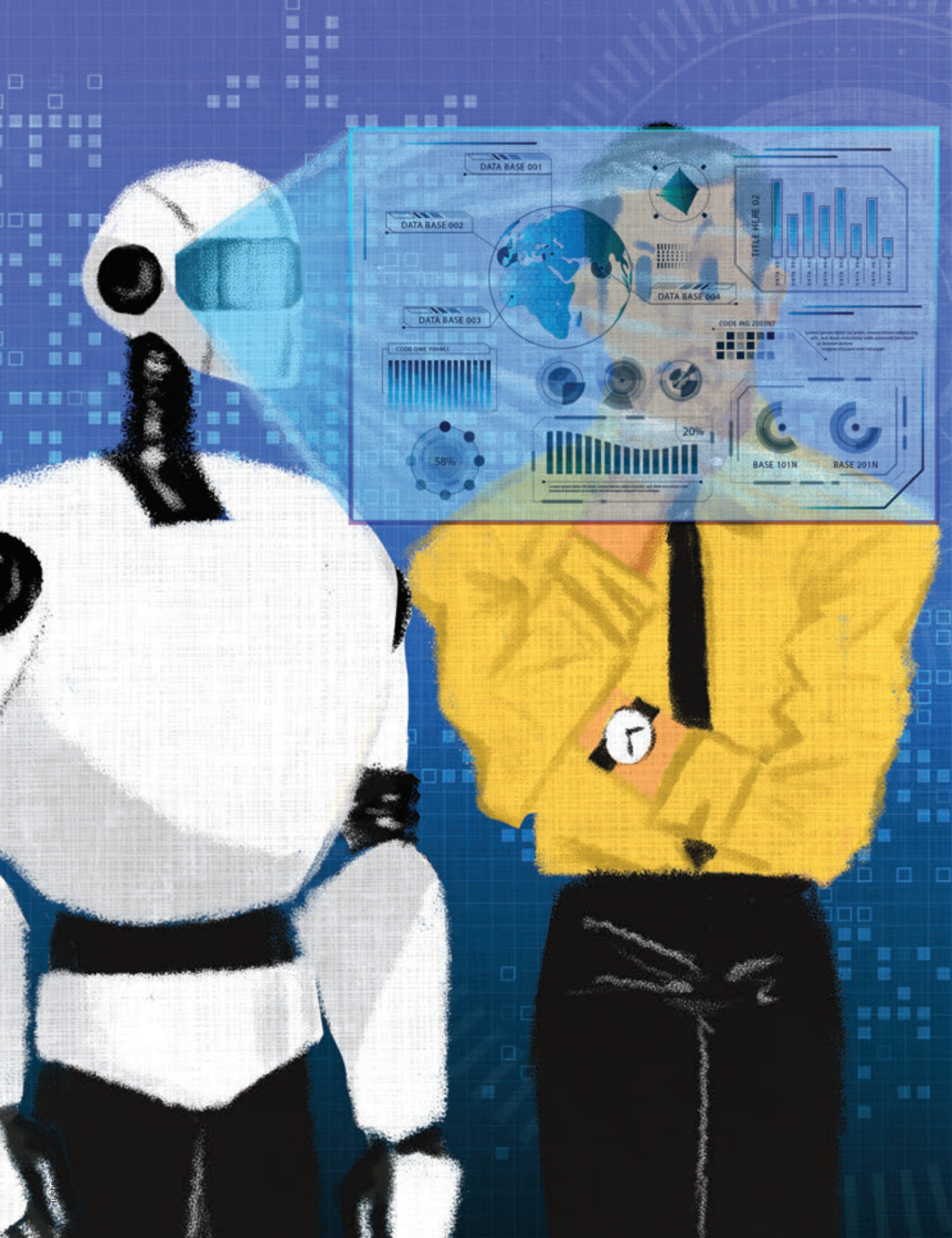
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Individuals must look at AI not as a competitor who will replace them, but rather as an enabler that can help them work smarter.

♦ JEREMY CAMPBELL, BLACK ISLE GROUP

TECHNOLOGY

An enabler of the future

Employee engagement is tanking. People are feeling drained, detached, and disillusioned. Gallup reports only 32 per cent of employees feel engaged at work—a sharp decline from 38 per cent just a few years ago. But here's the real question: can artificial intelligence (AI) change that?

Used wisely, AI could be the key to transforming work from a chore into something genuinely fulfilling. Gallup's latest data shows a dramatic drop in enthusiasm, commitment, and overall workplace satisfaction, with many workers feeling disconnected, burned out, or disengaged. The question is: can artificial intelligence (AI) reverse this trend? The answer is yes—if used correctly.

The scale of the problem

Engagement drives everything—productivity, retention, and overall business success. Research from McKinsey shows that disengaged employees cost businesses up to 34 per cent of their annual salary in lost productivity. With hybrid work, job uncertainty, and AI-driven restructuring, workers are feeling increasingly detached from their roles.

Recent high-profile cases highlight this crisis, with employees voicing frustrations over AI-driven changes and job insecurity. At Meta, internal reports revealed widespread dissatisfaction following mass layoffs and shifting corporate priorities. Meanwhile, at Amazon, workers have staged protests over excessive monitoring and high-performance demands. These examples underline the urgent need for businesses to rethink how they engage their employees.

How AI can address engagement issues

AI is often seen as a job-stealer, but in reality, it can help make work more engaging by taking over tedious, repetitive tasks. That frees employees to focus on the kind of creative and strategic work that actually excites them. Here's how:

■ Reducing repetitive work

A major cause of disengagement is the monotony of routine tasks. AI can automate data entry, scheduling, and administrative duties, allowing employees to focus on strategic, creative, and meaningful work. For instance, Unilever uses AI to streamline recruitment and HR tasks, freeing up managers to focus on people rather than paperwork.

■ Enhancing workplace flexibility

Training AI models involves complex data sovereignty issues, such as data governance, regulations pertaining to cross-border data flow, conflicting global trade policies, to name a few. Biases and ethical concerns add to these growing challenges

AI-powered tools help personalise work experiences, making flexible schedules and remote work more feasible. For example, Microsoft's Viva platform uses AI to analyse employee work habits and recommend better scheduling to prevent burnout. AI-driven insights can also help managers identify when employees are overloaded, ensuring workloads are balanced.

■ **Providing real-time feedback and recognition**

Employees crave recognition, but traditional feedback mechanisms are slow and ineffective. AI can provide instant feedback on performance through smart analytics. At Google, AI-driven systems assess coding efficiency and provide recommendations in real-time, allowing employees to improve continuously rather than waiting for a quarterly review.

■ **Better mental health and wellbeing support**

AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants, such as Wysa and Woebot, provide employees with 24/7 mental health support, offering stress management strategies and coping mechanisms. Some firms are integrating AI to monitor workplace sentiment, helping leaders proactively address concerns before they escalate.

■ **Personalised learning and development**

AI can tailor learning paths to individual employees, ensuring they gain relevant skills and career growth opportunities. For example, IBM's AI-driven learning platform identifies skill gaps and suggests courses, improving career development while keeping employees engaged.

Practical solutions for business leaders

Implementing AI to boost engagement requires more than just technology—it demands strategy. Here is how businesses can make it work:

■ **Use AI to support, not replace, human management**



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AI should enhance human leadership, not substitute it. Leaders must balance AI-driven insights with emotional intelligence to create a more engaging and supportive environment.

- **Prioritise transparency and trust**
Employees need to understand how AI is being used and how it benefits them. Companies should communicate AI's role in improving work-life balance rather than just optimising efficiency.
- **Encourage employee input on AI integration—as seen at Siemens, where employee committees help shape AI adoption strategies.**
Employees should have a say in how AI tools are introduced and used in the workplace. Involving staff in the decision-making process increases acceptance and engagement.
- **Measure the impact of AI on engagement**
Businesses should track key engagement

metrics before and after AI implementation to assess effectiveness. If AI isn't improving employee experience, adjustments must be made.

Final thoughts

AI has the potential to transform workplace engagement, but only if companies use it the right way—ethically, transparently, and with the clear goal of enhancing human work, not replacing it. It must empower employees rather than simply drive efficiency. Companies that integrate AI to reduce drudgery, support wellbeing, and provide meaningful career growth will see engagement rise—and with it, productivity, innovation, and retention.

AI is not here to replace us—it is here to help us work smarter, not harder. Companies that harness it for engagement, not just efficiency, will be the ones that thrive. The question is: will yours be one of them? It is about AI enabling humans to do their best, most fulfilling work. The companies that understand this will lead the next era of workplace transformation. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Campbell is CEO of Black Isle Group and creator of Nudge.ai – turning learning into lasting habits.



The Indian aviation sector has been boosting connectivity, regional growth, innovation, and global competitiveness, driving economic progress toward a developed, Vikshit Bharat.

LEADERSHIP

- ♦ DR DEBASISH SUR, THE UNIVERSITY OF BURDWAN, BURDWAN; DR SIDHARTHA BHADRA, MUC WOMEN'S COLLEGE; AND PRADIP BHABAK, THE UNIVERSITY OF BURDWAN

Skyward ascent

The vision of 'Vikshit Bharat' or 'Developed India' is a long-term aspiration that seeks to transform India into a nation marked by widespread prosperity, advanced infrastructure, and enhanced quality of life for all its citizens. This vision is deeply intertwined with the progress and modernisation of various sectors, among which the aviation sector plays a pivotal role. The Indian aviation industry is not merely a facilitator of transportation but a significant driver of economic growth, regional development, and global integration. Over the past few years, this sector has witnessed substantial advancements, further emphasising its critical role in shaping a developed India. This article delves into how the aviation sector contributes to the realisation of Vikshit Bharat supported by recent developments and case studies that highlight its importance.

Economic growth and development

■ **Contribution to GDP**

The aviation sector's contribution to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is substantial, reflecting its importance as an economic powerhouse. The sector contributes directly through airline operations, airport management, and related services, as well

as indirectly through the stimulation of tourism, trade, and investments. According to the reports published by the International Air Transport Association and the Ministry of Civil Aviation, India, the aviation sector accounted for about 1.5-2 per cent of India's GDP before the pandemic. This equated to a contribution of approximately \$72 billion in 2018-19. The sector's contribution to GDP in 2023-24 was estimated to return to around 1.5-1.8 per cent. This would equate to approximately \$70-80 billion, potentially surpassing the pre-pandemic contribution depending on the pace of economic recovery and growth in the aviation sector. The direct contribution includes the revenue generated by airlines, airports, and ground services.

Additionally, the sector supports industries like tourism and hospitality, which further enhances its impact on GDP. Tourism alone, heavily dependent on aviation, contributed around \$194 billion to India's GDP in 2019, representing about 6.8 per cent of the total GDP.

■ **Employment generation**

The aviation sector is a significant employer, providing millions of jobs across various skill levels. From pilots and engineers to ground

staff, cabin crew, and airport management professionals, the sector creates both direct and indirect employment opportunities. In 2023-24, the industry is estimated to support approximately 7.2 to 7.8 million jobs, both directly and indirectly. The employment opportunities extend beyond the immediate boundaries of the aviation industry, influencing sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and retail. The ongoing expansion of airports and the introduction of new routes, especially under the UDAN scheme, have further driven job creation in smaller towns and cities, contributing to balanced regional development.

Infrastructure development

■ Airport modernisation

Airport modernisation is a cornerstone of the aviation sector's contribution to the vision of Viksit Bharat. Modern and efficient airports are essential for improving the quality of infrastructure, a key indicator of a developed nation. India has embarked on a comprehensive airport modernisation program, which includes expanding existing airports and

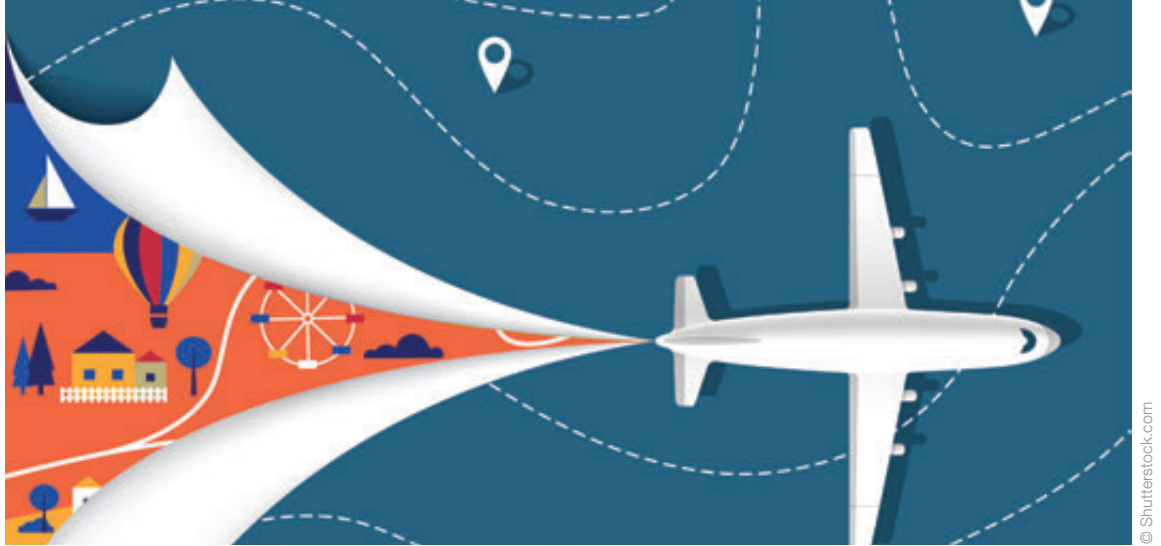
constructing new ones, particularly in tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

For instance, the expansion of the Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru which saw the completion of its second terminal (T2) in 2023, is a prime example of how airport modernisation can lead to improved passenger handling capacity and better services. T2, known as the 'Terminal in a Garden', is designed to handle an additional 25 million passengers annually, featuring advanced technology and sustainable design.

Similarly, the construction of the Noida International Airport in Uttar Pradesh, which is expected to be operational by 2024, is another significant development. This airport is poised to become one of the largest in the country, with a capacity to handle 12 million passengers annually in its first phase, eventually expanding to accommodate 70 million passengers per year. This project not only enhances India's airport infrastructure but also stimulates regional economic growth by attracting businesses and tourism to the area.



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■ Smart airports

The integration of smart technologies in airports is revolutionising the aviation sector in India. Smart airports leverage advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and big data to enhance operational efficiency and passenger experience. Features such as biometric check-ins, AI-driven security systems, and automated baggage handling are becoming increasingly common in Indian airports.

Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) is a leader in this regard. In 2023, IGIA introduced facial recognition technology, enabling a fully biometric-based seamless travel experience. This technology reduces wait times, enhances security, and improves overall passenger satisfaction. The adoption of such smart technologies aligns with the vision of Viksit Bharat by positioning India as a global leader in modern infrastructure.

Enhanced connectivity and regional development

■ UDAN scheme

The Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN)

scheme is one of the most significant initiatives under India's regional connectivity and aviation development strategy. Launched in 2017, UDAN aims to make air travel affordable and widespread by connecting underserved and remote regions with the rest of the country. This scheme plays a crucial role in enhancing regional connectivity, promoting balanced regional development, and ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach all parts of the country.

As of 2023, the UDAN scheme had successfully connected over 400 underserved routes, bringing air connectivity to remote areas such as the Northeastern states and smaller towns like Darbhanga in Bihar. These developments have led to a significant increase in tourism and local economic activity in these regions. The scheme has also facilitated the growth of small and regional airports, which are vital for supporting the overall aviation infrastructure in the country.

■ Boost to tourism

Improved air connectivity directly supports the growth of tourism, which is a vital part of India's economy. The aviation sector plays

Indian airlines and aviation companies are increasingly investing in sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs) and more efficient aircraft technologies to reduce their carbon footprint.



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a critical role in opening up new tourist destinations and improving access to existing ones, thereby encouraging both domestic and international tourism. The increased influx of tourists boosts foreign exchange earnings and creates jobs in the hospitality and related sectors.

The direct flights launched between key international markets and popular tourist destinations like Goa and Kerala in 2023 have significantly boosted tourism in these regions. For instance, the introduction of direct flights

between New York and Goa by Air India has made the state more accessible to American tourists, leading to a surge in visitor numbers and contributing to the local economy.

Global integration and competitiveness

■ **International aviation hubs**

Developing India as a major international aviation hub is crucial for enhancing global connectivity, facilitating trade, and attracting international businesses. This aligns with the vision of Viksit Bharat, which envisions India as a global economic powerhouse.

Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, recognised as one of the top 10 best airports globally in 2023, exemplifies India's potential to become a leading international aviation hub. Its strategic location and world-class facilities make it a preferred transit hub for international flights, further integrating India into the global aviation network.

■ **Growth of Indian airlines**

The expansion of Indian airlines globally and their participation in international alliances contribute to India's global presence and competitiveness in the aviation sector. Indian

carriers like Air India, and IndiGo have been expanding their international operations, enhancing India's connectivity with the rest of the world.

Air India's acquisition of 470 aircraft from Airbus and Boeing in 2023, under the Tata Group's management, is a significant move aimed at positioning Air India as a leading global airline. This fleet expansion is expected to improve the airline's service quality, increase its market share, and enhance India's competitiveness in the international aviation market.

Innovation and technological advancement

■ **Aerospace engineering**

India's investment in aerospace research and development (R&D) is crucial for fostering innovation and strengthening the country's position in the global aerospace industry. The development of indigenous aircraft and advancements in aviation technology are essential components of this strategy.

The successful flight of India's first indigenous regional transport aircraft, the Hindustan-228, in 2023, marks a significant milestone in India's aerospace engineering capabilities. This aircraft, developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), is expected to enhance regional connectivity and reduce dependency on foreign-made aircraft. Such developments underscore India's growing expertise in aerospace engineering and its potential to become a global leader in this field.

■ **Sustainable aviation**

The focus on developing sustainable aviation technologies is critical for aligning with global environmental goals and supporting the vision of sustainable development in Viksit Bharat. Indian airlines and aviation companies are increasingly investing in sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs) and more efficient



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aircraft technologies to reduce their carbon footprint.

In 2023, SpiceJet partnered with the CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum to conduct test flights using biofuel blends. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to achieve carbon neutrality in aviation, which is crucial for reducing the sector's environmental impact. Similarly, IndiGo announced its goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, reflecting the aviation sector's commitment to sustainability.

Skill development and education

■ Aviation training institutes

The growth of the aviation sector necessitates a steady supply of skilled professionals, including pilots, engineers, technicians, and management personnel. Establishing and expanding aviation training institutes is essential for meeting this demand and supporting the broader educational and skill development goals of a developed India.

The GMR Aviation Academy, which opened a new campus in Hyderabad in 2023, is set to train thousands of aviation

professionals annually. This institution offers specialised courses in airport operations, safety, and management, contributing to building a highly skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of the evolving aviation sector.

■ Research and innovation centres

Encouraging the establishment of research centres dedicated to aviation technology and management is crucial for fostering innovation and preparing India for future challenges in the aviation sector. These centres play a pivotal role in advancing technological developments and enhancing operational efficiency within the industry.

The National Centre for Aerospace Innovation and Research (NCAIR), established in Bengaluru in 2023, is expected to drive advancements in aerospace technology and materials. This centre is a collaboration between academia, industry, and government, aimed at promoting research and innovation in the aerospace sector. Such initiatives are vital for positioning India as a leader in aviation technology and ensuring the sector's long-term sustainability and growth.

Safety and regulatory standards

■ Enhanced safety protocols

Adopting and enforcing global best practices in aviation safety ensures the well-being of passengers and the efficient operation of the sector, which are critical for maintaining trust and reliability. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) introduced new safety regulations in 2023, including enhanced pilot training programs and stricter maintenance checks. These measures have resulted in a record-low incident rate, reinforcing India's commitment to aviation safety.



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■ Regulatory reforms

Streamlining regulatory processes, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and enhancing transparency can make the sector more efficient and attractive for investment, both domestic and international. The implementation of the Aircraft Leasing and Financing Regulations in 2023 has made it easier for Indian airlines to lease aircraft from global lessors, reducing costs and improving fleet management. This reform is expected to boost the growth of the aviation sector and attract more international players to the Indian market.

Sustainability and green initiatives

■ Green airports

Developing environmentally friendly airports with sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient designs, water conservation, and waste management, contributes to a greener India. Cochin International Airport, the world's first fully solar-powered airport, continued its expansion in 2023 by adding more solar panels and implementing rainwater harvesting systems. These initiatives have reduced the airport's carbon footprint significantly, setting an example for other airports to follow.

■ Carbon neutrality goals

The sector's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint through initiatives like carbon-neutral flights and eco-friendly aircraft technology supports the global climate change agenda. IndiGo's announcement in 2023 of its goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 underscores the aviation sector's commitment to sustainability. The airline is investing in new fuel-efficient aircraft, exploring sustainable aviation fuels, and implementing carbon offset programs to meet its targets.



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Conclusion

The Indian aviation sector is a critical pillar in the vision of Vikshit Bharat. By enhancing connectivity, promoting regional development, fostering innovation, and contributing to global competitiveness, the sector not only supports economic growth but also drives India towards becoming a developed nation. The continued evolution and modernisation of the aviation industry, underscored by recent developments and forward-looking initiatives, will be essential in realising a prosperous and well-connected India. As the sector advances, it will play a pivotal role in shaping a future where India stands as a global leader in aviation and a symbol of modernity, sustainability, and inclusivity. 

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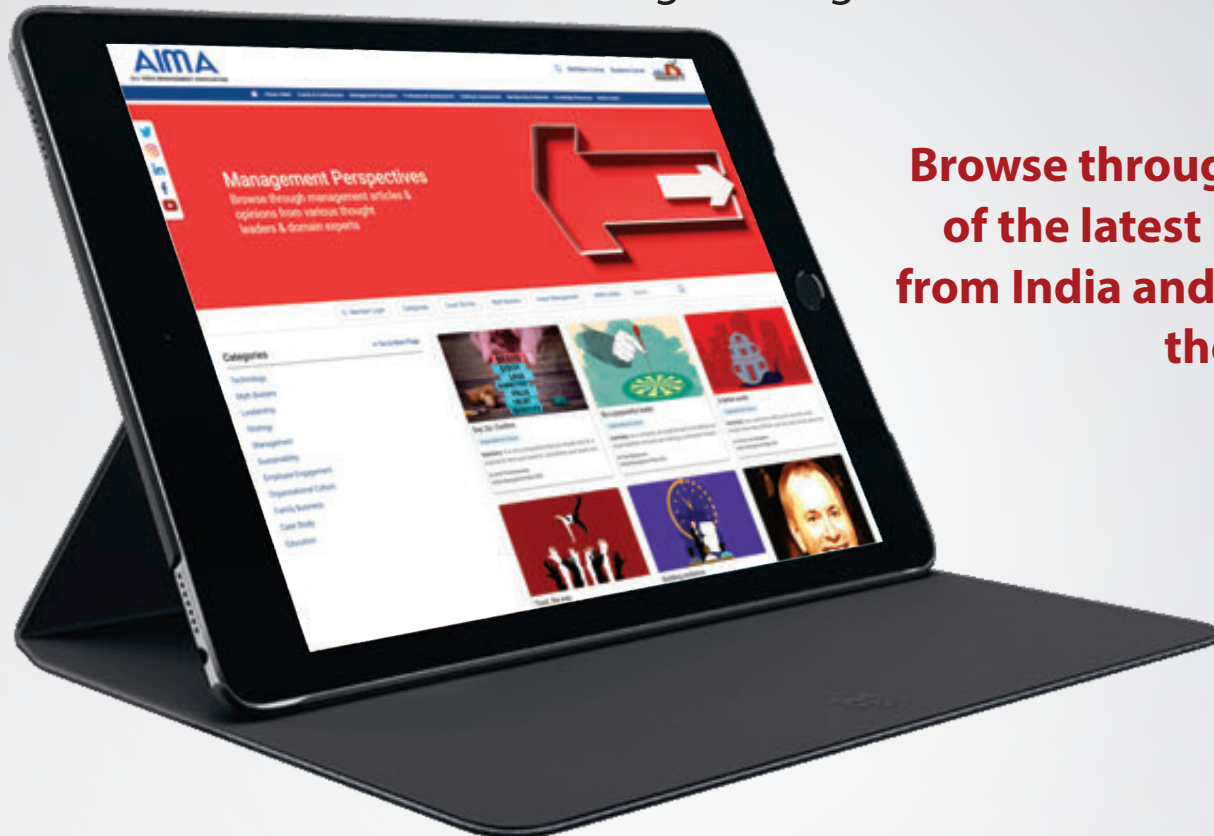
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