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AIMA ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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NAVIGATING WORKPLACE CONFLICTS

AUTHORITY UNDER PRESSURE

ANNE-MAARTJE OUD

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Navigating Workplace Conflicts Without Losing Authority

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

If everyone in a meeting agrees immediately, either the issue is trivial or the conversation has not really begun. In most organisations, when thoughtful and capable people come together to solve problems, differences of opinion are inevitable. In fact, research and management literature have long pointed out that conflict is not always a sign of dysfunction; it is often a sign that people care deeply about the outcome. The real test of leadership is not avoiding conflict but navigating it without losing authority or damaging relationships.

When leaders take the time to reason through the issue from both sides, many conflicts resolve themselves without anyone feeling diminished.

In my experience, many workplace conflicts are not really about the issue at hand. They are often clashes of perspective, pride, or ego. Two capable professionals may look at the same situation and arrive at very different conclusions. Each believes they are being rational and fair. When that happens, the discussion can quickly move away from the problem and become about who is right.

One simple discipline that helps enormously in such situations is to consciously step into the other person's point of view. This does not mean you have to agree with them. It just shows that you are genuinely trying to understand their position, the pressures they are facing,the assumptions they are making, or the risks they are considering — the conversation changes in tone. What seemed like stubbornness may simply be a different interpretation of the same facts. When leaders take the time to reason through the issue from both sides, many conflicts resolve themselves without anyone feeling diminished.

Management research also suggests that many disagreements persist because people struggle to see situations beyond their own frame of reference. Each side believes their position is fair and obvious, while the other side appears unreasonable. The moment we acknowledge that fairness can look different from different vantage points, the door opens for a more constructive conversation.

This is where calm reasoning becomes important. Once the emotions settle, the focus should shift back to the substance of the issue. Often, when both sides articulate their assumptions clearly, a middle ground or a better solution emerges. Leaders

sometimes worry that engaging in such dialogue might weaken their authority. In reality, the opposite is true. Authority that is exercised with composure and openness tends to command far greater respect.

There are, however, situations where the disagreement is deeply technical or operational. In such cases, the most effective way to navigate conflict is through clarity of facts and expertise. If the discussion is about engineering, finance, technology or process design, the argument should be settled on technical merit. When leaders rely on data, sound reasoning, and domain knowledge, it becomes difficult for anyone to take advantage of ambiguity. Technical clarity often cuts through what might otherwise become prolonged debate.

Organisations, whether large corporations or small enterprises, function because there is clarity about decision rights. Every leadership system defines who is accountable for what decisions

Ultimately, organisations, whether large corporations or small enterprises, function because there is clarity about decision rights. Every leadership system defines who is accountable for what decisions. Boards delegate authority to management, management distributes responsibility across teams, and within that framework individuals exercise judgment. Dialogue and debate are essential in arriving at the best decision, but once the decision right rests with a particular role, that structure must prevail.

Good leaders therefore do two things at once. They encourage open discussion so that the best ideas surface. And when the time comes, they take responsibility for the decision within the framework of the organisation's leadership system.

Handled this way, conflict does not erode authority. It strengthens it. Because authority that is grounded in fairness, clarity, and respect is far more enduring than authority that is imposed.

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Conflict situations between employees are an inevitable part of any organisation. Disagreements are bound to rise when people, ideas, and ambitions. What often distinguishes an effective leader from the rest is his or her ability to resolve conflicts with clarity and fairness, without his or her authority being undermined.

For many managers, conflict poses the challenge of maintaining a delicate balance. On one hand, they must address disagreements decisively to maintain discipline and direction. On the other, heavy-handed responses can erode trust, silence valuable feedback, and weaken team morale. The mark of a good leader is how he or she resolves issues without appearing either authoritarian or indecisive.

Anne Maartje Oud, author of *WHAT TO DO IF...?* writes in the cover story of this issue, "You do not lose authority because someone disagrees with you. You lose it when your behaviour under pressure becomes inconsistent, reactive, or unclear. People watch how you respond when challenged. They decide in those moments whether you are someone who hides behind position or someone who leads the relationship as well as the task."

More than just position or title, authority comes from consistency, transparency, and the confidence to listen before acting. Leaders who handle disputes constructively often strengthen their credibility rather than diminish it. By setting clear expectations, encouraging open communication, and addressing problems early, conflict can be transformed from a disruptive force into an opportunity for alignment and growth.

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

Maneck Davar

Maneck Davar

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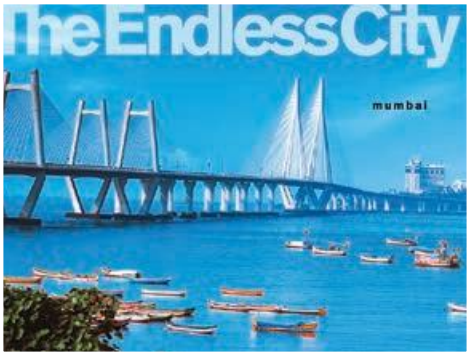

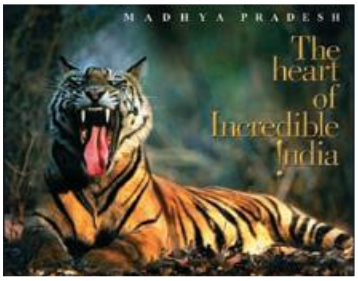

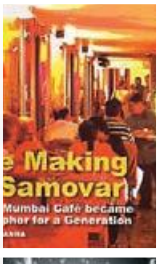

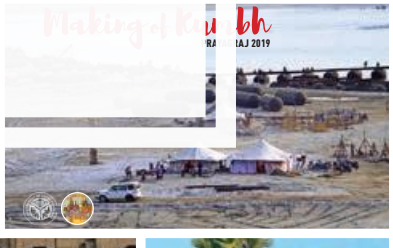

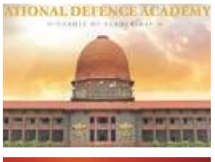

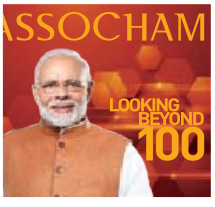

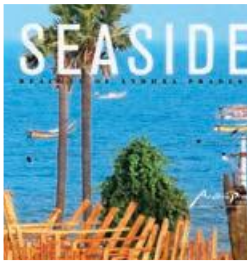

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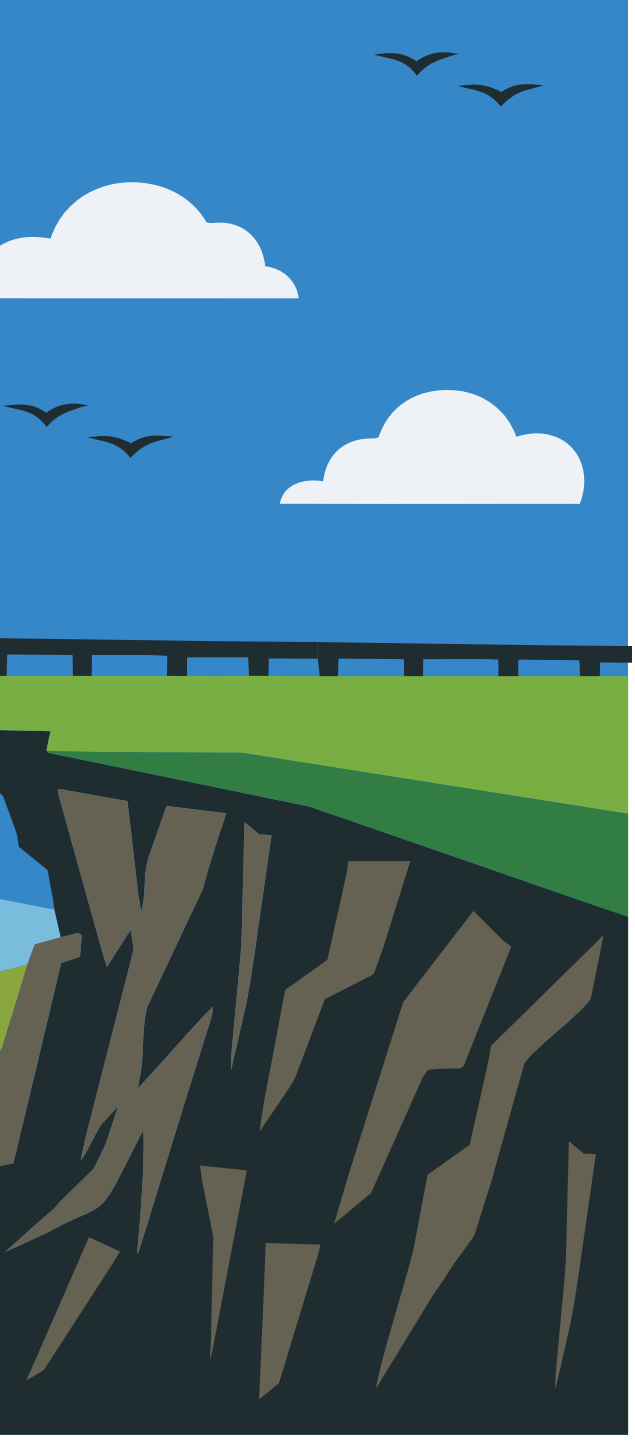
STRENGTH IN THE STORM

Armaan Hoyvoy

Authority under pressure

Leadership, during conflict resolution, is strengthened not by avoiding tension, but by responding to it with clarity, composure, and consistency.

✦ ANNE MAARTJE OUD, AUTHOR, *WHAT TO DO IF...?*



Early in my career, I disagreed with my boss and was warned by others not to challenge him. Despite the hesitation, I spoke up and to my surprise, he appreciated it very much. He later told me that he had one mantra: "Conflict is Growth", a lesson that has stayed with me ever since. Of course, we have to be mindful of what we challenge at work and we must always stay professional, but a conflict itself should not be seen as something negative.

Tension usually shows up in three categories.

It can be about the content when there is a difference of opinion between option A and option B. It can be about the procedure like unclear roles or confusion about who does what and when. Or it can be in the interaction for example because of cultural differences or because someone speaks very vaguely, or because one person takes more space in the room.

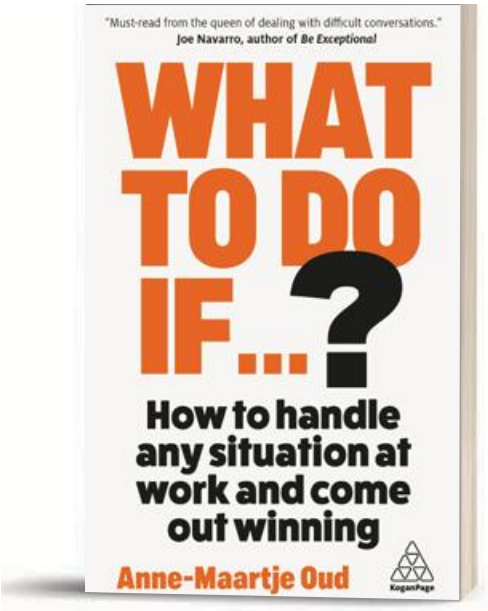
Conflict has several dimensions, yet it is usually the interaction that creates the most difficulty. It is about how you position yourself, how others perceive you, and what that does to your authority as a leader. Authority is relational and it is granted by others because they trust your clarity and consistency.

So how do we keep authority in a conflict?

- **See conflict as information.** When someone challenges a decision, treat it as data rather than disruption. When a team member openly challenges you in a meeting, the visible behaviour is interruption or contradiction. The underlying message might be competition for influence, frustration about decisions, or a business culture where people only feel heard when they push hard. Conflict gives you information. If you pay attention to who speaks, who withdraws and who goes silent, you start to see the patterns that shape your team.
- **Slow down your own reflex.** Under pressure, our behaviour changes. We might speak faster, listen less and become more rigid. That rarely helps the conversation and it directly affects how others experience our leadership. Some people move into rapid justification, explaining and defending every detail. Others pull rank, referring to hierarchy to close the discussion. And some withdraw, becoming quieter or stepping back from the conversation altogether. But before you slip into that quick responding mode, breathe, take a pause and try to relax. For example, instead of leaning forward and ending the

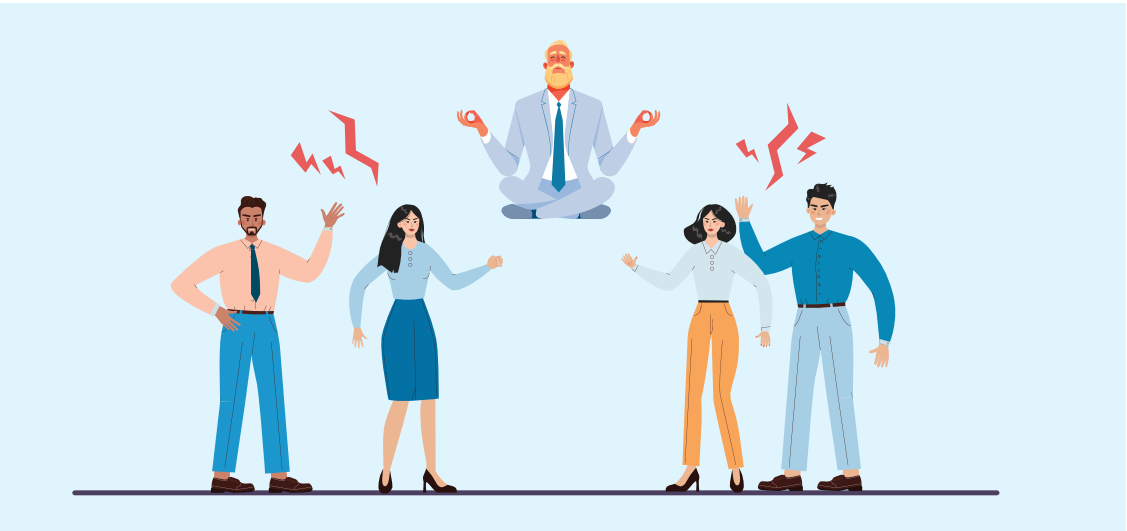
conversation with a snappy voice: "This is my decision. We're done discussing it," try a regulated response like:
"I hear the concern, thank you for explaining it. However, this decision stands. Let me go into the next steps with you."
While you say this, use a slower speaking tempo and controlled tone. You choose your words carefully. Your composure communicates more than your argument.

- **Address behaviour.** Authority grows when you are able to describe behaviour calmly, without shaming. It shows that what is happening in the room is being noticed and taken seriously. It shows you observe, listen and therefore people feel acknowledged. Instead of reacting to the emotion or defending your position, shift the focus to what you can actually see and hear. Name the behaviour.
"I notice you interrupt when the decision is being explained."
"Several people have gone quiet since the deadline was mentioned."
"We are talking over one another."
It's the same when giving feedback. It should not be about the person; it should be about what you see, what you hear, what you've noticed and what can be changed. When you get a defensive reaction, you could say: ""I notice this might be landing differently than I intended. My intention here is to look at what could work better next time, not to criticise."
- **Mind your non-verbals.** When leaders create an environment that is both safe and clear, they demonstrate trustworthy behaviour. Consistency in words and actions, clear boundaries and predictable responses builds credibility. That credibility strengthens your position and supports you in leading others with confidence. This is visible when saying what you do, and doing what you say but also with body language.



When we fidget or make ourselves small, this can weaken our position. Yet the other extreme does the same. Overplayed confidence like a raised voice, exaggerated posture, excessive dominance, also lowers credibility. We need balance in our behaviour because both belong to leadership.
There are moments when uncertainty is appropriate. Saying, "I don't know yet," or holding silence after a question, or briefly looking away can build more trust than pretending certainty. And there are other moments that require clarity and firm decisions. Non-verbal, decisiveness can be shown in simple ways such as a steady nod, a clear hand gesture or a calm, upright posture. The key is behavioural awareness. A skilled leader reads the room and adjusts.

- **Create structure for disagreement.** If someone repeatedly challenges you, do not treat it as a single incident. Look at the pattern because it often tells you something. People rarely keep pushing for no reason.



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Create space to explore it directly. Name what is visible and invite explanation: "I notice you often question decisions during the meeting. Is there something behind this that we should address?" This shifts the dynamic from opposition to dialogue. It signals that disagreement is allowed and that concerns can be discussed openly rather than expressed through repeated challenge.

At the same time, do not leave disagreement to chance. Build clear, visible moments where different perspectives are expected. For example, during meetings you could ask:

"Who sees this differently?"

"What concerns have we not yet addressed?"

"Before we close, what objections are still on the table?"

When you create structure, you make conflict part of the process. You do not maintain authority by winning every argument. You maintain it by staying aligned with your role while giving space to others.

If you are still facing a lot of negativities you can say: "If you have concerns, I'd appreciate it if you bring them forward. You can do this in the meeting, through email or, if needed, you can always book an appointment with me. I value your input. But I also expect you to support the final decision once it's made. Can we agree on that?"

Conclusion

Every conflict is a live demonstration of what is acceptable and it is up to you as a professional how you deal with them. If you gossip about the person afterwards, others learn that this is how you treat them behind their back. If you avoid the conversation, others learn that you might not step up to the plate. But if you address it directly and respectfully, others learn that disagreement can be handled and build further on those conversations.

You do not lose authority because someone disagrees with you. You lose it when your behaviour under pressure becomes inconsistent, reactive, or unclear. People watch how you respond when challenged. They decide in those moments whether you are someone who hides behind position or someone who leads the relationship as well as the task. Authority is not built by avoiding discomfort. It is built by repeatedly choosing constructive behaviour under pressure. IM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Maartje Oud is author, *WHAT TO DO IF...? How to Handle Any Situation at Work and Come Out Winning.*

Armaan Hoyvoy

Michael Henderson, author, *Outcaring the Competition: Why the next competitive edge isn't technology – it's human,* writes about five dangerous myths about organizational culture that are costing leaders the competitive advantage.

MYTH BUSTER

The culture delusion

Behind the surge in culture programs, engagement surveys, and leadership frameworks sits an uncomfortable truth. Most organisations are working hard on culture, yet very few are gaining a lasting advantage from it. Why?

Because culture is still widely misunderstood. After four decades of organisational anthropology and hundreds of culture interventions, one pattern is unmistakable. Performance breakdown rarely comes from a lack of intent or investment. It comes from misconceptions that quietly distort decision-making and sabotage results.

Here are five of the most damaging myths leaders continue to believe, and why organisations that outcare their competition reject them outright.

MYTH 1: CULTURE IS YOUR VALUES, MISSION, AND PURPOSE STATEMENTS.

Many organisations proudly point to a wall of framed values, a polished purpose statement, or a newly refreshed vision and declare, "We've done culture." But values on the wall are not culture. They are symbols.

Culture lives in what people actually care about when no one is watching. What they protect. What they tolerate. What they reward. What they ignore.

High-performing cultures understand that values statements do not create behaviour. Behaviour reveals care. When leaders focus on how care is expressed in daily decisions, trade-offs, and priorities, values stop being decorative and start becoming lived.

Culture is not what you say matters. Culture is what people consistently act as an expression of caring about what they consider matters

MYTH 2: ENGAGEMENT SCORES TELL YOU HOW HEALTHY YOUR CULTURE IS.

Engagement surveys have become the dominant proxy for culture health. Percentages rise, dashboards glow green, and leaders breathe a sigh of relief.

Yet engagement data measures sentiment, not meaning. Culture is not measurable it is meaningful.

Organisations that outcare the competition do not confuse measurement

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with meaning and motivation. A workforce can be satisfied, comfortable, and disengaged from purpose all at once. Equally, people can be stretched, challenged, and deeply committed without scoring highly on a survey scale.

Culture is not revealed once or twice a year through metrics. It is revealed continuously through patterns of care, belief, and behaviour. Leaders who learn to observe culture directly gain something surveys never deliver, real-time insight and the ability to respond while it still matters.

MYTH 3: CULTURE IS OWNED BY HR

Handing culture to HR feels logical. It is neat. It is administratively efficient. It is also deeply flawed.

Culture forms everywhere leadership is exercised, strategy is enacted, and decisions are made. Every executive meeting, budget choice, and performance conversation shapes what people care about next.

In organisations that outcare their competition, culture ownership is distributed, not delegated. Leaders understand that culture is not a program to manage but a system to embody. HR may steward frameworks and language, but leaders shape culture through what they prioritise, model, and protect under pressure.

Culture is not owned by a department. It is lived on a daily basis as a social performance system by the members of the culture.

MYTH 4: STRONG CULTURES SHOULD BE UNIFIED AND CONSISTENT EVERYWHERE.

The idea of 'one culture' is comforting. It promises alignment, clarity, and control.

It is also unrealistic and confuses structure and systems with culture.

Any organisation with scale has multiple cultures. Teams, functions, locations, and leadership styles generate distinct patterns of care. Pretending these differences do not exist does not unify culture. It fractures it.

High-performing organisations acknowledge cultural plurality and align it through shared meaning rather than forced uniformity. They focus on coherence instead of sameness. When people understand how their local culture

connects to the wider purpose and strategy, diversity strengthens performance rather than diluting it. Culture does not need to be identical to be aligned. It needs to be understood, and accounted for.

MYTH 5: CULTURE IS SOFT, SECONDARY, AND SEPARATE FROM PERFORMANCE.

Perhaps the most persistent myth of all is that culture is a 'nice to have' once strategy, technology, and execution are handled. The evidence points in the opposite direction.

Culture does not sit beside performance. It multiplies it. When care is misaligned, even brilliant strategies underperform. When care is clear, shared, and embodied, ordinary strategies outperform expectations.

Organisations that outcare their competition recognise culture as a strategic force, not a morale initiative. They understand that culture shapes decision quality, speed, trust, innovation, and resilience, long before results appear on a balance sheet.

Culture is not soft. It is decisive.

The quiet advantage

Most organisations do not fail at culture because they do not care. They fail because they misunderstand what culture is and how it forms and functions.

The organisations that consistently outperform do something deceptively simple. They remove misconceptions before adding methods. They stop managing culture as an abstraction and start working with it as a living system of care.

When leaders understand culture at this level, something changes. Performance stops being forced. Alignment becomes natural. And advantage becomes impossible to copy. That is what it truly means to outcare the competition.

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Recommended reads

HUMAN-WISE: HOW TO LEAD FROM WITHIN AND SELL WITH CONFIDENCE

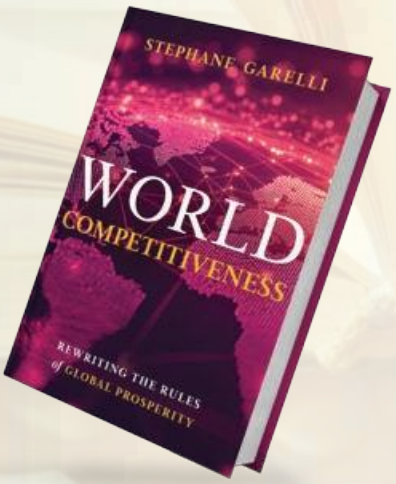
Authors: Helen Wada
Publisher: Practical Inspiration Publishing

Any manager leading a sales team today will understand the careful balance required between the pressures of chasing success and maintaining a positive, healthy workplace culture. However, *HUMAN-WISE* argues that commercial performance and humanity don't have to be at odds. It provides a practical roadmap for professionals, introducing a framework that places self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and coaching skills at the centre of personal and professional success.

CAN I SAY THAT? YOUR GO-TO GUIDE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Authors: Poornima Luthra
Publisher: Publishing Rebel

This book examines the root cause of the recent backlash diversity, equity, and inclusion has faced around the world recently: fear. It unpicks how we can let go of the discomfort that so many leaders seem to struggle with and shows how we can develop the openness, curiosity, vulnerability, courage and resistance to become a true force for change. So if you have ever worried about saying the wrong thing or you've wanted to become a more proactive ally, this book will empower you to talk with confidence and take meaningful action.



WORLD COMPETITIVENESS: REWRITING THE RULES OF GLOBAL PROSPERITY

Author: Stephane Garelli
Publisher: Wiley

Every business today is operating against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions, disruptions, fractured markets, and uncertainty. It makes it increasingly difficult for leaders to adapt and create strategies for sustainable success, and all the more important that leaders understand the wider context in which they operate.

This book shows how world competitiveness has evolved to create the challenges we all face today. It blends conceptual frameworks with practical examples to offer a positive, solution-orientated perspective.

THE CEO MIRAGE: SEEING THROUGH THE ILLUSIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Author: John B Gearing
Publisher: Morgan James Pub

This new book is a refreshingly honest look at what it really takes to be a business leader today, exposing the illusions that many CEOs are guilty of hiding behind – whether they are aware they are doing it, or not.

Written by business leader and advisor John B. Gearing, The CEO Mirage offers hard-earned lessons and powerfully candid reflections on how executives have derailed or even destroyed organisations through their behaviour. He exposes the dangers of false confidence, overly optimistic business plans, yes-men and the quest for growth at all costs in a powerful way that many readers will identify and connect with.

CLEAN WINNERS: SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY THAT PUTS CUSTOMERS FIRST

Author: Goutam Challagalla and Frederic Dalsace
Publisher: Harvard Business School Press

Despite seeing environmentally friendly products take over shelves and companies touting green credentials, the uncomfortable truth is many businesses still aren't seeing a payoff for their sustainability efforts – financially, or in real environmental and social impact.

This fascinating new book argues that it is time to switch the narrative on sustainability. Rather than asking how to make a product more sustainable, we should look at how to use sustainability to generate genuine customer value.

Authors Goutam Challagalla and Frédéric Dalsace use examples such as Siemens and Nespresso to demonstrate a new way of thinking which puts customers first, then offer practical tools and tactics to turn sustainability into your competitive edge.

PICK YOUR GUMMY BEAR: LESSONS FROM MY BIGGEST LIFE CHOICES

Author: Johan Depraetere
Publisher: Whitefox Publishing Limited

At the heart of this eye-catching new book is the lesson that every choice we make, however seemingly large or small, has the power to shift the trajectory of our lives. It may be at home or in the boardroom, but every single decision could open up new opportunities and possibilities.

The author, Johan Depraetere, is a global nomad whose remarkable business journey has taken him from a dot-com start-up in New York to boardrooms in South Korea, taking in a series of exciting experiences along the way. More than just a memoir, however, the author manages to expertly weave crucial leadership lessons into his heart-warming stories in a way that will be inspirational for anybody feeling at a crossroads in life.

Armaan Hoyvoy

Leadership of today begins with is sustained by courage, clarity, and human awareness.

✦ CLAIRE BRUMBY, AUTHOR, *FORGET NORMAL – I WANT MAGIC*

Lead with M.A.G.I.C.

Leadership is changing. The old model of command, control, and hierarchy is no longer fit for purpose. These methods no longer resonate in a world that prioritises empathy, flexibility, and authenticity.

For decades, confidence in the workplace has been confused with dominance. Clarity has been governed by targets and KPIs. Culture has been treated like a token set of bullet points on a slide deck, rather than the lived experience of a workforce.

Confidence in today's workplace looks different. Authority looks different, even culture looks different. We are in a new era. Hybrid teams and constant change, which is coming faster by the quarter.

The workforce is more values-driven. Burnout is not a quiet side effect anymore; it is a board level issue, and it is on the rise. People are not just asking "What do we do?" they are asking "Why are we doing it?" and they want to know "Does this align with who I am?"

This shift is becoming increasingly visible. Rapid economic growth, digital acceleration and generational change are reshaping expectations of leadership. India's young workforce is ambitious, globally connected and increasingly unwilling to trade well-being for status. At the same time, organisations are balancing cultural respect for hierarchy with the need for innovation and agility. This creates both pressure and opportunity. Leaders are being asked to honour legacy while building workplaces that feel psychologically safe, inclusive and future ready.

In boardrooms conversations are moving beyond quarterly performance to sustainable performance. Diversity is no longer a corporate social responsibility statement, or box to be ticked. It is a strategic necessity. Emotional intelligence is being promoted from the label of 'soft skill' to a true differentiator. The leaders who are and will continue to thrive are those who can lead with the duality of commercial rigour and human awareness. They understand that confidence without empathy erodes trust, and that culture is not something to outsource to HR. It is shaped in real time by the behaviour of those who lead.

There is also a deeper shift playing out. In many Indian organisations, respect, loyalty and collective responsibility have long been cultural strengths. When these values are expressed through rigid hierarchy or silence though, they can by accident stifle innovation.

The new leadership challenge underway is to not discard tradition, but to evolve it. Create environments where respect coexists with open communication. This is especially of value as organisations expand across borders.

Leading multi-generational and multi-cultural teams requires more than technical expertise. It demands self-awareness. Leaders have a duty to understand how their behaviour is interpreted across different contexts, and just how quickly trust can be eroded or built in diverse teams.

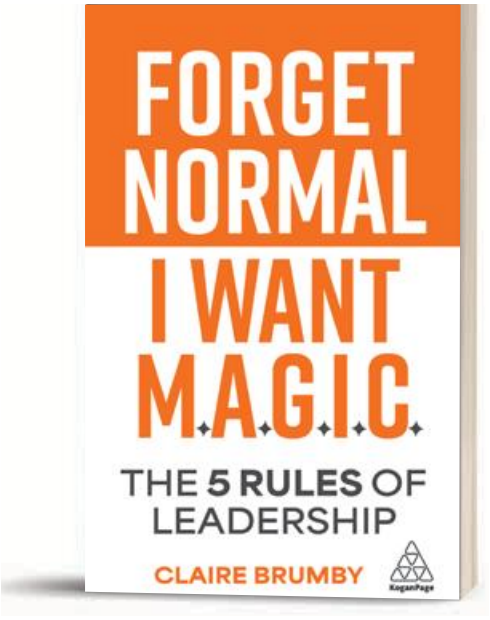
In today's and tomorrow's world we have to understand that confidence is no longer about asserting authority, it is about creating clarity in complexity. Clarity is not about having all the answers. It is about asking better questions. Culture is not about making sure the 'is' are dotted and the 'ts' crossed in policy manuals. It is what employees experience on that difficult Tuesday afternoon when tensions are high with deadlines looming and pressure is rising. This is why self-leadership is no longer optional. It is the very foundation of sustainable organisational leadership.

I have met and worked with many high performing leaders. They are extremely capable, highly experienced, and very strategic in their approach. All that said, they are still questioning themselves. They are bone tired of leading in a performative way rather than their own way. What is needed now is self-leadership. Depth, discernment, courage, and presence.

This is why I developed the M.A.G.I.C. Framework™. MAGIC stands for Mindset, Awakening, Gumption, Intuition and Charisma. It is a practical human-centred model for modern leadership. One that strengthens confidence, sharpens clarity, and empowers you to trust yourself.

Here is why 'normal' leadership is breaking you (and your culture) and a few patterns that might look familiar:

- You look confident on paper, bit inside you are second guessing everything. You are over-prepping, over-explaining, over-delivering to prove you deserve a seat at the table.
- You are clear on the needs of everyone else, but foggy on your own. You have a packed calendar with Teams meetings and the like. Your mind is cluttered, and as usual your own priorities are always "I'll get round to them next week."
- Your team are capable…but cautious. People wait for permission, dilute their ideas, and look to you for every answer. It is not because they are weak. More that the culture quietly punishes risk and honesty.



M.A.G.I.C. is the reset. It starts with you a self-leader, then ripples to how you lead your people and shape your workplace.

M – Mindset: The Operating System of Leadership

Every leadership culture begins in the mind of the leader. If your internal narrative is defence or rooted in fear of failure your organisation will feel it. It will show up in risk aversion, micro-management and stalled, or worse, no innovation.

Mindset is not just positive thinking. It is having the discipline to examine the beliefs driving your decisions.

A – Awakening: Alignment Before Strategy

Many leaders operate for years without ever asking whether their leadership aligns with their values. Awakening is the moment you realise performance without alignment is unsustainable.

Post pandemic, this has accelerated. The workforce is no longer motivated by title and hygiene employment factors alone. People want meaning, and they want coherence between 'stated' values and lived behaviour.

When leaders align internally it shows up with clearer decisions, stronger boundaries, and a more consistent culture.

G – Gumption: Courage in Motion

The modern workplace demands courage. Culture does not change through vision statements. It changes through behaviour. Gumption is the willingness to take action even through feeling discomfort. Act with courage, especially when it is inconvenient.

In reality this displays as

- Challenging outdated processes that no longer serve the business.
- Addressing underperformance directly rather than tolerating to keep the harmony.
- Backing a strategic shift, before there is unanimous buy-in.

Courage builds trust. When teams see leaders take principled action, even when difficult, it strengthens psychological safety.

I – Intuition: The Strategic Advantage Leaders Ignore

In a data driven world intuition can often be dismissed as unreliable. Yet experienced leaders know that some of their best and most pivotal decisions were guided my instinct. Conversely, some silence it in favour of over analysis.

Intuition, contrary to some thought processes, is not impulsive. It is pattern recognition informed by experiences, emotional intelligence, and subconscious processing. In some cases, it could be argued that waiting for 'perfect' information and conditions can often be more dangerous than trusting judgement.

The strongest leaders integrate logic and intuition. In a fast-moving world this integration is a competitive edge.

C – Charisma: Presence Over Performance

Charisma can often be misunderstood as being an 'extrovert' or having 'flair.' When leaders are clear in mindset, aligned in values, courageous in action and confident in their instincts, their presence changes. They do not need to dominate the room, they anchor it.

Charisma in leadership looks like-

- Listening fully,
- Speaking with conviction,
- Admitting when you do not know,
- Holding steady under pressure.

Charisma built on authenticity creates connection. That connection builds loyalty and then strengthens culture.

Leading with M.A.G.I.C. matters now because the leadership landscape has shifted dramatically. The organisations who will thrive are those who no longer cling to rigid hierarchies. They are the ones who are willing to evolve.

When leaders develop mindset, they build confidence. When they embrace awakening, they gain strategic clarity. When they practice gumption, they model courage. When they trust intuition, they move decisively, and when they embody charisma, they inspire culture.

This is not about becoming someone new. It is about leading from who you already are, when you strip back the outdated norms. IM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Brumby is author, *Forget Normal – I Want Magic: The 5 Rules of Leadership.*

Armaan Hoyvoy

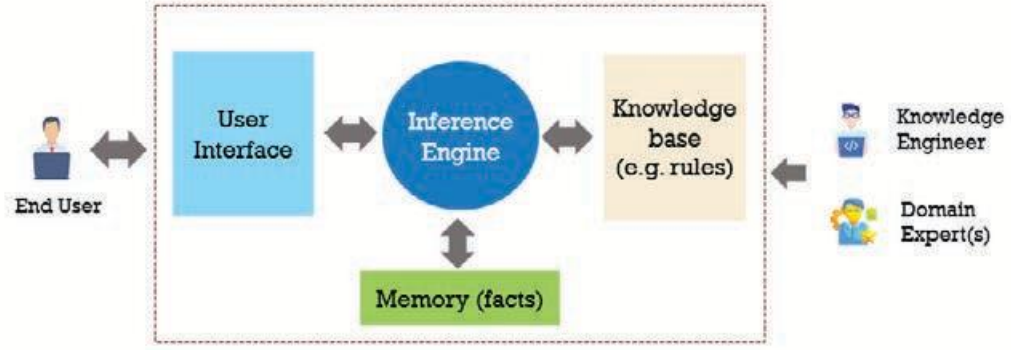
Gen AI powers knowledge; classical AI ensures accountable loan decisions.

✦ RAJENDRA M SONAR, PH.D., SJMSOM, IIT BOMBAY

The hybrid AI revolution

Most of the early AI systems were expert systems powered by rule-based system and inference engines, dominated AI from 1970s till 1990s. An expert system is an AI program that emulates human expert decision-making in specialized domains using knowledge-based rules. These systems, which are highly effective for deterministic, complex, narrow, and heuristic-based problems, improve consistency and accessibility of expert knowledge. technology strategy.

Expert systems were developed in many domains and verticals since 1970s. MYCIN was a pioneering 1970s Stanford University rule-based expert system designed to identify bacteria causing severe infections and recommend antibiotics. Using 600 production rules and backward chaining (goal driven problem solving), it achieved accuracy comparable to infectious disease specialists. It was notable for explaining its reasoning, though never used clinically. There were many applications developed in BFSI domain in 1980s till 2000s. Let us start exploring on loan underwriting domain as a reference use-case and specifically CLUES



Simple expert system components

(Countrywide Loan Underwriting Expert System). CLUES was a pioneering rule-based artificial intelligence system launched in February 1993 and was designed to automate the mortgage underwriting process, increasing loan production capacity while maintaining consistency and reducing cost. It paved the way for modern automated underwriting systems (AUS) like Fannie Mae's Desktop Underwriter (DU) and Freddie Mac's Loan Product Advisor (LPA). By the mid-1990s, the system was processing over 8,500 loans monthly across more than 300 decentralized branches and was handling 35% of all Countrywide loan volume. CLUES contained approximately 1,000 business rules derived from human underwriting expertise and secondary market guidelines from more than 100 hours of interviews were conducted.

Our amazingly resilient kiranas and other services are actually increasing their presence rather than shrinking and folding up. Maybe, consumption has increased but these guys are always a step ahead in the game

What AI CTOs did in 1990s

In 2001, Laura Doster, Mortgage Banking, freelance writer based in Springfield, Virginia interviewed the then CTO, Richard Jones, Countrywide Home Loans, Inc., Calabasas, California, an industry leader in technology adoption. He was about the company's decision to build its own automated underwriting system (AUS) in 1991, the benefits and drawbacks of the "build" decision and what the future of automated underwriting (AU) development is going forward.

Some relevant excerpts from the interview to understand what kind of AI systems existed in 1990s to set the context can be accessed at https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Countrywide%27s+CTO.-a077828996

Jones' answers illustrate how Countrywide's size and technology prowess continue to keep it at the top of the list of successful mortgage banks. In fact, it seems the company has had a clue about technology for quite a while, even before it built its ground-breaking Clues.

We first decided to do this in 1991. At that time, there was a refinance boom, kind of like what we're having right now. There was really nothing in existence at that time… no other automated underwriting system, and there was a shortage of underwriters. We were doing a huge amount of volume and we needed to automate. This is consistent with Countrywide's philosophy. All along, our idea was to use technology to gain a competitive advantage, and that was our thinking in 1991.

Well, we always do a 'build' versus 'buy' decision whenever we look at a technology project. That's exactly what we did in that case. We realised that we needed to have something that would have a very sophisticated decision-making capability. We looked at neural network technology. We looked at a number of different technologies, and decided on a combination of a rules engine and a statistical scorecard methodology. We also looked at decision tree type software. The problem with the neural networks and the decision tree type software was that it was too hard to explain how the answer was derived. It was like a black-box kind of situation. So while they could come out with interesting answers to the underwriting decision, it was very hard to account for exactly how the decision was arrived at.

The way we did it with Clues was, we bought a rules engine software product to help us define and automate, but we also have built statistical scorecards to help us look at the history of certain loans and certain situations and the probability of default. Then we built a historical scorecard around all that information.

Another big advantage, we felt, was that it wouldn't be just a black box. We would know what was inside the black box. We would know all the elements of the risk decision that was

being made and understand exactly how that decision process was arrived at by the software. As opposed to just throwing it to a black-box decision-maker and it comes back with an answer and you don't really know all the factors that went into making that decision.

Last year, the matter of black-box systems became a huge issue in the industry, particularly relative to credit scoring and also in relation to Fannie Mae's and Freddie Mac's automated underwriting systems. Do you look back and think, "We really saw something far ahead that's coming to be an issue right now"?

I think Countrywide demonstrated a lot of foresight when it developed its own automated underwriting system. I think we did a great job selecting a rules engine. So we've kind of taken this back-end engine and completely integrated it with our e-business environment. That's one of the reasons why we're the No. 1 funder of loans on the Internet--because of our ability to price online.

The rules were initially developed using the documented guidelines of CHL's subprime products, plus extensive interviews with subprime underwriting experts. The rules are being continually enhanced based on the performance of loans, marketing strategies, new risk analyses and so on. The enhancements are released monthly. Secondary Marketing's AI department develops and maintains CLUES in close coordination with the Production divisions and IT. Countrywide employs approximately 1,550 technology employees today.

Since domain experts are involved in providing their valuable expertise based on years of experience, expert systems take care of credibility and accuracy of knowledge

Our servicing Web site, www.customers.countrywide.com, receives over 600,000 unique visitors per month. Over 400,000 borrowers can receive e-mail customer statements, and over 100,000 make online payments per month. Our underwriting engine tells them upfront whether or not their borrower will qualify and, if so, what is required to substantiate the loan. Time isn't wasted on unnecessary efforts.

Rethinking on classical AI today

These excerpts from the interview give fair understanding what roles classical AI systems played. Just think over, if such systems are to be developed today, how the approach would be! Definitely, not the same it was in 1990s, especially with emergence of Gen AI. Let us explore how such systems can be developed using Gen AI in the current Gen AI context.

Since domain experts are involved in providing their valuable expertise based on years of experience, expert systems take care of credibility and accuracy of knowledge using which it reasons and solves problems the way human beings solve; produce results in consistent and transparent manner, and explains the outcomes when asked. The results are equivalent of prescriptions given; verified and audited results by the professionals and practitioners.

Knowledge engineering is one of the crucial tasks, it is the process of building, maintaining, and developing expert systems by eliciting knowledge from human experts and encoding it into a computer-readable knowledge base. It involves using techniques like rule-based systems, frames, and semantic networks to simulate human decision-making in specific domains. Inference engine is the brain of the expert system. It processes the information stored in the knowledge base to draw conclusions or make recommendations using reasoning strategies (like forward chaining or backward chaining) to analyse facts (data) and apply rules.

One of the important distinctions of expert systems is knowledge base (typically rules)

and inference engine is completely separate making it easier to change the knowledge base. During the problem-solving using goal driven reasoning, it asks only relevant facts based on goal to be achieved.

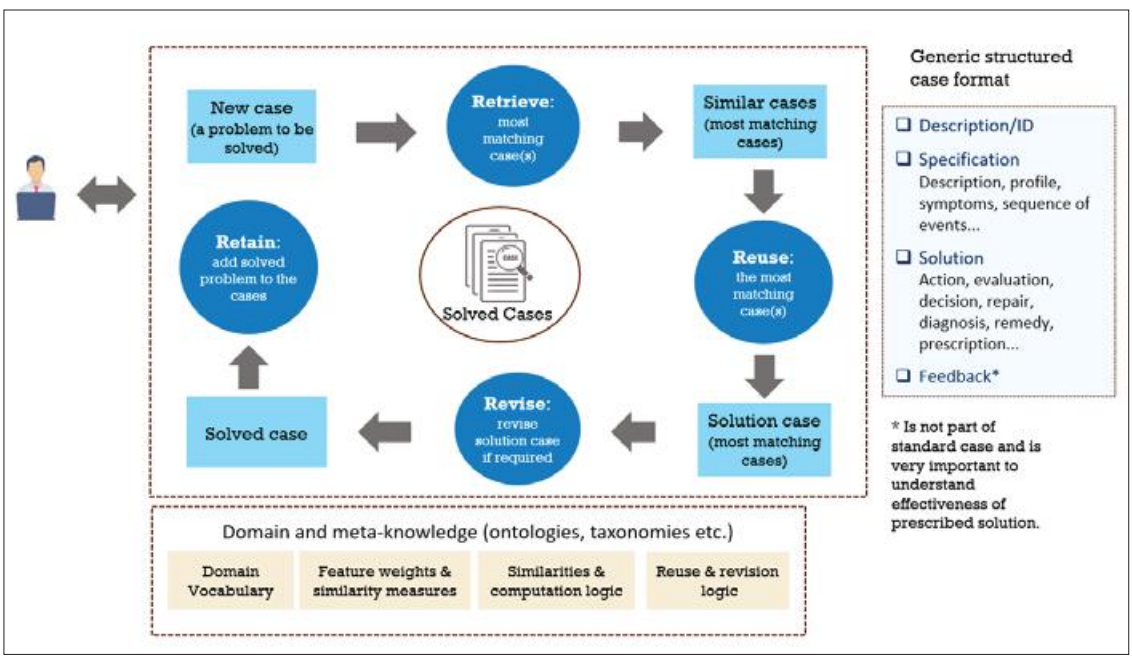
However, no technology in the AI domain is perfect; there are limitations to classical knowledge-based systems-

a. These systems do not have learning capabilities and extracting expert knowledge is time-consuming, expensive, and error-prone; experts often struggle to articulate tacit knowledge; knowledge needs validation and requires skilled knowledge engineers.

b. Knowledge engineering complexity: rule explosion, inter-rule conflicts, maintenance overhead as policies evolve.

c. Static knowledge representation: rules hard-coded, slow to build, versioned manually making them to respond slowly to market changes, difficult to scale across products or geographies, regulatory updates and new risk patterns. As markets, regulations, and borrower behaviour evolved rapidly, these systems struggled to keep pace.

Case-based reasoning (CBR) systems reason by analogy, solve new problems by retrieving and adapting solutions from similar past cases. They mimic human reasoning, the way, we as humans solve the problem. CBR systems store past experiences as solved cases. For example, CBR based underwriting system will have all past loan proposals as cases. Since cases themselves represent implicit knowledge, the knowledge required to build CBR systems is much lesser compared to expert systems. The good part of modelling using CBR, each and every feature including categorical ones such as qualification, skills, designation, job industry and status, dependent details can be modelled meaningfully, are given weights depending upon the relevance use-case and domain context rather than assigning numeric values like machine learning algorithms do. Features like



Solving problem using case-based reasoning

age, health are more important in insurance while ability to pay back is crucial for loan use-cases. Lot of domain knowledge (categories, ontologies, similarity measures, etc.) is used to semantically match features of solved cases to a new problem case to retrieve relevant cases to be reused and derive solution for problem case. Models are easier to understand and explain. Together, ES and CBR form the backbone of knowledge-driven decision automation.

With the advent of Gen AI, the tasks of modelling and engineering of domain knowledge have been simplified. There is really no need to go through huge documents, circulars, regulatory requirements manually; Gen AI backed systems can extract and structure the knowledge the way domain experts and knowledge engineers and developers want them to suit systems that implement them. It means the knowledge engineering problem is sorted out to great extent. It also helps make systems deterministic.

While recent advances in Gen AI have transformed natural language understanding and content generation, classical AI paradigms such as ES and CBR continue to offer strengths that are critical in regulated domains like BFSI

Why classical AI still matters in the Gen AI era

Use cases like loan underwriting remains a domain where reasoning, justification, and accountability are at least as important as predictive power. Regulatory scrutiny, explainability mandates, and institutional risk appetite demand systems that can do more than generate plausible answers they must reason transparently and consistently.

This makes loan underwriting a natural candidate for revisiting classical AI approaches, particularly ES and CBR approaches that were foundational to early AI success stories and remain highly relevant in regulated decision-making contexts.

While recent advances in Gen AI have transformed natural language understanding and content generation, classical AI paradigms such as ES and CBR continue to offer strengths that are critical in regulated domains like BFSI. Please note, the classical AI in this context, is referred to expert systems and case-based reasoning systems.

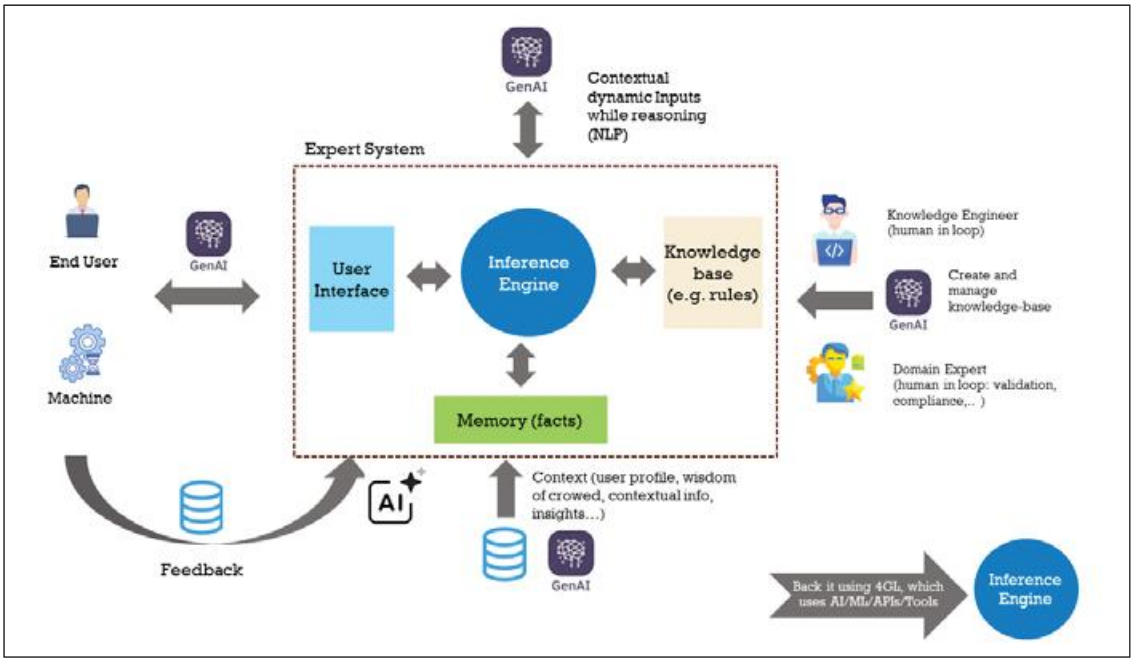
Gen AI can complement, not replace knowledge-centric AI, enabling a new generation of underwriting systems that are explainable, credible, adaptive, and scalable. The good part is, Gen AI would be extensively used (offline) for knowledge engineering while building systems than while problem solving time (run-time), thereby saving lot of tokens (in directly the cost) at the time of execution. This is like one time creation of enterprise level software with help of end users, system analysts and developers using Gen AI backed platform. Which takes time, efforts and cost to create but subsequent cost of usage of software by many stakeholders is almost none. Updates can be easily done and managed using controlled vibe-coding.

Challenges with pure Gen AI

Generative AI has reignited interest in AI-driven decision-making by dramatically lowering the cost of language understanding, knowledge summarisation and pattern abstraction. However, in underwriting contexts, Gen AI introduces critical risks:

a. Hallucination: confident but incorrect reasoning.
b. Non-determinism: inconsistent outputs.
c. Explainability gaps: narrative explanations without verifiable logic.
d. Regulatory discomfort: difficulty proving decision integrity.

As a result, pure Gen AI underwriting systems remain unsuitable for core credit decisions without strong controls. Another challenge



Using Gen AI to strength Expert System

is, cost overhead as every conversation needs interaction with Gen AI and exchange of tokens. Imagine use-cases, which on production need conversations with millions of customers, for example, making underwriting engine available online which tells borrowers upfront whether or not their proposal will qualify and, if so, what is required to substantiate the loan.

Using Gen AI to strengthen ES and CBR systems

Gen AI as a knowledge multiplier for ES and CBR

Rather than positioning Gen AI as a decision maker, a more powerful paradigm is to use it as a knowledge structuring and acquisition layer. The real opportunity lies in repositioning Gen AI as an enabler of classical AI, not its replacement.

Accelerating knowledge acquisition

Gen AI can ingest credit policy manuals, regulatory circulars, historical underwriting notes and convert them into draft rule sets, decision tables, case attributes for CBR systems. This directly takes care of historical bottleneck of knowledge engineering.

Structuring tacit expertise

Through guided prompts and scenario-based interactions, Gen AI can help experts articulate implicit heuristics, exception patterns and risk trade-offs. These outputs can then be validated and formalized into ES/CBR knowledge bases.

Continuous knowledge refresh

Unlike static rule systems, Gen AI can monitor policy changes, suggest knowledge updates, flag inconsistencies across rules and cases. Crucially, final authority remains with human experts, preserving governance.

Assisted knowledge engineering
Act as a copilot for domain experts, reduce dependence on specialized knowledge engineers

Reimagining underwriting systems today with Gen AI

If such systems were to be built today, Gen AI would enable faster time-to-knowledge, weeks instead of months to model underwriting logic.

Hybrid architecture: Gen AI for knowledge ingestion, natural language interaction and ES + CBR for Core decision logic and deterministic execution.

Explainable by design: Decisions grounded in explicit rules and precedents, Gen AI used to explain decisions in details and not invent them.

Scalable human-in-the-loop: Experts validate and curate knowledge, Gen AI amplifies expert productivity.

LLM-based knowledge engineering reduces runtime LLM dependence

What LLMs are very good at (Offline)

LLMs excel at:

- Reading large policy documents
- Extracting rules, conditions, exceptions
- Proposing similarity attributes
- Drafting adaptation logic
- Generating structured representations (rules, cases, vocabularies)

This directly maps to CBR knowledge containers:

- Vocabulary
- Case base
- Similarity measures
- Adaptation knowledge

Once this knowledge is materialised into structured form, it becomes executable without LLMs, that is the crucial cost-saving pivot. However, whenever there is change knowledge needs revision.

What happens after knowledge is structured

Once rules and cases are: validated by experts, stored in databases/rule engines, versioned and governed then at runtime:

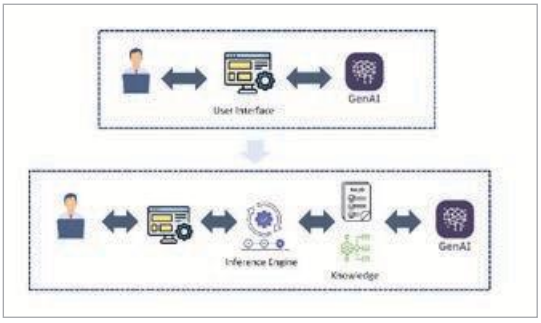
- Expert System - evaluates rules (cheap, deterministic)
- CBR engine - retrieves similar cases (cheap, index-based)
- Similarity - vector / symbolic distance (very cheap)
- Adaptation - rule-based or parametric (cheap)

No tokens consumed, no hallucination risk, no RAG latency and no prompt engineering

Conceptual shift

Instead of Use LLMs to decide loan, the architecture becomes Use LLMs to build and maintain the knowledge that decides loans.

This shift aligns strongly with recent research on CBR-LLM hybrids, which explicitly identifies LLMs as effective knowledge engineers rather than reliable runtime decision agents.



Using Gen AI to create knowledge

Building the same systems today: A hybrid blueprint

If underwriting expert systems were designed today, the architecture would look markedly different.

Gen AI Layer	
	Knowledge ingestion, natural language interfaces and expert copilot for rule and case creation
Classical AI Core (ES + CBR)	
	Deterministic decision logic, explainable inference, policy-compliant execution
Human-in-the-Loop Governance	Validation, Versioning, Auditability

This hybrid approach preserves trust while dramatically improving agility.

CBR systems, in particular, allow institutions to demonstrate applicants with similar profiles were treated consistently across time and geography

AI in Indian BFSI is a governance problem first

In the Indian BFSI ecosystem, loan underwriting is not merely a technical decision problem, it is a regulated institutional process governed by prudential norms, supervisory oversight, and public accountability.

Institutions operate under:

- Reserve Bank of India supervisory frameworks
- Internal vigilance and audit mechanisms
- Parliamentary and CAG scrutiny (especially for PSU banks)

As a result, any AI-driven underwriting system must satisfy three non-negotiable requirements:

- Explainability (why was a loan approved or rejected?)
- Consistency (are similar borrowers treated similarly?)
- Defensibility (can the decision survive audit and legal review?)

These requirements strongly favour knowledge-centric AI paradigms, particularly ES and CBR, over opaque or probabilistic-only approaches.

Classical AI in Indian banking: An understated legacy

Indian banks especially PSU banks and large NBFCs have a long but often under-acknowledged history of deploying rule-driven decision systems, even if not always labelled as "AI".

Rule-Based Underwriting as De-Facto Expert Systems

Historically, Indian underwriting systems embedded:

- Eligibility rules derived from RBI Master Directions
- Exposure limits and sectoral caps
- Credit score cut-offs and deviation matrices
- Delegation-of-power (DoP) logic

These systems effectively functioned as expert systems, with:

- Explicit policy rules
- Deterministic execution
- Manual override workflows

Their longevity is itself evidence of regulatory fitness.

Why ES and CBR align naturally with RBI expectations

Explainability and audit readiness

RBI supervision whether through risk-based supervision (RBS), thematic inspections and IT and model audits; implicitly expects traceable decision logic. Expert systems and CBR offer case precedent justification and clear linkage to policy documents. This directly supports internal audit, concurrent audit and RBI inspection responses.

Consistency and fair lending

Indian regulators are increasingly sensitive to bias, arbitrary discretion and inconsistent

treatment across regions or branches. CBR systems, in particular, allow institutions to demonstrate applicants with similar profiles were treated consistently across time and geography. This is a powerful compliance narrative.

Challenges included: large, heterogeneous branch networks, tacit underwriting knowledge concentrated in senior officers and frequent policy circulars and clarifications

Knowledge acquisition at scale

Challenges included: large, heterogeneous branch networks, tacit underwriting knowledge concentrated in senior officers and frequent policy circulars and clarifications. Capturing this knowledge manually was slow and fragile. Indian BFSI regulation evolves rapidly: priority sector norms, MSME classification, changes, loan to value (LTV) and provisioning updates and digital lending guidelines.

Reimagining CLUES-Era Systems for today's India

Earlier loan underwriting expert systems succeeded because they matched:

- Institutional risk culture
- Regulatory expectations
- Operational realities

If similar systems were built today, Gen AI would enable:

- Faster knowledge onboarding across products and regions
- Easier adaptation to RBI changes
- Better documentation for audits

But the core decision logic would remain rule- and case-driven.

A regulatory-first hybrid architecture

A future-ready Indian underwriting system would comprise:

- Gen AI Layer (assistive, not authoritative): policy ingestion, knowledge structuring, natural language explanations
- Classical AI Core (authoritative): Expert system rules aligned to RBI norms, case-based reasoning for precedent handling and deterministic inference
- Governance Layer: human approval, version control, audit logs and explainability reports

Such an architecture satisfies: RBI supervision, PSU bank accountability and NBFC agility

Responsible, regulator-ready AI for India

For Indian banks, NBFCs, and regulators, the goal isn't automating underwriting, but doing it responsibly. Classical AI provides the structural integrity and audit trails demanded by Indian regulatory regimes. Gen AI accelerates knowledge engineering and evolution without undermining governance.

Secondary Benefits

- Determinism and Auditability: same inputs -> same outputs, full reasoning trace available and easier RBI and internal audits.
- Reduced Vendor Lock-In: core logic resides in rules and cases, LLM provider can be swapped or downgraded and no dependence on proprietary embeddings or prompts.
- Lower Operational Risk: no hallucinations in credit decisions, no runtime model drift and easier incident analysis and rollback
- Regulatory Comfort: LLMs are not deciding credit, humans approve knowledge and systems behave predictably

Strategic implication for Indian BFSI

For Indian banks and NBFCs, the question is not 'How do we use LLMs more?' but rather 'How do we use LLMs where they reduce cost and risk instead of increasing it?'

Shifting LLMs upstream achieves exactly that:

- LLMs amplify expert productivity
- Classical AI delivers governed execution
- Institutions retain control over decisions

This is not anti-Gen AI. It is Gen AI used where it is strongest and avoided where it is weakest.

Use-case driven guidance (What BFSI leaders actually care about)

Use Rules / Expert Systems When	Examples
• Decision logic is explicitly defined • RBI / internal policy mandates exist • Decisions must be consistent across branches • Volume is high and margins are thin	• Eligibility checks • LTV, FOIR (Fixed Obligation to Income Ratio), DSCR (Debt Service Coverage Ratio) thresholds • Exposure caps and DoP (Delegation of power) rules • Mandatory rejections (blacklists, KYC failures)
Use Case-Based Reasoning (CBR) When	**Examples**
• Exceptions and nuances matter • Historical precedent is relevant • Human underwriters already think in analogies • Explainability via examples is valuable CBR is ideal where rules alone become brittle.	• MSME underwriting with informal income • Deviation handling • Risk-based pricing justification • Portfolio consistency checks
Use LLMs / Gen AI When	**Examples**
• The task is linguistic or exploratory • Determinism is not mandatory • The output is advisory, not authoritative • Cost per invocation is acceptable LLMs should not be primary credit decision-makers.	• Policy summarization • Credit note drafting • Analyst copilots • Customer communication templates • Knowledge extraction from documents
Use Hybrid (Rules + CBR + LLM) When	**Examples**
• The problem is regulated and complex • Decisions must be auditable • Knowledge evolves over time • Scale and cost matter	• End-to-end loan underwriting • Credit decision explanation systems • Regulatory-compliant AI platforms • Enterprise underwriting modernization

The way forward

The future of AI in BFSI underwriting is not a choice between classical AI and Gen AI, but a thoughtful integration of both.

- Expert Systems and CBR provide trust, explainability, and control.
- Gen AI provides scalability, adaptability, and knowledge acceleration.

Together, they enable Responsible AI for BFSI systems that are intelligent, transparent, and regulator-friendly. The real opportunity lies in leveraging Gen AI to industrialise knowledge engineering, allowing classical AI systems to evolve continuously without losing their foundational strengths.

For Indian BFSI, the AI question is not how powerful is the model? but how defensible is the decision?

- Expert Systems and CBR provide institutional trust
- Gen AI provides knowledge velocity
- Human governance provides regulatory legitimacy

Together, they form a Responsible AI paradigm that is uniquely suited to India's banking system. The future of underwriting AI in India lies not in bypassing regulation, but in engineering intelligence that works within it.

Icons used in diagrams are acknowledged and for academic purposes only. IM

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Armaan Hoyvoy

Notwithstanding the presence of global and Indian e-commerce giants, India's grocery stores and other such services are thriving.

✦ KRISHAN KALRA, ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Resilient systems

When two young IITians Sachin & Binny Bansal started an online book store in 2007—likely inspired by their experience at Amazon—there were serious doubts about the success of their venture. Later, as they went on adding products across categories—consumer electronic goods, fashion apparel, toys, cosmetics, etc., soon to have virtually everything on their site—the doubts were laid to rest. Just 11 years later, Walmart valued their enterprise, started with an initial investment of a mere ₹4 lakh, at $38 billion, and acquired a 77 per cent stake in the company.

There were also serious fears that *kiranas* (neighbourhood grocery stores) and many other services would all go out of business. These fears heightened hugely when, in 2013, Amazon set up shop in India, rapidly expanding since. Today, they have over a million sellers on their platform and a huge juggernaut of partners—delivery, warehousing, fulfilment—needed for handling their multi-billion-dollar business and almost flawless systems for quick delivery, replacements, and refunds, etc.

Amazon's entry created huge ripples and during Jeff Bezos's visit to India—reportedly, half a million traders representing thousands of trade bodies, protested in 300 cities booing the company and the visiting CEO and urging the government to not allow them to function in India. There were protests even outside the hotel where Bezos was staying in Mumbai and at where he had a long meeting with some 25-30 top industrialists, entrepreneurs, and professionals. There were apprehensions that their presence would mean the 'death of *kiranas*'. Even the sellers were reluctant to enter an internet-based platform and digital payments system. Of course, we are all aware of how the two companies have revolutionised retail in the country—offering everything that one might need under one roof.

However, notwithstanding their overwhelming presence—and the entry of other platforms—including ones that offer the pointless '10 minutes' delivery'—our old *kiranas* and other service providers have not 'shut shop', yet. Indeed, some smaller ones—an estimated 2 lakh did close down. But there

are nearly 13 million existing, and they are the backbone of FMCG distribution, especially, in rural areas and tier II & III cities, accounting for 85 per cent of the total sales. These stores, crucial for the country's retail sector, contribute 11 per cent to the GDP and 8 per cent to the workforce. A majority of them are thriving and pose (along with the '10-minute delivery ones) serious competition for Amazon and Flipkart who are contemplating additional investments to catch up! Let me cite some examples of the strength of old *kiranas* from personal daily experience.

Our amazingly resilient *kiranas* and other services are actually increasing their presence rather than shrinking and folding up. Maybe, consumption has increased but these guys are always a step ahead in the game

- Our old cook-cum-majordomo has been going grocery shopping twice a month to the neighbourhood store. Over the years, we have seen the store expand—from one small outlet, the guy now owns four in diverse categories of products, spread over nearly 3,000 sq.ft. around the same location. I often see several customers being served by store assistants. There are about 4-5 assistants at the billing counter, and they are equipped with all kinds of modern technology that make shopping a seamless experience.
- Urban Company continues to do high-pressure digital publicity campaigns for their washing, ironing, cleaning, and massage services but the two 'ironing guys' in our neighbourhood are forever busy and at times refuse work.
- PharmEasy, Netmeds, 1MG, Truemeds, Medswala and others all offer doorstep delivery of medicines but all the pharmacies in my neighbourhood are always busy.
- Despite new malls coming up all the time, each one is crowded even though all kinds of apparel, shoes, handbags, etc. are available online. Why? I think we all want to physically see and touch what we are buying, feel the fabric/leather, etc. Also, malls are not only for shopping; they offer a range of food outlets, multiplexes, and other entertainment too—an experience and an outing for the family—so they are unlikely to lose business to the online commerce companies.

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So, our amazingly resilient *kiranas* and other services are actually increasing their presence rather than shrinking and folding up. Maybe, consumption has increased but these guys are always a step ahead in the game. Their personal contact with the customers, time they spend with each one, some even giving short term credit without any paperwork are all comfort factors for their robust existence and expansion in the face of formidable e-commerce platform.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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