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ACE UP THE SLEEVE

David Roche

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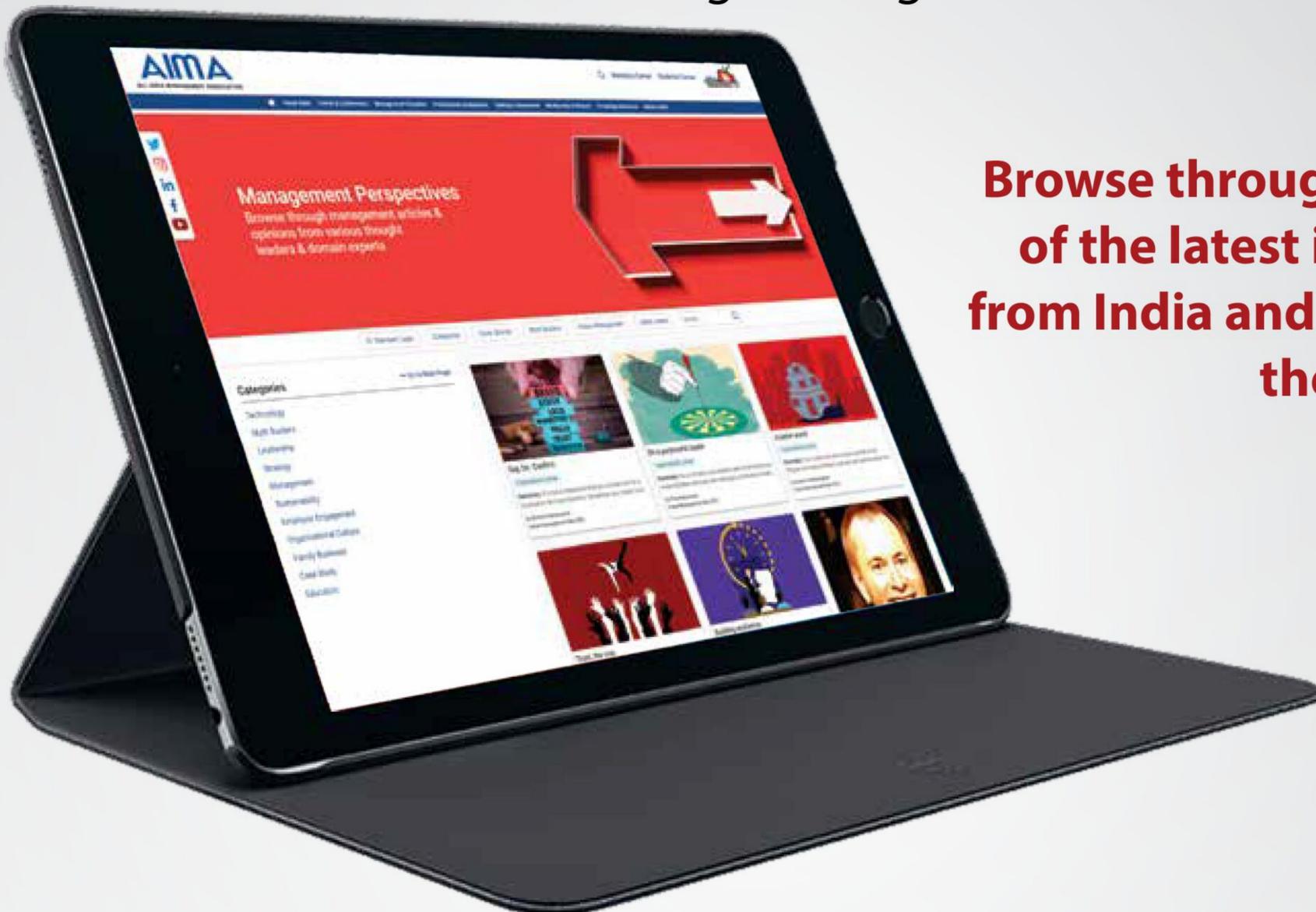
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The people skill superpower

Nikhil Sawhney is President, AIMA & Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Triveni Turbine Limited, and a Director of Triveni Engineering.

Leadership is about getting the people excited and convinced about one's aims and ideas. Yet, the rarest skill among leaders is the people skill.

Most of the corporate leaders trust their position to obtain cooperation and the organisation processes to get results. But that approach has limited utility in a continuously changing and challenging environment where

Speaking pleasantly, listening respectfully, communicating clearly, and helping team members with tasks and personal issues are the most basic of people skills that every leader must possess or acquire

everybody's initiative and ingenuity are essential for enterprise's success. It is no surprise that too many leaders are frustrated and blame their modest achievements on their teams.

People skills have become even more necessary as specialists are replacing generalists in leadership

positions. Most specialists are good at what they do but they lack the willingness and ability to relate to the people around them. Enterprises cannot afford to leave it to the individual to show or develop people skills.

It is important for organisations to have people skill development programmes not

just for the leaders but for everyone. It is not just the managers who can use help with behavioural and social skills but also their subordinates. Social and cultural adjustment at every level is necessary to minimise friction and maximise productivity. Both the current and the future leaders need to be trained in essential people skills.

Speaking pleasantly, listening respectfully, communicating clearly, and helping team members with tasks and personal issues are the most basic of people skills that every leader must possess or acquire. It helps to have the ability to emotionally connect with subordinates and charge them up for contributing more to the organisation's cause. Ultimately, people are willing to do more for the leaders who they believe care about them.

Leaders must lay the foundation for elevating the team's level by demonstrating their own ability before making demands on others. They need to show confidence and trust in the team by giving substantial autonomy to individuals and groups. It helps to encourage team members to help each other, which also allows the leaders to free themselves from the minutia and focus on the big picture. A little appreciation now and then can be a game changer as it puts the people in the self-motivation mode.

An effective way to ensure acceptable or preferred behaviour is to link it with evaluation

People management comes into a sharp focus when there is a change of leadership at any level. The new leaders need to handle the transition with sensitivity and ensure that a change in leadership does not turn into a haemorrhage of talent.

and rewards of the managers. While the slave driving managers tend to get more done and faster, their toxicity damages the social health of the organisation and makes it vulnerable to

talent erosion and flight. The top management must convey to managers down the line that good people skills are not merely desirable but also necessary.

A most common symptom of poor people skills of managers is their poor rating of subordinates and frequent new hiring to replace the previous hires. Punishment is usually the weapon of the incompetent. Developing people's ability and improving their performance is an essential KRA of the

leaders. A high-performance culture is built around improving people by investing in them and making them feel that they can achieve more.

People skills are most critical at the middle management level, which filters and forwards most of the tasks and reports. Usually, the

middle managers are overwhelmed with demands from both above and below and they are left with little energy or enthusiasm for people issues. Burnouts are most common at the middle management level. The top leaders need to be mindful of the people dimension of vision and strategy implementation.

People management comes into a sharp focus when there is a change of leadership at any level. The new leaders need to handle the transition with sensitivity and ensure that a change in leadership does not turn into a haemorrhage of talent. The new leaders who do not find adequate support from the top themselves tend to quit midway through the transition.

People skills are the superpower that every leader needs, irrespective of their genius in specific expertise. After all, leaders can achieve only as much as their teams would help them to. 

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Imagine a leader who possesses great academic knowledge, has mastery over technical skills, possesses enviable financial acumen, but still fails in his/her role of leading the organisation. What could've possibly gone wrong? The most probable answer here is 'the leader's lack of people skills'—personal traits, by the virtue of which, a leader takes his/her people along, treats them with respect, and makes them feel valued.

Leaders with long-term goals have long-term strategies to achieve those goals. Such leaders need people by their side... people who are aligned to the same long-term vision as their leader. Leaders who possess good people skills are successful at cultivating positive relationships with their people, thereby building such a team of highly motivated individuals. Such leaders are good communicators, exhibit emotional intelligence and empathy, and prioritise conflict resolution.

Individuals are seen to perform better in an environment where they have the freedom to express themselves, where they can question without the fear of being judged, and where criticism comes in a constructive, as opposed to demeaning, form. Such a work culture can only be fostered if the leader—generally, the CEO—shows genuine interest in his/her people and trusts them. As David Roche, author, *Become a Successful First-Time CEO*, writes in the cover story of this issue, "Only by relying on their people skills can a leader foster an environment where their own and their team's technical expertise truly stand out."

What is your take on the importance of people skills in a leader? Do write in with your views to imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com

Maneck Davar
Maneck Davar

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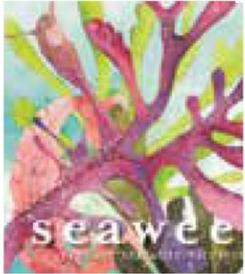
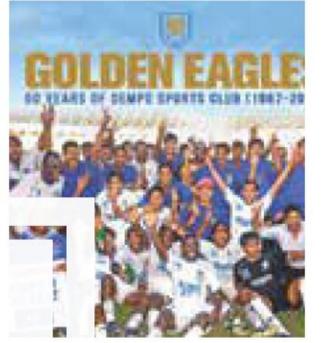
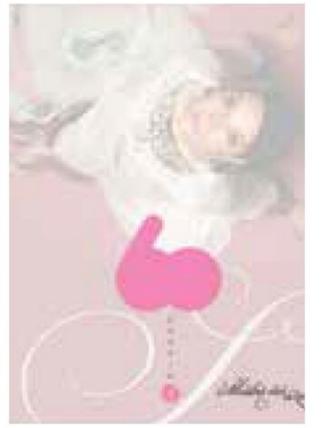
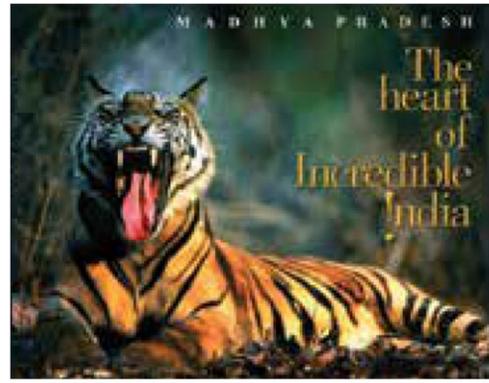
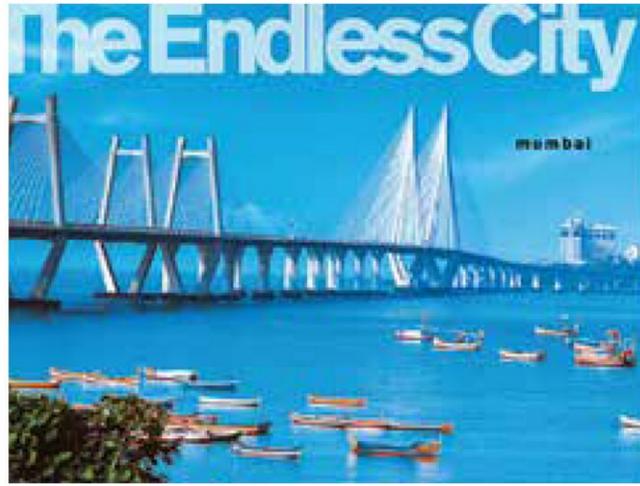
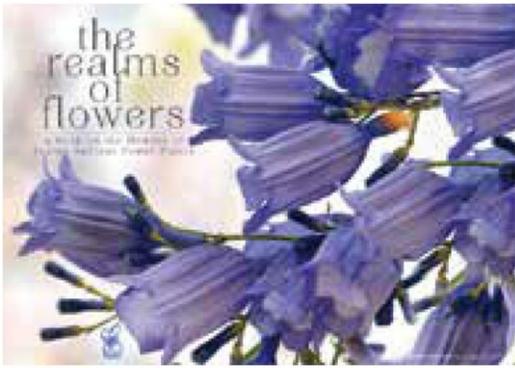
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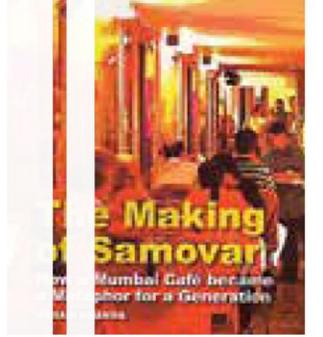
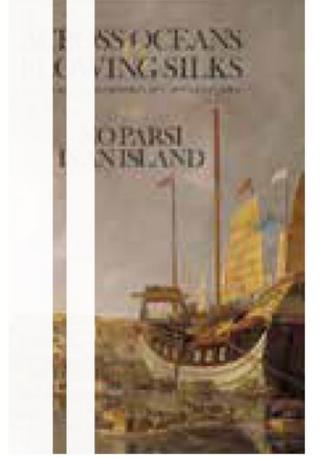
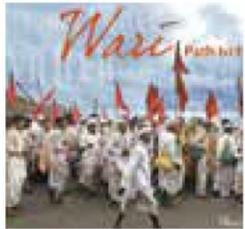
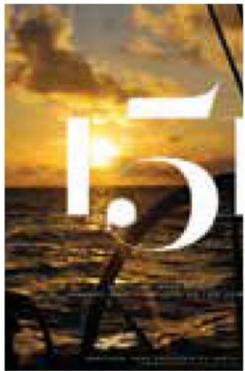
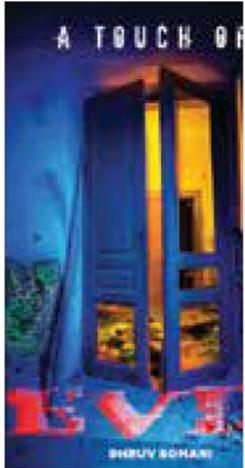
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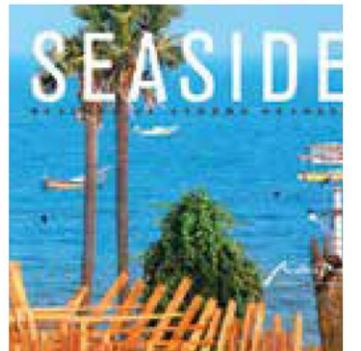
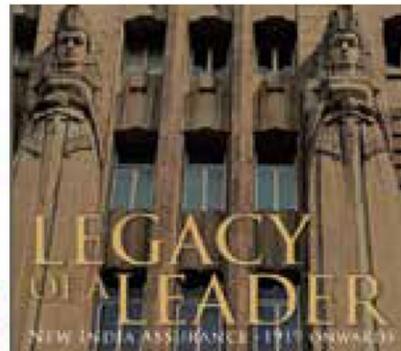
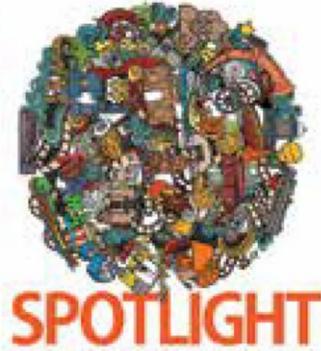
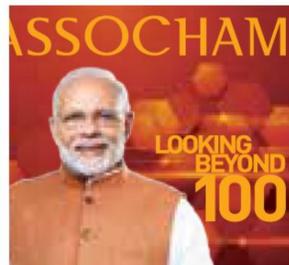
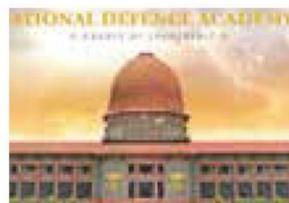
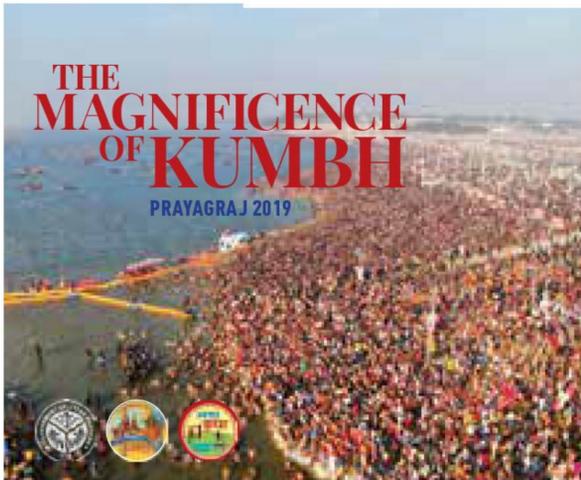
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LEADING WITH EMPATHY







Dinesh Bhogale

Ace up the sleeve

People skills are crucial for a first-time CEO's success.

◆ DAVID ROCHE, AUTHOR, *BECOME A SUCCESSFUL FIRST-TIME CEO*



According to *Harvard Business Review*, two out of five new CEOs fail within their initial eighteen months. It is not their experience or expertise that is at fault; but rather their deficiency in people skills and inability to cultivate the essential relationships with the key points of contact in the company.

The high failure rates are evidence of too much focus on the selection process and not enough following up to ensure integration is deeper than mere induction meetings. Too often, the new CEO is expected to be out of the blocks on day one and delivering the items on the '100-Day Plan'. Arguably, one of the biggest jobs in the world is President of the United States; there is nearly a three-month gap between the declaration of the election's winner to the inauguration day when they take up office, and a transition team is appointed to help manage the process. In the UK, Keir Starmer's Labour Party shadow cabinet have been working with the Civil Service since the beginning of the year, with the approval of the current Conservative Prime Minister, to help the transition that would arise as a result of a change of government at the next general election.

However, there is a notable absence of support mechanisms tailored for new CEOs. As a consequence, it is unsurprising that seven out of 10 leaders are said to suffer uncertainties about their experience or skills being adequate.

In this article I will discuss why the focus for first-time CEOs should be on people skills and relationship building to ensure they feel thoroughly prepared for the demands of their role.

How far do technical skills take you?

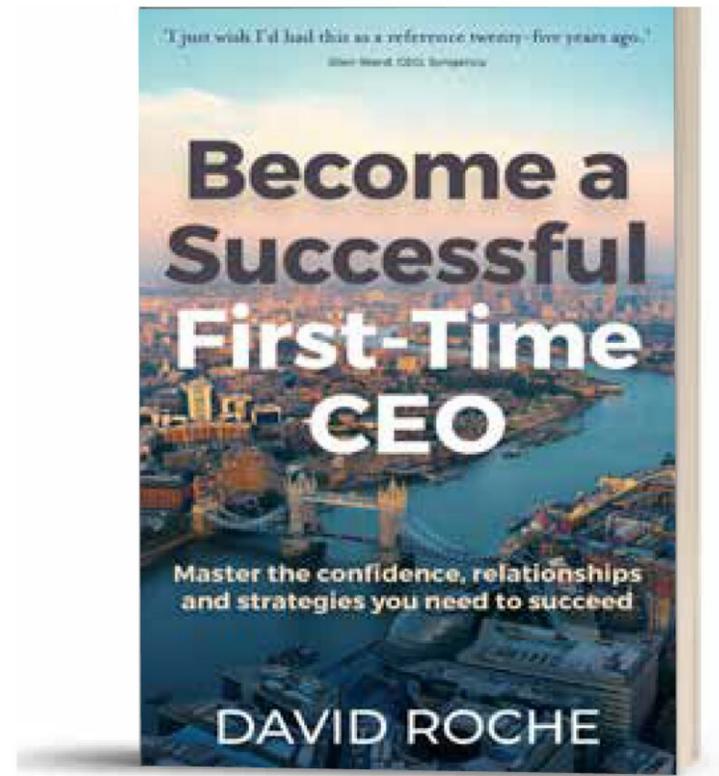
Often, there is an expectation in the business world for individuals who have reached the top position within an organisation to come pre-loaded with all the necessary experience and skills required for the job. New CEOs often have a track record of success and may seem destined for leadership roles, exuding confidence and making the transition appear effortless to onlookers.

However, the reality for a first-time CEO is often quite different. While they may have possessed sufficient skills to earn the promotion, they now find themselves taken out of their comfort—and sometimes competence—zone and put into an unfamiliar position of overall responsibility that they have not experienced before to this degree. This transition is frequently made without adequate support and coaching to ensure optimal performance. Despite their technical expertise, new CEOs commonly struggle with thoughts like:

- As the leader of the company, I am expected to have all the answers.
- There is an expectation for me to be knowledgeable, share my perspective, and make the right decisions.
- I am supposed to be good enough or I would not have been given the job.

Under these circumstances, it is how this CEO then builds his/her relationships that will set him/her up for success. There is real pressure in this new role; for most, it is at a level that they have never experienced before. Everyone in the company depends on you. And their families and dependents do too. Their livelihood depends on the success of the company and, therefore, on you.

As a consequence, some choose to wear the armour of a supremely confident image despite what is actually going on underneath. What this behaviour can discourage is the willingness of those around such a confident leader to speak truth to power, as such advice is not received well. Whilst it is true that people look at you differently when you are appointed as a CEO, this does not imply that you should not acknowledge when you require the assistance of others. Genuine confidence is evidenced when a leader seeks answers, builds people skills and creates an environment that encourages debate and differing viewpoints.



The capacity to understand others' perspectives and empathise is becoming increasingly rare, yet it is a vital tool to a highly skilled leader—be it business or politics. Only by relying on their people skills can a leader foster an environment where their own and their team's technical expertise truly stand out.

The CEO Winner's Circle examines the relationships that first-time CEOs need to get right in order to be successful.



GREY AREA COACHING

The CEO Winner's Circle examines the relationships that first-time CEOs need to get right in order to be successful.

Relationships are unpredictable

The ‘CEO Winner’s Circle’ highlights the key relationships first-time CEOs should be building both internally and externally. It is important to recognise that it all starts with you, and that is where you should place initial focus.

An athlete who competes against others will be trained to make initial moves or set plays to defeat an opponent, but the truly great individuals and teams transcend that and play what is in front of them. They override the set play that the hours of practice have tried to instil as second nature and just go for it: the drop shot in tennis, the sidestep and outside break in rugby or, most obviously, the strategy and reaction on a chess board. Every individual is different amongst all these vital connections and there’s no fixed answer that can be applied in all cases to any particular circumstance.

Arguably, there is no definitive answer in any relationship scenario, as some individuals may have a unique reaction to the person before or the next person. While there are probabilities, there is no certainty. As Mike Tyson famously said in answer to the question about whether he was concerned about his next opponent’s strategy to defeat him: “Everyone has a plan until they get hit.” This is why it is crucial for new CEOs to continuously refine their people skills to effectively influence across diverse settings.

The importance of engaging with a professional coach and mentor to develop the necessary people skills

While first-time CEOs may anticipate the tasks they must undertake, they frequently find themselves ill-prepared for the psychological and emotional intricacies and impacts associated with the role. This is why coaching, mentoring, and business books all handle this critical area of relationships differently. Business books tend to follow a format of the top five things to do/avoid in order to



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succeed and that is very difficult to do with relationships. The ‘If ‘x’ happens, then do ‘y’ approach works less well here.

However, first-time CEOs need a safe sounding board and a wise head to be able to think things through and learn on the job which is where coaching and mentoring add value. Whether you are a first-time CEO or an experienced leader or aspiring to become one, having a coach or mentor can be crucial, providing a confidential space to voice challenges and concerns that you might be experiencing in and out of the workplace.

As a new CEO, communication barriers can exist, and it might feel like you are speaking a different language to other individuals—maybe the frequency of it, possibly the level of detail, or understanding of why. This is where a good coach and mentor can act as an adaptor, to help you make connections that just weren’t there before. Often, when coaches and mentors discuss a real example from their pasts, it can unlock a parallel problem the current client is fighting with, helping them to have a ‘light bulb’ moment to see their issue differently. When faced with insurmountable problems, the solution can seem miraculous.

Fundamentally, when faced with challenges, it is the support, guidance, advice, and skills of their surrounding network that will aid new CEOs in persevering. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Roche is a professional executive coach and mentor at Grey Area Coaching; Chair of London Book Fair and the writing agency New Writing North; and author, *Just Where You Left It* and *Become a Successful First-Time CEO*.



Companies that fail to catch up with the latest HR trends may not be able to provide the best-in-class employee experience.

♦ J DEVAPRAKASH, TARAPUR ATOMIC POWER STATION

TECHNOLOGY

Machines in managing minds

When the much-awaited motion picture Enthiran hit the silver screen in 2010, audiences were amazed by the lead character Chitti, the human-like, AI-based robot who defied human limitations effortlessly. Back then, the idea of such a machine becoming reality seemed far-fetched.

But within twelve years of the film's release, the launch of ChatGPT in 2022 and Bard (later renamed as Gemini) in 2023 ushered us into a new era of conversational artificial intelligence (AI), bringing the concept of 'Chitti' closer to reality. Now, we can simply talk to machines and get things done—from drafting proposals to creating images and from preparation of tour itineraries to obtaining expert advices—just like a personal assistant.

Recalling a scene from Enthiran where Chitti evinces an extraordinary reading speed, devouring books at an incredible pace, relentlessly requesting more. In a humorous turn, even bulky telephone directories are no match for Chitti's insatiable appetite. This act

underlines the key difference between Chitti and humans. Unlike us, who become engrossed in the stories and narratives within books, Chitti processes information indiscriminately. To Chitti, a captivating novel and mundane phone listings hold the same significance—mere data. In the world of AI, what Chitti does is called data analytics, to be precise machine learning algorithms to process data.

The intelligent machines

“Artificial Intelligence is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programmes,” according to John McCarthy, the father of AI. These powerful machine algorithms are capable of churning through complex statistical analysis and massive amounts of text data in a flash. That is why business giants and leaders are now turning to AI solutions to automate tasks, make data-driven decisions, personalise customer experiences, and innovate for a competitive edge.

AI-powered Management

Among the 5 M's of management (Manpower, Money, Materials, Machines, and Methods),

manpower is considered the most critical factor in achieving organisational goals. In today's dynamic digital landscape, securing and keeping talents is the ultimate challenge. Interestingly, the digital realm offers solutions, too. In fact, many organisations have already commenced tapping it. And, talent acquisition and management are now moving beyond traditional ways. Today, advanced technologies like chatbot, machine language, computer vision, etc. are increasingly gaining popularity.

According to a recent survey, almost all the Fortune 500 companies including the globally top-listed ones, such as Walmart, Amazon, Apple, Ford, Tata, and Reliance are using AI in some way or other in their HR functioning. Keeping pace with private businesses, many public sector companies and

several government departments in India have also began leveraging AI technologies in governance, including in recruitment.

Hiring new employees in a public sector company can be a long haul. It entails navigating a complex web of regulations and managing large datasets.



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Headhunting gets easier

Hiring new employees in a public sector company can be a long haul. It entails navigating a complex web of regulations and managing large datasets. In that, a significant portion of the process involves manually identifying the suitable applications.

A typical job posting receives over 25 applications. Here is an instance to relate: The 7.2 lakh government postings (offered during 2014 to 2022) attracted a whopping 22 crore applications, according to a Lok Sabha written reply.

That is why, to many recruiters, screening is a nightmare. Applications verification is a gruelling task as analysing vast amounts of data is incredibly time-consuming, and relying solely on manual processes can be taxing. At times, screening alone takes months, leave aside the rest of hiring process. Besides, limitations of human such as fatigue, emotions and cognitive overload lead to additional hold-up in the screening process. And that's where AI comes to the rescue.

Automating routine tasks

Repetitive, time-consuming tasks can be effortlessly managed with the help of AI solutions. Chat GPT-based tools are capable of automatically screening and shortlisting candidates by going through each application, checking for relevant skills, qualifications, and experiences, if the applications are too many.

By introducing NIRJA, an AI bot and machine learning algorithm, in 2019, National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) reportedly became the first Indian public sector company in revamping its HR functions aligned with the most recent developments in the field. NTPC's Intelligent Recruitment and Job Assistant (NIRJA) was aimed at facilitating its recruitment process. Another state-owned giant, Oil and



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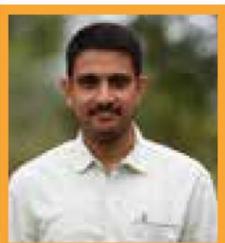
Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), too has jumped into this AI race by incorporating machine-language-driven solutions in its recruitment process. Evidently, AI is growing in prevalence in hirings across organisations, and now, several public sector corporations and government departments are turning to AI solutions to make their selection process simple and reliable.

In reservation compliance

In line with its Constitutional promise of equality, India uses a reservation system to give people from disadvantaged background a fair shot at jobs in government offices and state-owned companies. Government departments and companies comply with reservation mandates by keeping track of vacancies using rosters. It encompasses the control of different aspects, like employee scheduling, resource allocation, and regulations compliance.

AI tools in roster maintenance unlock smarter workforce management, resulting in a more efficient and productive business. AI solutions can also be beneficial in monitoring and ensuring adherence to reservation policies and regulations. It can automatically flag any discrepancies or violations in the roster and suggest corrective actions. Using predictive analytics, forecasting of future staffing needs—by studying historical data and considering backlogs—can be significantly streamlined.

As Forbes put it, “AI will be a game changer for headhunting.” Smart businesses are beginning to align themselves with the impact of AI, which is driving the fourth industrial revolution, and are moving towards “Smart HR 4.0.” Perhaps, companies that fail to catch up with the latest HR trends may find themselves struggling to keep pace with the changing landscape, and may not be able to provide the best-in-class employee experience. **IM**

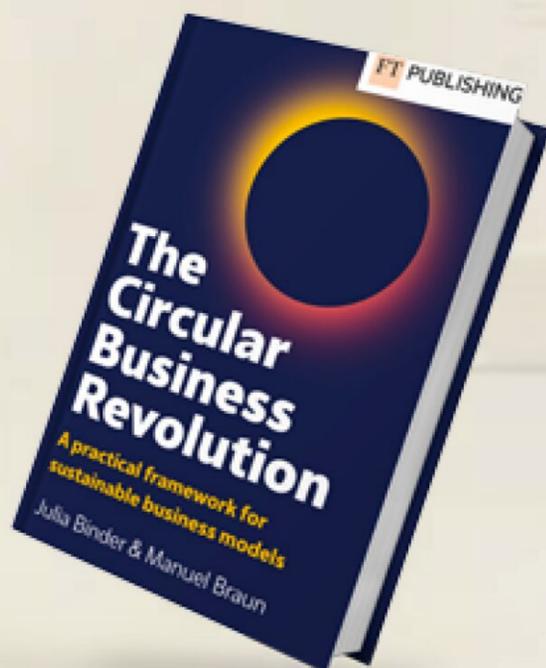


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J Devaprakash is Deputy General Manager at Tarapur Atomic Power Station.



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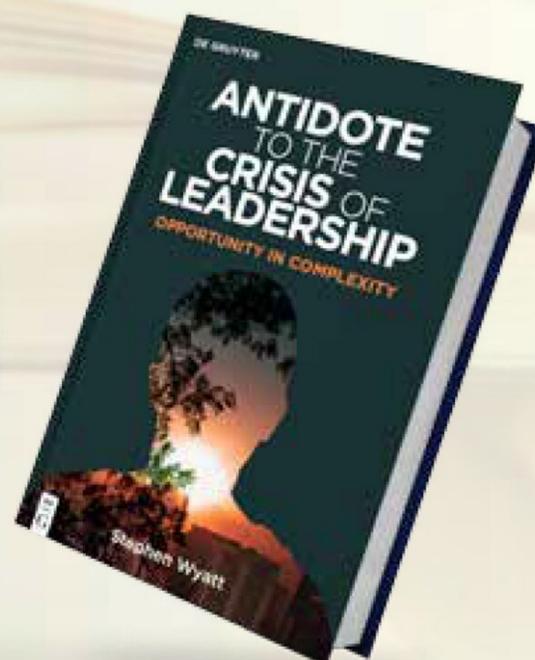
Author: Prof Julia Binder and Dr Manuel Braun

Publisher: FT Publishing International

The Circular Business Revolution is an essential book for any business leader thinking about how they could make their organisation more sustainable. It expertly connects the dots between economic and environmental pressures to create a roadmap for leaders to transform their business model and create a more sustainable, circular future.

The book features over 100 case studies of circular innovation from across the world, highlighting the trends to watch, the pitfalls to avoid, and how you can align with the organisation's long-term growth strategy.

It will help leaders revolutionise their business in a way that's good for their profits, people, and the environment.



ANTIDOTE TO THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP: OPPORTUNITY IN COMPLEXITY

Author: Stephen Wyatt

Publisher: De Gruyter

Leadership is in crisis. Scandals are commonplace. Major societal problems are not being resolved. And leaders cannot say they have the full trust of their employees.

The problem is that traditional approaches to leadership are no longer adequate to deal with the complex and dynamic challenges today's leaders face. This thought-provoking new book explores the skills you really need to be successful as a leader today, but also reveals how you can develop these differentiating skills and mindsets.

Packed with insights from over 50 leaders from around the world, this is the perfect book to equip you with the skills you'll really need to be a leader of tomorrow.

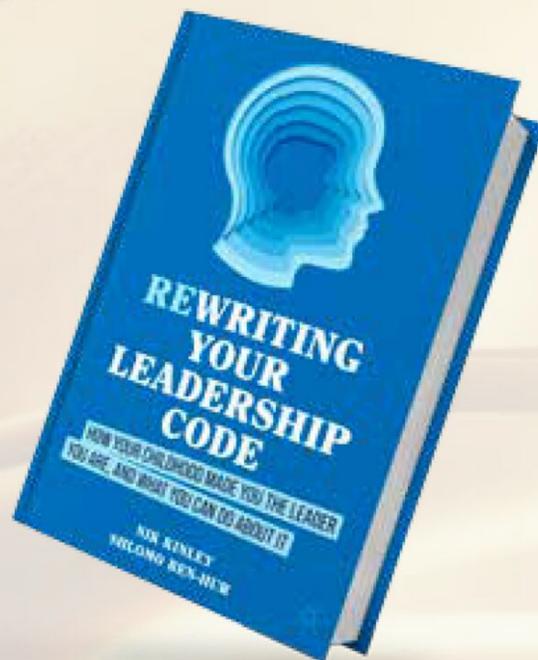


THE FOCUS FIX: FINDING CLARITY, CREATIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN AN OVERWHELMING WORLD

Author: Chris Griffiths and Caragh Medicott
Publisher: Kogan Page

Leaders and managers everywhere will have experienced the constant bombardment of digital noise and notifications that technology brings. It can blur the lines between work and home life in an unhealthy way, and make us feel lethargic, unproductive and creatively stifled.

The good news is that there is a way to break free from this trap. This book unveils a host of new strategies for uncovering our focus and escaping busyness burnout. It is packed with tips and techniques readers will enjoy, from “focused daydreaming” to “sub-conscious feng-shui”, to help cope with today’s technostress and unlock new levels of focus and creativity in your personal and professional life.



REWRITING YOUR LEADERSHIP CODE: HOW YOUR CHILDHOOD MADE YOU THE LEADER YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Author: Shlomo Ben-Hur and Nik Kinley
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Have you ever stopped to consider what really made you the leader you are today? Is it your qualifications and career experience, or could the way you work and behave actually have deeper roots in your childhood?

This book encourages us to look at how our childhood experiences secretly influence the way we make decisions, behave, and feel about ourselves at work, and crucially shows how we can channel their impact to our advantage. From how we act in meetings to how we handle change, this book shows how our childhood plays a pivotal part in how we lead our teams under pressure. It draws upon decades of research and proven neurological and psychological mechanisms to you reflect on your past, and your future.

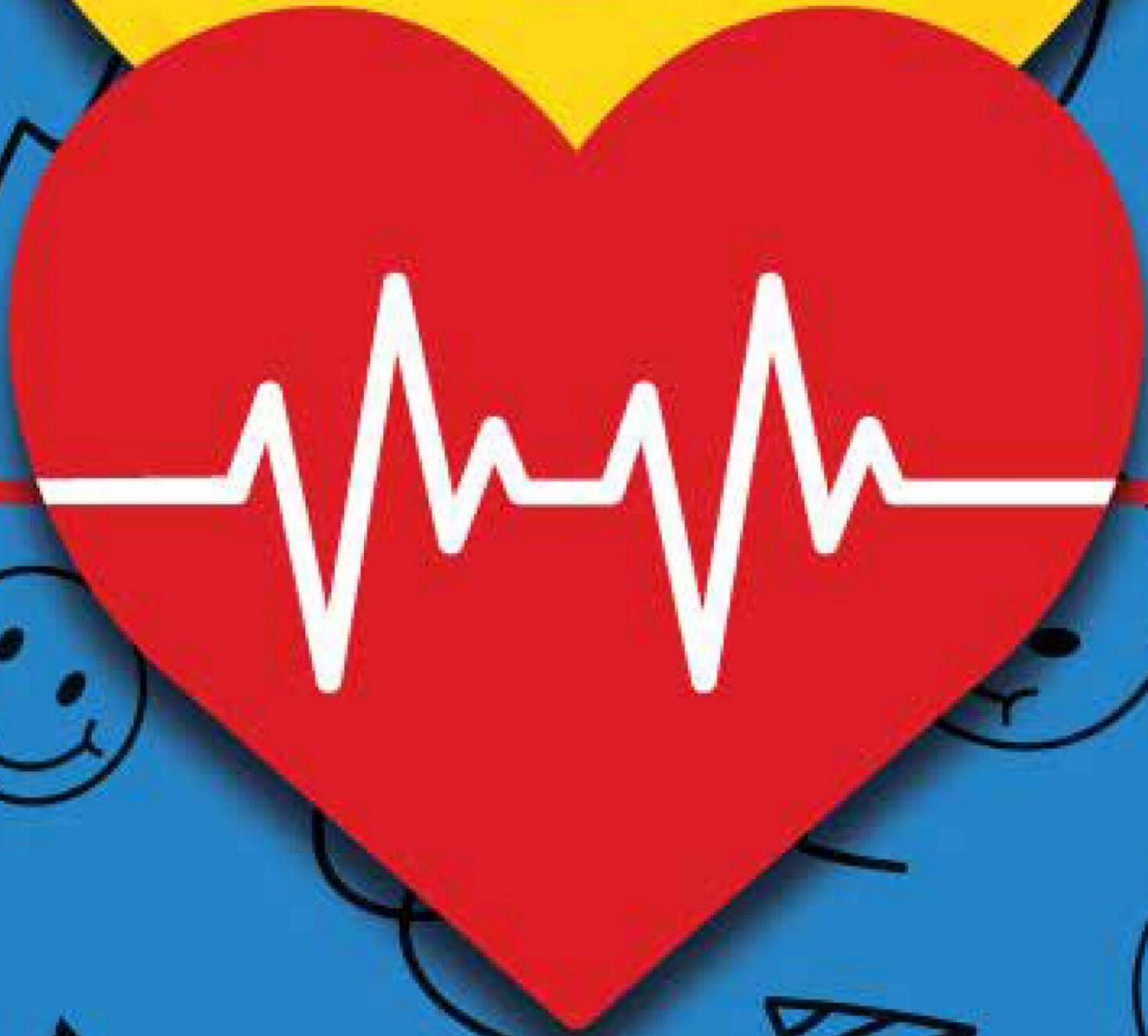


THE DIGITAL SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGE: BREAKING THROUGH

Author: Ralf W. Seifert and Richard Markoff
Publisher: IMD International

Supply chains form a fundamental part of most organisations today, but challenges abound. Not only do they have to focus on expenditures, logistics, distribution, and expectations of upstream and downstream partners, but leaders are also expected to possess sufficient technological expertise in Industry 4.0.

The book distils the authors’ 50+ years of supply chain experience into a practical handbook for anyone wanting to get to grips with the essentials of digital supply chain transformation. It is packed with case studies on Henkel, HEINEKEN, L’Oreal, and Zalando, and will help readers understand how AI could impact their own supply chain.



Leaders are obligated to ensure that they are fit to help bring in the next iteration of business and the world.

◆ ANNA ELIATAMBY, CO-AUTHOR, *HEALING-SELF CARE FOR LEADERS AND THEIR TEAMS*

LEADERSHIP

Healthy and happy

Our world is in turmoil, and so are we. We are shifting, changing, and questioning our purpose and future. Business is rethinking its frame and structures. Leaders are being asked to be more and do more in this confusing time.

In the middle of all this, leaders need to centre themselves. To understand their individual self and look after themselves. And they deserve to be happy and content. By working towards this approach, they will become the leaders who balance themselves, remain open to the future, and embrace whatever comes. They will lead with strength and kindness.

The concept of happy, healthy leadership reflects recent shifts in thinking about the competencies needed for effective leadership. Besides the technical aspects, the concept of happy, healthy leadership includes more human qualities, such as emotional intelligence and compassion. These are necessary, but need to be blended and connected more because we cannot compartmentalise the human side of a leader and treat it as different to the technical

capabilities. They all live in one complete human being- the leader.

Being a happy, healthy leader

This requires that first, you should know yourself. You accept yourself and are confident with humility. You work from a value base that you know and understand, and use in your daily life.

Happy, healthy leaders look after their mental health and physical health. Such persons have a good and effective self-care plan that focuses on health and aims for contentment, if not happiness. They know and understand their skills and strive to build their capabilities.

Healthy and happy leaders keep their eyes, ears, and heart open to the incoming future, remains undeterred, and collaborates with people. They see no need to dominate, to be better than. They ensure that they have the skills and knowledge needed to lead. And they are willing to learn and pause and reflect.

Overall, they will grow and develop as a leader, facing their helpful and unhelpful aspects. They are realistic in accepting their strengths and fallibilities—their own human frailty, which we all possess.

What are the key qualities and assets?

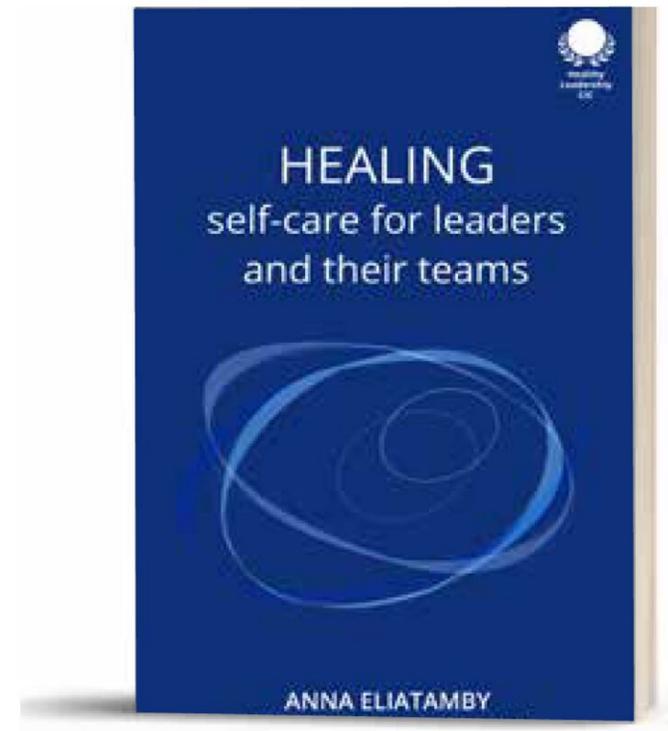
■ Personal qualities

1. Core values and beliefs

These should be the backbone of a leader. We all have them, but we do not always know, recognise, or use them. Ancient writings always emphasise the importance of their worth. This is a lesson from which we can learn.

Pause and think about what is central to your value base and beliefs. Where did you learn them? What is the legacy that you are being part of—from your family or your understanding of hope for the next iteration of our society? Aiming for decency, integrity, inclusion, and kindness.

To what extent do your values reflect these qualities: peace for self and others-seeking harmony and reconciliation; for people- putting others before self, always; sacrifice and simplicity-sacrificing self for the



greater good; integrity, kindness, and concern for others?

Think about how well you are living and working from them. All the time or just sometimes? Do live your values for the collective or yourself? What would those you lead say about your values and integrity?





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Answering these questions leads to a greater understanding of yourself. This enhances your health and contentment. If you are realistic about the need for compromise and how you will recompense when you breach your values.

2. Self

Often, we like to think of ourselves as superhuman, almost automatons. But we are not. Our bodies, hearts, and minds are finite and need to be looked after. When we do, then they provide us with a solid platform from which to excel in our leadership.

Have a mental health and physical health check. Learn about how you cope with uncertainty, what triggers your stress response, what enables you to cope positively, and what leads to you being negative and possibly self-sabotaging. What are the hidden aspects of yourself that you don't like to think

about? How can you look at them safely and heal?

What helps your self-esteem? What blocks it. How do you deal with emotions? How comfortable are you with being happy?

Once you have learned about your current approach to self-care and self-respect, then build and keep a plan. Use it to stay healthy and happy.

Make sure you choose elements that fit you and are helpful. We have so much choice in terms of health and well-being. Select wisely from the ancient traditions such as ayurveda and consider western approaches.

3. People in our circle

Regardless of whether our society is one that emphasises the individual or the collective, it is the people in our lives that heavily influence our health and happiness. Both at home and at work. Some nourish us and others can deplete, even starve us.

Review who is in your life, from close and loved ones to acquaintances. From very close colleagues to someone who you only see in a monthly meeting. What is their contribution to your health and happiness? If they are detrimental, can you decrease their impact? If they are positive, how can you celebrate them?

■ Work qualities

1. Enacting core values

It is translating values into actionable steps that makes the difference. Very few achieve this. If we say we have values, then we have an obligation to bring them alive and live by them. For example, understanding, fairness, and



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equanimity. Create criteria for fairness and equanimity to understand situations and decide. Treat others with dignity and respect- regardless of that person's seniority. Admit fault with humility- be willing to self-correct. What other actions could you use to enact your values? Perhaps you already have some, why not continue?

Make sure that what you do matches your values and beliefs. Be oriented to reality and ask others for feedback.

2. Being able to function in the job

There is no definitive qualification to lead. An MBA may help. What is important is to ensure that you have the skills, qualities, and knowledge to lead in your field. This may mean having generic skills, such as communication alongside subject-matter expertise. Be willing to keep pausing, reflecting, and learning. No-one is so expert that they can't learn more.

3. Enabling and providing a happy, healthy, work culture and environment

It is pointless to be a happy, healthy

leader if you do not try to incorporate those qualities in the work culture and in those you lead. Share your core values and those of your organisation and society with staff. Ask them to generate a set for work and some key questions to ask. Then investigate your current culture against the questions. For example, ask staff how often they praise positive accomplishments and address negative issues in a way that reduces their impact.

Build a plan for a revised culture with staff. Make sure you incorporate what is necessary for promoting healthiness and happiness for everyone.

From this moment on

It is too easy to read about leadership and then do nothing, except pause for a moment or two. Why don't you make a promise to yourself that you will do your utmost to become more of a happy and healthy leader...and then act on it?

Because leaders have an obligation to themselves and their staff to ensure that they are fit to help bring in the next iteration of business and the world. For all of us. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Eliatamby is Director, Healthy Leadership, CIC and co-author (with Grazia Lomonte), *Healing-Self Care for Leaders and their Teams*.

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Alan Williams, Founder Director, SERVICEBRAND GLOBAL Ltd; Founder, Global Values Alliance; Director, British Quality Foundation and Dave Stubberfield, Director and Principal Consultant, Carter Consultancy clear misconceptions about the area of customer experience. Alan and Dave are also co-authors, *Supercharging The Customer Experience*.

**MYTH
BUSTER**

Great customer experience

In nearly all sectors, especially the service-related ones, a new business agenda is emerging that is changing the landscape of customer experience and making traditional approaches no longer relevant. Customers are increasingly making choices based on emotion rather than rationale, and their thoughts and feelings can be shared to millions, instantly, in our super-connected world. Furthermore, brands are no longer owned by organisations, but co-owned with customers, employees, service partners, and investors. And employees themselves want a sense of meaning and fulfilment from the companies they represent. There has been a general shift from a product-based economy to an experience-based one. For organisations, the role of its customers and employees as ambassadors is of huge importance, today. In short, the successful organisation of tomorrow will deliver a customer experience that reinforces a sense of shared values with customers and other stakeholders.

In *Supercharging The Customer Experience*, we challenge several myths about the traditional approach to customer experience which is no longer relevant in light of the paradigm shift above.

MYTH 1: Customer experience is the same as customer service.

Many believe that customer experience revolves solely around customer service interactions. However, this is a misconception. Customer experience encompasses every touchpoint a customer has with the organisation, whether online, in-store, or over the phone, to shape the customer's perception of the brand. For instance, a well-designed website can enhance the overall experience before a customer even engages with any person representing the organisation. Similarly, post-purchase communications, such as thank-you emails or follow up courtesy calls, can maintain positive relationships and foster loyalty. By recognising and

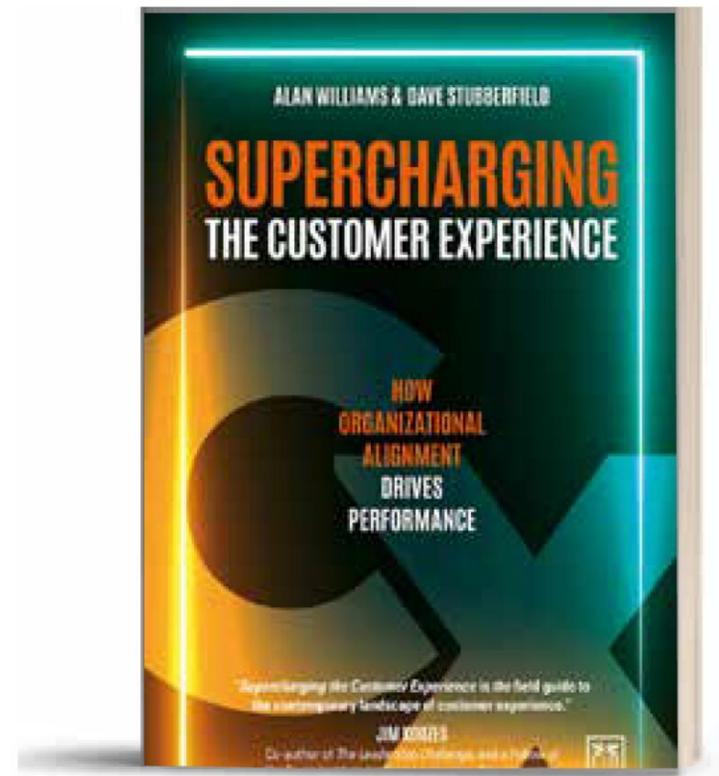
optimising all touchpoints, organisations can deliver a values-driven brand-aligned, consistent customer experience that differentiates them from competitors, provides satisfaction, encourages loyalty and inspires advocacy. Customer service is often the role or function that occurs after the product or service has been delivered.

MYTH 2: Customer experience is the responsibility of the CX function.

While the CX function can play a crucial role, in our experience, delivering an excellent customer experience requires a holistic approach. Every department, from marketing to service delivery, contributes to shaping the overall customer experience. For example, marketing teams create messaging and promotions that attract customers, while service delivery teams deal directly with the customers. Even employees in administrative or other support roles with ‘internal customers’ indirectly impact the customer experience through their efficiency and responsiveness. By fostering a culture where customer satisfaction is a priority for every employee, leaders give themselves the best chance of the organisation delivering consistency and alignment across all touchpoints. This collective effort can create a customer-centric culture throughout the organisation, leading to improved loyalty and advocacy for customers and employees alike. An activity like customer journey mapping will help to understand the flow and touchpoints that customers have throughout their interactions across all areas of the organisation.

MYTH 3: Customer experience is only relevant for B2C companies.

Contrary to popular belief, customer experience is pertinent across all types of



organisations and even support functions within an organisation. Every interaction influences customer perception and loyalty whether this is in a B2C, B2B, third sector, or a public services setting. In B2B relationships, for instance, the quality of customer service and the ease of doing business can significantly impact client retention and long-term partnerships for contracts that can be worth tens of millions of dollars. Similarly, in the public sector, citizens expect efficient and user-friendly interactions with government services and representatives. Non-profit organisations rely on positive experiences to attract donors and volunteers and fulfil their missions effectively. Customer experience is even relevant to an internal function such as Finance or Corporate Communications and the way they are perceived by their ‘internal customers’. Regardless of the industry or sector, organisations that prioritise customer experience can demonstrate a commitment to understanding and meeting the needs of their customers, in whatever form, resulting in increased satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy.

MYTH 4: Investment in customer experience is an optional extra.

Some may view investment in customer experience as discretionary. However, ignoring it can lead to dire, even fatal, consequences. In today's competitive landscape, when your competitor is one mouse click away, prioritising customer experience is imperative for long-term success. Without customers, an organisation has no reason to exist. Investing in customer experience initiatives demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. This may involve upgrading technology systems to enhance the online shopping experience, training employees to deliver exceptional service, or implementing feedback mechanisms to capture customer insights. Organisations that prioritise customer experience not only retain existing customers but also attract new ones through positive word-of-mouth and online reviews. Moreover, studies have shown that customers are willing to pay a premium for superior experiences, making it a strategic differentiator in the marketplace. Viewing customer experience as an investment rather than a cost helps organisations to create values-driven service for sustained performance.



MYTH 5: AI and data are the future of customer experience.

While AI and data are both invaluable tools for the future development of customer experience management, they are only the beginning. Insightful analysis informs strategic decisions, but true success lies in implementation and fostering a people-driven customer experience culture. Empowering employees to prioritise customer satisfaction ensures sustainable growth and loyalty. AI and data analytics can provide valuable insights into customer behaviour, preferences, and pain points, allowing organisations to personalise interactions and anticipate needs. However, it's essential to translate these insights into actionable strategies and initiatives that enhance the overall customer experience. This requires customer experience delivery with a 'human touch' for the best results and to avoid any potential confusion or mistrust from the customer. Moreover, fostering a people-driven culture where employees are encouraged to empathise with customers and proactively address their needs is critical. Organisations that prioritise both data-driven insights and a human-centric approach can create meaningful and memorable experiences that resonate with customers on a deeper level, engendering trust, driving loyalty and advocacy. We advise not to throw everything at AI or technology, balance is the key...and more importantly, finding the right solution for your organisation.

Our book was inspired by the question: "With all the content out there on the topic, why is great customer experience so rare?" Our answer is that content is vastly over-rated and what is far more important is context, designing, and implementing customer experience specifically designed for your unique situation and set of circumstances. **IM**



D&I in the DNA

We live in an instant gratification world where people expect immediate responses to emails and texts, same-day delivery for online purchases, quick service at drive-thrus, and instantaneous streaming of movies and music. With apps for nearly everything—from ride-sharing to food delivery—patience has become an increasingly rare commodity as technology caters to and reinforces our desire for immediate satisfaction, a concept vividly highlighted with the advent of ChatGPT for those not wanting to be bridled by waiting it offers the hope that not only may we never have to wait again—we might never have to think again. But when it comes to D&I, if it is lasting benefits you are after waiting and thinking are key ingredients of success. To see it, we may have to take our minds back to an analogue or indeed an agrarian age when people recognised that some good things

improve with time, and that patience and persistence often yield richer rewards than immediate gratification.

A professional investor told me recently that when it comes to getting returns from investments, the secret is time-in, not timing; similarly fine wines and whiskeys improve in taste and value as they age. The aging process allows them to develop complexity and subtlety that cannot be rushed. For our purposes, we can look at education and learning: Mastery in any field, whether academic, artistic, or technical, requires time and dedication. Deep understanding and skill come from prolonged study and practice, which cannot be rushed. Diversity and Inclusion mastery is a journey. If it is lasting impact that you are after then the most valuable and enriching approaches require a long-term commitment and patience, offering rewards that quick fixes cannot match.

In this article we will think about how to create a long-term D&I strategy for change. Staying with the education metaphor, let us frame this conversation around how a



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person becomes fluent in a language or discipline. Inclusion fluency, as we define it, is an organisation's capacity to embed D&I principles into its culture, operations, and strategic objectives seamlessly. This process evolves from awareness to full integration and advocacy, where fluency transcends mere literacy. A fluent organisation not only understands D&I concepts but actively implements and innovates upon them.

We ascribe seven stages to fluency:

1. Awareness,
2. Commitment and understanding,
3. Education and empowerment,
4. Implementation and integration,
5. Measurement and accountability,
6. Innovation and leadership,
7. Continuous improvement.

The initial stage in our inclusion fluency is awareness. Drawing a parallel between Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and D&I we identify four critical axes: self-recognition, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management. In the context of inclusion, self-recognition includes an

unvarnished evaluation of your organisation's current level of inclusion fluency and literacy. To do that thoroughly, you will need to accurately assess questions such as: how open, flexible, and adaptable is your culture; what is the commitment level among your key stakeholders; to what extent are different areas or functions receptive to fully inclusive practices; how do people's social identities affect levels of lived experience in your organisation and bluntly - is the culture you think you have, the one you have got. In addition, you will want to understand the level of inclusion knowledge and practice of staff across all levels in the business, and crucially identify the resisters, bystanders, supporters, and change champions, (typically 10 per cent, 60 per cent, 20 per cent, and 10 per cent, respectively).

The next stage is understanding and commitment, to measure what in our consulting model we call The Why-Fi Signal. Any inclusion journey must be steered by the top of the organisation, senior leaders set the vision for inclusion, and must live the cultural

values of the organisation. You will want to engage your c-suite in a dialogue-oriented approach to deepen their understanding of the importance of inclusion. Using the metaphor of the Why-Fi signal will allow you to evaluate their own and your organisation's commitment to D&I and identify if certain diversity aspects have been prioritised over others. A strong 'Why-Fi' signal reflects a unified commitment to D&I, whereas a weak signal could lead to reduced funding and the de-prioritisation of D&I initiatives.

The third and fourth of our seven stages in achieving fluency are education and empowerment and integration and implementation. Having conducted a thoroughgoing analysis of your level of inclusion fluency you will now have a reliable feel for your starting position and flag up any potential obstacles that will need to be overcome. From this, you can begin to tailor your approach to creating a genuinely inclusive environment. This involves aligning with your core values and ensuring a shared understanding of inclusion, its importance,



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and its practical implications within your organisation.

Without exception this will require some degree of focused up-skilling to ensure that every individual within your organisation experiences genuine inclusion. In our experience working across multiple sectors and territories organisations should plan for a 36-month all employee Inclusion Fluency curriculum with a structure that progresses from elementary to advanced levels. Each stage of the curriculum should be designed to build upon the previous, ensuring that participants not only learn about D&I but also how to apply it in their personal and professional lives for lasting impact.

In the first year, your goal should be to establish a foundation for inclusion through three key interventions for all employees. Remember- inclusion is simple, but it is not easy. The initial phase should concentrate on dialogues that address the rationale, scope, and practical aspects of inclusion. Ideally, you will have data that has identified major issues and exclusion hotspots, providing real-time data to drive these dialogues. If in year one you have been able to ensure that everyone is (1) primed for inclusion, i.e., understands the why, what, and how of inclusion (2) recognises what gets in the way and (3) are developing inclusive behaviours, you will have made huge (and measurable) strides and be ready for the next 24 months curriculum which will allow you to start to take deeper dives into diversity, explore issues such as equity and social justice before going on to advanced inclusion, systemic change, sustainability, and leadership and legacy.

In Fluency Stage 5 your focus will be on measurement and accountability. You will want to formulate a data-led approach to assessing which areas of your business require additional support in developing and embedding their

While the allure of quick solutions is tempting in our fast-paced world, the journey toward true Diversity and Inclusion is one that demands time, dedication, and a deep, organisational commitment

inclusion. Utilising outputs from steps one and two you can gather additional data such as workforce demographics, insights from your existing employee surveys and diversity data, as well as implicit sentiment data. This allows you to identify areas within the organisation needing improvement in inclusion fluency by mapping data onto organisational charts or workflows.

Understanding the lived experience of your employees at an organisational level is crucial if you aim to take everyone with you, and to tailor your inclusion maturity journey for different audiences, you will need to identify where it hurts, and who's hurting. Identifying your exclusion hotspots gives basis for the change plan to drive net zero exclusion at your company.

Finally, in Fluency Stages 6 and 7—innovation and leadership and continuous improvement—following the data evaluations and heat-mapping in step three, a collaborative stakeholder mapping activity between us and your key project stakeholders guides our approach to up-skilling sessions in step 4. You can offer targeted support to 'People Leaders' who are resistant to D&I principles, helping them adopt a more inclusive mindset in their roles and responsibilities. Alvin Toffler highlighted the importance of not only learning but also unlearning and relearning, underscoring the transformative journey we advocate. The supporting case study in appendix L demonstrates that measurable improvements occur not merely through inspection but, more importantly, by establishing clear expectations. Alongside the core curriculum do give serious thought to offering an

Inclusion Excellence programme to equip your business leaders (People Leaders) with the knowledge and skills needed to champion and implement inclusion excellence. I also recommend that you create a dedicated offering to equip HR professionals and HRBPs with the knowledge, skills, and tools to embed DEIB principles into all HR functions and practices, fostering an inclusive workplace culture. By supporting HRBPs, it enables them to act as inclusion advocates throughout the business and provide partnering services to their business functions built on a foundation of inclusion fluency. Selected modules from this set will also be utilised to support the up-skilling of People Leaders in areas such as recruitment and progression.

In conclusion, while the allure of quick solutions is tempting in our fast-paced world, the journey toward true Diversity and Inclusion is one that demands time, dedication, and a deep, organisational commitment. In this article I hope that I have been able to underscore for you that D&I is not merely a box to be ticked but a strategic endeavour that integrates every facet of an organisation's operations. By embracing a long-term, structured approach to D&I—much like learning a language or maturing a fine whiskey—organisations can foster genuine inclusivity that is both sustainable and impactful.

As you move forward, it is imperative that your leaders not only initiate but continuously nurture this process, adapting and innovating to ensure that inclusion becomes an intrinsic part of the organisational culture. Only through such persistent and informed efforts can we hope to build workplaces that truly reflect and celebrate the diversity of the world around us. **IM**



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