

CIO&LEADER

TRACK TECHNOLOGY • BUILD BUSINESS • SHAPE SELF

"AI will help enterprises break tradition and leap into next-level innovation."



ANISH SHAH

President, COO, Jio Platforms Ltd, Chief of IT & Digital Platforms, Reliance Jio
PG. 8

"Open-source technology will be key to making AI both affordable and effective for businesses."

AKASH AMBANI

Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd
PG. 4

25TH ANNUAL CIO&LEADER CONFERENCE

The Intelligent Enterprise - AI Edition
PG. 10

15TH NEXT100 AWARDS

Presenting the 2024 batch of 100 future CIOs
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6TH CIO&LEADER SAMMAN

Acknowledging the contribution of senior IT leaders
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**You and your IT team drive transformation in your organization...
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Thank you!

THE 25TH CIO&LEADER Annual Conference, held in Goa this August, was a resounding success! On behalf of the entire CIO&Leader team, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for your continuous support, participation, and for sharing your invaluable insights at the various conferences we've organized. This milestone event, marking our silver jubilee, provided a critical platform to discuss and shape the future of AI, cloud, data, and security for the coming year.

This issue features key highlights from the conference, including the 6th CIO&Leader Samman and the 15th annual NEXT100 awards, where veteran CIOs and emerging leaders converged to chart the future and celebrate leadership.

The event also featured thought provoking keynote addresses from industry leaders such as Akash Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd., Mohit Kapoor, Group CTO of Mahindra & Mahindra, Ashvin Vellody, Chief Strategy Officer, Consulting, Deloitte AP and India, and Saurabh Chandra, MD, BCG.

Akash emphasized the role of open-source technology in making AI both affordable and effective for businesses, while addressing essential concerns like privacy, security, and data sovereignty. His detailed interview is featured in this edition, with more insights from other keynotes to follow in upcoming issues.

I'm particularly excited to witness many of you significantly increasing investments in AI and ML, positioning your organizations to leverage these technologies for innovation, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage. During my personal interactions, it became clear that improving customer experience, innovating products and services, and discovering actionable insights to enhance decision-making are top priority areas where AI can make a substantial impact.

There is also a notable shift toward adopting AI as packaged solutions, reflecting the growing trend of integrating ready-made solutions into existing systems. We will explore these trends further in future editions.

We look forward to continuing this journey of collaboration and innovation with you! ■



I am particularly excited to see many of you significantly increasing investments in AI and ML, positioning yourselves to leverage these technologies for innovation, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage.

Jatinder Singh
Executive Editor
jatinder.singh@9dot9.in

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August-September 2024



COVER STORY

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The silver jubilee edition of India's largest CIO gathering witnessed several high-profile attendees.



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Empowering tomorrow's workforce by building future-ready skills

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Editor: **Vikas Gupta**





Open-source technology will be key to making AI both affordable and effective for businesses

In an exclusive interaction with CIO&Leader, **Akash Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio**, shares insights on AI's role in the enterprise ecosystem and Jio's efforts to drive AI adoption for business growth.

By **Jatinder Singh and Sachin Mhashilkar** | editor@cioandleader.com

A **AT THE 25TH** CIO&Leader Annual Conference, Akash Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm, addressed over 200 CIOs and NEXT100 winners in a virtual Q&A session. During the discussion, Ambani, who leads Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL)—the telecom division of Reliance Industries and a subsidiary of Jio Platforms—shared his vision for India's digital future and highlighted the crucial role AI will play in driving the next phase of growth in the country.

Ambani discussed Jio's strategy to democratize AI by leveraging its success in enabling nationwide connectivity. He highlighted AI's crucial role in shaping the future of enterprises, Jio's commitment to developing hyper-personalized AI solutions, and the importance of cultivating an AI-driven culture within Reliance Industries.

Since joining the RJIL board as a non-Executive Director in 2014, Ambani has been a driving force behind the company's mission to revolutionize India's digital landscape. As the

current leader, he spearheads Jio's initiatives in 5G, AI, Blockchain, and IoT, aiming to initiate a transformative shift in commerce, education, and healthcare.

Jio, which was initially soft-launched on December 27, 2015, for partners and employees, became publicly available on September 5, 2016. It has since rapidly grown to become India's largest mobile network operator and the third-largest globally, with over 481.8 million subscribers (as of August 2024).

CIO&Leader: How do you see AI shaping the future of industries in India? What role will Reliance Industries play in this transformation, both in India and globally?

Akash Ambani: AI has transitioned from a buzzword to a mainstream technology, driving unprecedented transformations across industries. It holds the promise to revolutionize sectors, unlock significant business value, and enhance customer

Interview

experiences. The advancements in generative AI, especially with multi-modal and multi-lingual capabilities, are particularly exciting. We expect open-source technology to be key in making AI both affordable and effective for businesses.

At Jio, our mission to connect 1.4 billion Indians now extends to integrating AI across every enterprise segment and into daily life.

For example, since the launch of our 5G service, we've utilized real-time AI to optimize our radio cells and network equipment. With over 2 million radio cells deployed across India, each unit is autonomously optimized to meet specific traffic and customer needs. These real-life applications will only accelerate with the advancements in generative AI, leading to a range of hyper-personalized solutions driven by our enterprise knowledge.

At Jio, we see ourselves not merely as participants but as architects of this transformation. Our role has evolved from managing IT infrastructure to spearheading strategic initiatives. AI and data-driven insights are now integral to our daily operations, and we aim to incorporate AI into all our product segments—mobility, home, enterprise, and applications.

We recognize the vast potential of AI applications such as natural language processing, computer vision, and machine learning, especially given India's diverse landscape. Our focus on generative AI is about transforming initial excitement into practical, scalable applications. We plan to leverage generative AI to automate creative processes and personalize customer experiences, embedding these advancements into our Jio platforms.

Reflecting on our journey, we have leveraged AI at Jio for a couple of years and are now prepared to share our best practices and learnings with our enterprise customers. In summary, it is crucial to allocate resources based on the strategic importance of each project, embrace change, carefully evaluate business value, consider expected ROI, and assess implementation complexity. This approach remains our main focus at Jio.

CIO&Leader: What are the key challenges in making AI democratization possible?

Akash Ambani: To fully harness the benefits of

AI, we must approach it with an open mind and embrace change. Technology should enhance our customers' lives and provide real business value, not be used just for the sake of it. It is crucial that our solutions deliver tangible outcomes and address key issues like privacy, security, and data sovereignty. Our goal is to advance quickly while remaining responsible and mindful.

Additionally, overcoming resistance to new technologies is essential. As a forward-thinking company, we have embraced AI through partnerships with technology providers, leveraging open-source ecosystems, and developing in-house solutions. Regularly reflecting on our practices and sharing insights with our enterprise customers is critical for effective AI adoption.

Every technology must be evaluated thoroughly. It's important to move beyond legacy thought processes and focus on what you are truly enabling. For us, key considerations include data privacy, sovereignty, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and affordability. We assess each of these aspects carefully and choose the most suitable approach—whether partnering with technology providers, using open-source tools, or building in-house AI solutions. Although we're in the early stages, we are committed to leveraging all available avenues to achieve our goals.

CIO&Leader: How can Reliance Jio collaborate with manufacturing industry CIOs to facilitate practical AI/ML proof of concepts? What steps would you recommend to help them showcase tangible results to management?

Akash Ambani: At Reliance Jio, we emphasize the importance of partner ecosystems and joint enterprise collaborations. Our partnership

"It's important to continuously monitor and experiment with emerging technologies, especially in the rapidly evolving generative AI space."

"AI and data-driven insights are now integral to our daily operations, and we aim to incorporate AI into all our product segments—mobility, home, enterprise, and applications"

with Azure provides a solid foundation for advancing AI/ML initiatives across various sectors. To facilitate practical AI/ML proof of concepts, we recommend that manufacturing CIOs explore the most effective approaches within this partnership and tailor them to their specific needs.

We encourage companies to assess their unique requirements and collaborate with us to devise the best strategy. By working closely together, we can ensure that these initiatives deliver tangible results and provide clear value to management.

CIO&Leader: How can organizations scale their infrastructure for growing AI workloads and optimize for real-time processing? What bottlenecks or challenges should they anticipate?

Akash Ambani: I view this question in two parts. First, achieving high reliability is crucial. Within our company, I've advocated for measuring reliability not just as a percentage but on a per-customer basis. Whether the customer is an enterprise or a network service user, even minimal downtime can lead to significant frustration.

To address the scalability of infrastructure, cloud-native architectures are essential. Leveraging microservices and containerization for modular AI applications is critical. We tend to overinvest in scalable infrastructure and sometimes over-engineer systems, but this is necessary for ensuring service availability and continuity.

Interoperability and open standards also play an important role in staying ahead of trends. It's important to continuously monitor and experiment with emerging technologies,

especially in the rapidly evolving generative AI space. Regular experimentation with new AI tools can enhance business operations and customer engagement.

CIO&Leader: How do you anticipate AI will transform the global economy? What proactive strategies should be adopted to manage its effects on employment, and mitigate job displacement?

Akash Ambani: AI presents a substantial growth opportunity, with recent studies projecting over \$250 billion potential market by next decade. This highlights the immense value AI can unlock, offering unprecedented business advantages.

Regarding job displacement, I believe AI will primarily enhance organizational efficiency and focus, rather than diminish employment opportunities. By integrating AI tools effectively within our ecosystem, we can improve job roles and create new opportunities. The key lies in deploying AI with a clear focus on real customer needs and business value. With the right approach, AI will not only augment existing roles but also generate new ones, benefiting the Indian workforce significantly.

CIO&Leader: Jio is developing Bharat GPT, a specialized LLM for India, in collaboration with IIT Bombay. Can you share more about this project and its expected launch?

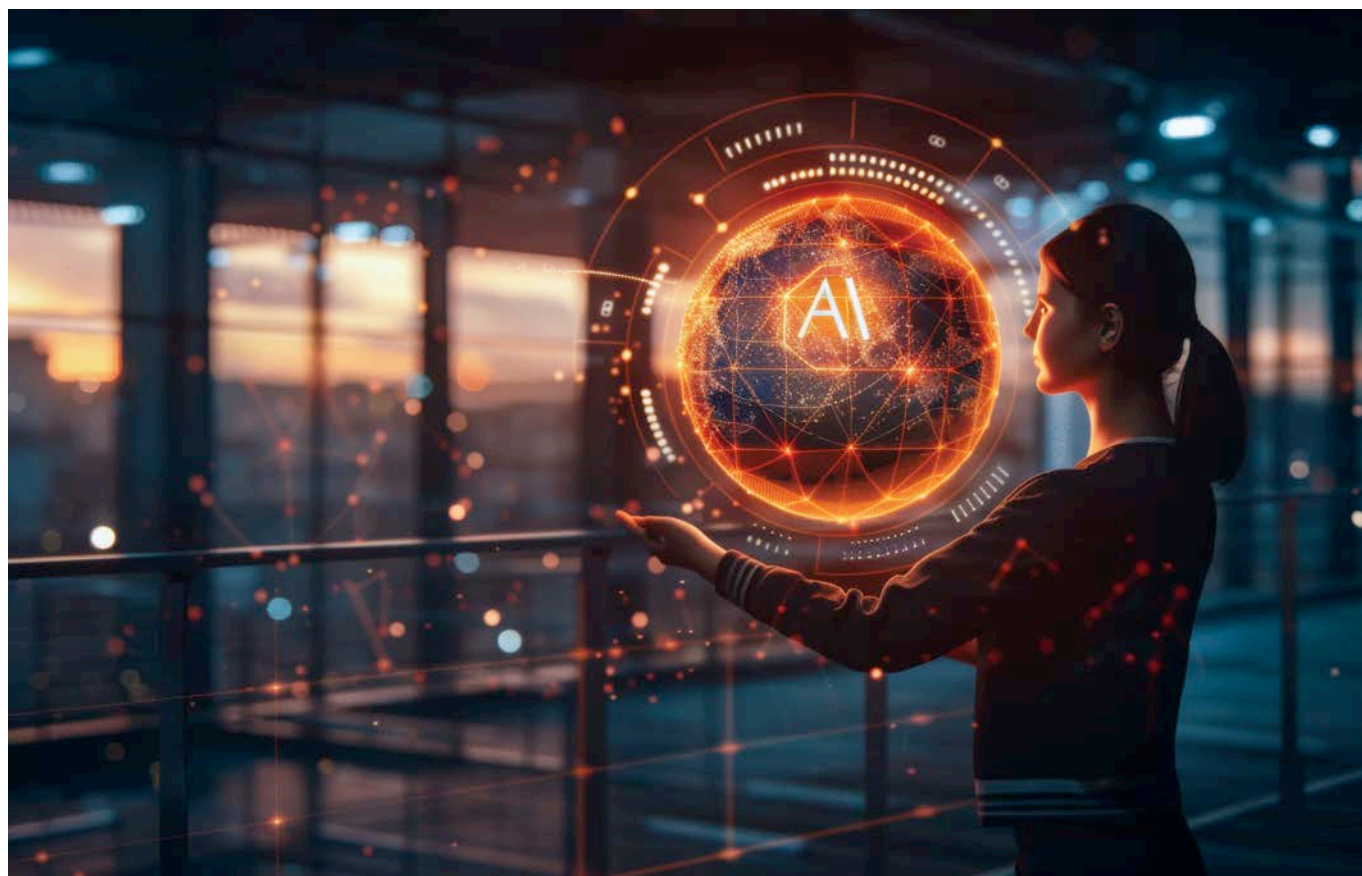
Akash Ambani: We're currently in the exploratory phase with Bharat GPT. It's essential to establish a strong business case and understand the impact it could have on a billion Indians before moving forward. As we make significant advancements, you'll hear about it directly from us. Our focus remains on developing technology that can be democratized for all of India, ensuring it brings meaningful change to the lives of our consumers. ■



Scan the QR code to watch the full interview.

keynoteaddress

By **Anish Shah**



AI will help enterprises break tradition and leap into next-level innovation and growth

Anish Shah, President, Chief of IT and Digital Platforms at Reliance Jio talks about how AI drives next-level innovation and growth in his keynote address at the 25th CIO&Leader Conference.

By **CIO&Leader** | editor@cioandleader.com

A

AT THE 25TH CIO&Leader Conference, an exclusive annual gathering of over 200 top CIOs and future CIOs of India, the focus was on AI's transformative power and its role in shaping the future of business. Among the distinguished speakers, Anish Shah, President, Chief of IT and Digital Platforms at Reliance Jio, delivered a compelling keynote on how AI is driving next-level innovation and growth.

"First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to CIO&Leader for bringing all of us together. Celebrating milestones like 15 and 25 years is no small feat—congratulations to the entire team. CIO&Leader has made invaluable contributions to the enterprise technology space and continues to shape its future," said Shah.

The impact of AI

Highlighting the impact of AI, Shah emphasized the importance of making AI accessible to all enterprises as a means of driving societal growth. "We've discussed how cultivating AI within every enterprise can significantly benefit society. Enabling AI for everyone, in my view, is one of the best ways for enterprises to contribute to societal growth. This is a meaningful and impactful direction for us to take."

Reflecting on his experience, Shah credited the leadership at Jio for fostering a culture of experimentation and innovation. "I've been fortunate to work with leaders like Akash, who have guided us with the freedom to innovate and the courage to fail. This support is crucial as we push boundaries and strive to achieve what once seemed impossible. Our chairman's vision, particularly in democratizing AI across India, inspires us daily. His passion drives us to continuously innovate and explore new horizons."



"The opportunities for intelligent enterprises are immense. With the right guidance and support, we can pioneer significant advancements and redefine the future of intelligent enterprises".

The future of intelligent enterprises

Shah envisions a future where enterprises transcend traditional practices, embracing AI to achieve unprecedented innovation and growth. "The opportunities for intelligent enterprises are immense. With the right guidance and support, we can pioneer significant advancements and redefine the future of intelligent enterprises. This is how we will shape the next era of business innovation." ■

—In closing, Shah congratulated the NEXT100 winners of 2024 and urged them to embrace new technologies with responsibility and a commitment to continuous learning, wishing them success in their journey as future leaders.



The silver jubilee edition of India's largest CIO gathering witnessed several high-profile keynote speakers including Akash Ambani, Mohit Kapoor

By CIO&Leader



C

CIO&LEADER HELD ITS flagship event, the 25th Annual CIO&Leader Conference, from August 2-4, 2024, at the picturesque Holiday Inn Resort in Goa. The conference, known for its insightful and thought-provoking format, was themed "The Intelligent Enterprise - AI Edition."

The discussions at the Silver Jubilee edition focused on developing impactful strategies and a way forward on how to effectively integrate AI into their organizations to drive business transformation and innovation.

The conference convened some of India's most prominent technologists, who channeled their expertise, insights, and innovative ideas to discuss and recommend cutting-edge AI-driven strategies for advancing business growth. With over 100 CIOs and 100 future CIOs in attendance, the event underscored its increasing significance and prestige.

Throughout the conference, participants engaged in over 60 sessions, featuring diverse formats such as keynote addresses, speed dating, roundtable discussions, CIO talks, panel discussions, and workshops designed to foster deep engagement and actionable outcomes.

The three-day event saw keynote sessions by tech leaders such as by Ashvin Vellody, Chief Strategy Officer - Consulting, Deloitte AP & India, Mohit Kapoor, Group Chief Technology Officer, Mahindra & Mahindra, Saurabh Chandra, Managing Director, BCG Platinon,

Akash Ambani, Chairman, Reliance Jio, and Vijay Sethi, Chief Mentor, MentorKart & Former CIO, CHRO & Head - CSR, Hero MotoCorp.

These interactive elements were integral to the CIO Prestige Program—an industry-first initiative for rewarding and recognizing CIOs. Throughout the conference, participants earned CIO Prestige Points by engaging in various activities and exploring the event's offerings.

CIO Prestige Program App, developed by CIO&Leader, allowed CIOs to track their points in real-time and see how they ranked among their peers in the competition for exciting prizes, including the grand prize Mahindra XUV 3XO.

Day 1's insightful discussions were followed by a lively Casino Theme party and a nostalgic Kishore Kumar Karaoke night, offering delegates a perfect blend of entertainment and networking. The event's highlight was the virtual presence of Akash Ambani, the Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm, who addressed the tech leaders and answered questions about the company's roadmap ahead and its AI journey.

On Day 2, after a day of intense sessions, participants enjoyed a Gala Dinner and Cocktails, accompanied by a vibrant musical performance by True Blue, adding an exciting conclusion to the day's events. On Day 3 the industry veterans were honored by a jury in CIO&Leader Samman, wrapping up the conference.

Day 1: Setting the Stage

The conference kicked off with attendees arriving at the Holiday Inn Resort, where they were greeted with a vibrant atmosphere and the opportunity to explore various sponsor booths. The official opening featured a welcome

address by Vikas Gupta, Publisher of CIO&Leader and Director of the 9.9 Group, setting an optimistic tone for the days ahead.

The innovative session by Ashvin Vellody, Chief Strategy Officer at Deloitte AP & India about "Creating an AI Strategy for Your Organization", kicked off the conference. The session offered insights into developing AI roadmaps.

The session by Mohit Kapoor, Group Chief Technology Officer at Mahindra & Mahindra, on Digital Transformations Powered by AI & Generative AI, was a major hit among the audience. He shared the use cases with the audience and gave inputs on how the businesses can leverage those uses.

The partner sessions of the day included-

- **"Harnessing AI for Your Business Transformation Ambition" by CR Srinivasan, Chief Executive Officer, Sify Digital Services.**
- **"The Road Ahead: AI in the Next Decade" by Archana Vemulapalli, Global Corporate Vice President, AMD, followed by an interactive Fireside Chat with R Giridhar, Group Editor, 9.9 Group.**
- **"Driving Efficiency & Innovation in an Era of AI-Powered Automation" by Siddhesh Naik, Country Leader - Data, AI & Automation, IBM India.**

One of the highlights of the day was the interactive "Speed Dating" session, where CIOs and future leaders engaged in quick, impactful conversations with technology partners, fostering valuable connections. The evening featured a lively Casino Theme party and a nostalgic Kishore Kumar Karaoke night, creating a perfect blend of networking and entertainment.

Day 2: Exploring AI's Potential

Day 2 began with a burst of energy, as attendees participated in morning activities like beach volleyball and photo shoots before diving into a day filled with thought-provoking sessions on AI.

Sachin Mhashilkar, Executive Director of B2B tech, greeted the audience on the second day of the event with a welcome note, followed by a keynote session on "Unlocking Business Value with GenAI: The Truth Behind the Hype!" by Saurabh Chandra, Managing Director, BCG Platonion.

Following the presentations, Jatinder Singh, Executive Editor, CIO&Leader, presented the findings of the CIO&Leader State of Technology Survey 2024, shedding light on the challenges and priorities in technology areas such as AI, IT security, Data & Analytics, and Cloud & Infrastructure.

A key segment of the day was the Ideas cafe, an interactive workshop where attendees brainstormed on pressing topics like AI-driven compute demands, the future of cybersecurity, and maximizing efficiency in multi-cloud environments.

Top CIOs explored creative solutions to 12 different technology-related problems during the session. These were-

- 1 **Growing Compute Demands with AI, Sudhakar Yerneni, Country Head, AMD.**
- 2 **Thermal Tsunami: Future Trends in Cooling in an AI Arena, Santosh Kulkarni, Country Manager - Business Development & Ashok Yadav, Director - Product Development & Engineering, Vertiv.**
- 3 **State of IT in 2024 and Beyond, Mohit Patle, Senior Director - India, Freshworks.**
- 4 **Your Digital Bridge for**

Enterprise Transformation, Harvinder Singh, Chief Revenue Officer - North Region & Rakesh Dosi, Business Head - Network Services, Sify.

- 5 **Cybersecurity in the Age of AI, Parag Khurana, Country Manager - India & SAARC, Barracuda.**
- 6 **Transform your CX for the Age of AI, Siddharth Kaul, Head - Growth Market Business, India & SAARC, Genesys.**
- 7 **Addressing Security & Compliance in an Era of Disruptive Communication Technologies, Moin Saimoula, National Head - Sales, IceWarp.**
- 8 **Adapting to Shifting Cyber-security Challenges Using SIEM, Sujith Immanuel Pellican, Head of IT Security - IAM & SIEM, ManageEngine.**
- 9 **Digital Transformation, Sushil Arya, Associate Director & Customer Technical Solutioner, Kyndryl.**
- 10 **Integrating AI with Existing Systems, Jagannadham Prava, CEO & Chandrasekhar Nudurumati, VP - Sales & IBM Practice Head, Dhanyaayai.**
- 11 **Optimizing Multi-Cloud Operations for Maximum Efficiency, Ashish Mathur, ex-CIO, ECU Worldwide.**
- 12 **Automating IT Operations Management, Deepak Agarwal, ex-Executive Director, IOCL.**
- 13 **Bridging the Gap: Aligning IT Performance with Business Goals, Dr Prashun Dutta, ex-CIO, Tata Power.**

The afternoon featured a series of insightful panel discussions, exploring AI's impact across various industries. Highlights included:

- **"AI in Financial Services," led by Ramesh Narayanaswamy, CTO at Aditya Birla Capital, exploring AI's role in transforming**



financial operations.

- "AI in Manufacturing," moderated by Sanjay Mishra, Chief Digital and Information Officer at Jindal Stainless, discussing AI's potential to revolutionize manufacturing processes.
- "AI in HR & People Management," led by Vinod Bhat, CIO at Tata SIA Airlines, focusing on AI's influence in human resources and talent management.

The panel discussions were held on the following topics:

INFORMATION REIMAGINED WITH TRUST

Moderator: **Vikas Gupta**

Panelists: **Pravin Patel Kulkarni**, Country Director-Sales, Cyber Security, OpenText India

Apurva Dalal, Chief Information Officer & acting CISO, Adani Green Energy

Indradyumna Datta, Group Chief Digital Officer, Jindal Steel & Power

Manish Grover, Executive Director

- Strategic IS & IS, Indian Oil Corporation

AUGMENTING CYBERSECURITY WITH AI

Moderator: **Sachin Mhashilkar**, Executive Director, B2B Technology, 9.9 Group

Panelists: **Sujith Immanuel**

Pellican, Head - IT Security, ManageEngine

Sendil Kumar Venkatesan, CTO, Shriram Capital

Anand Deodhar, Group Chief Digital & Information Officer, Force Motors

Rupesh Nirgude, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Prism Johnson

KRC Murty, Senior President & Head IMG - Business & Digital Technology Solutions, Yes Bank

Nirupmay Kumar, Executive VP - IT, Vodafone Idea

Sivasubramanian M, Chief Digital Officer, Welspun Corp

ELEVATE CX TO DRIVE BUSINESS OUTCOMES

Moderator: **Jatinder Singh**, Executive Editor, CIO&Leader

Panelists: **Ashish Sharma**, Vice President - Strategic Business Accounts, Ishan Technologies

Tushar Vagal, Chief Information Officer & Digital Head - L&T Realty, Larsen & Toubro

Vininder Baweja, Chief Digital & Information Officer, Saint-Gobain India

Seema Gaur, Senior Executive Director - IT, IFFCO

Padmabhushan Bahadure, Chief Technology Officer, IDBI Bank

PS Sundaram, Executive Director & Chief Information Officer, Power Finance Corporation Limited

Ashish Desai, Chief Information Officer - Textiles, Grasim Industries Limited

AI IN FINANCIAL SERVICES

Moderator: **Ramesh**

Narayanaswamy, CTO, Aditya Birla Capital

Panelists: **Ananth Subramanian**, EVP & Head - IT, Kotak Mutual Fund

Aparna Kumar, Chief Information Officer, State Bank of India

Avinash Naik, Chief Information Officer, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company

KV Dipu, Senior President, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company

AI IN MANUFACTURING

Moderator: **Sanjay Mishra**, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Jindal Stainless

Panelists: **Aashish Kshetry**, Vice President - IT & Chief Information Officer, Asian Paints

Atanu Roy, President & Group Chief Information Officer, PI Industries

Ajay Rambal, Head - IT, LG Electronics India

Parveen Dhangra, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Vedanta

Chetan Trivedi, Chief Information Officer, Hindustan Zinc

Dheeraj Sinha, Group CIO, Sun Pharmaceuticals

AI IN HR & PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Moderator: **Vinod Bhat**, Chief Information Officer & Chief Ethics Counsellor, Tata SIA Airlines

Panelists: **Sanjay Rao**, President, Group Chief Information Officer & Shared Services Head, SRF

Dr Prashant Atrey, Executive Director & Head of Department - IT & Communication, NHPC

Kishore Hirani, Chief Information Officer, Amara Raja Energy & Mobility

Mahesh Patil, Senior Vice President - IT, Axis Bank

Anand Hadgaonkar, Chief Information Officer - Asia, Whirlpool Corporation

Rupesh Nain, Chief Information Officer, Adani Enterprises Limited

The sessions with the senior tech leaders were as follows:

- **Implementing a Data-Driven Culture in Insurance** by Gautam Dutta, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance
- **Intelligent Transformation - My Thinking & Learnings** by Rajeev Jorapur, CIO, Bajaj Auto
- **Applying Systems Thinking to Digital Transformation** by Dr Prashun Dutta, ex-CIO, Tata Power
- **Digital Transformation in Logistics & Supply Chain**, by Ashish Mathur, Global CIO, ECU Worldwide
- **Enabling Intelligent Manufacturing**, by Anuj Vaid, Vice President, Kyndryl India
- Dr. A Shiju Rawther, Head IT, SBI Mutual Fund shared his experience as a **CIO and the evolving role of AI**

The high point of the day was the live interaction with Akash Ambani, the Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm. Akash Ambani addressed the IT tech industry veterans as well as the Next100

CIOs, acknowledging their role in “enabling a Digital India.”

He also shared his thoughts on the significance of AI in enterprises, and Jio's role in transf

Anish Shah, President and COO of Jio Platforms, facilitated the session.

The CIOs were invited for a Power Lunch where they were greeted with lively music and Goan-themed delicious Thali, which was packed with various dishes. As the day drew to a close, the much-anticipated NEXT100 Awards ceremony honored the next generation of CIOs, recognizing their potential and achievements in the tech industry.

The Next100 Awards is a yearly award program started by IT Next magazine and the 9.9 Group to select 100 seasoned IT managers with the aptitude and determination to become CIOs. The evening was a celebration of talent and the next generation of CIOs. Their potential and achievements in the tech industry were recognized by a jury, which carefully selected the awardees.

The partner sessions included-

- **“Revolutionize Service Management with GenAI”** by

Dhivakaran Thamilchelvan, Regional Head, Freshworks

- **“Driving Digital Excellence in Banking”** by Rakesh Dosi, Business Head - network Services & Jitender Durairajan, Vice President & Head - Cloud Engineering & Solutions, Sify
- **“Leveraging Data Centre & Hybrid Cloud for Your AI Transformation”** by Amit Agarwal, Chief Business Officer, Web Werks
- **“Network & SASE Foresight”** by Vijay Reddy, Vice President, Tata Communications
- **“Delivering Data-Driven, Personalized, and Delightful Omnichannel Customer Experiences”** by Sunil Sharma, Head-Enterprise Accounts Customer Interaction Suite, Tata Communications
- **“Pervasive AI in Your Business”** by Vinay Sinha, Corporate VP & MD-Sales, India Mega Region & Prabhat Sharma, Director-Sales, AMD India
- **“Enabling Intelligent Manufacturing”** by Anuj Vaid, Vice President, Kyndryl India
- **“Future of GenAI: The Path to General Intelligence”** by Sreekrishnan Venkiteswaran, CTO & Anuj Vaid, Vice President -

“AI should be leveraged as a tool and a strategic partner to unlock business opportunities and drive sustainable growth, with a focus on enhancing customer experiences.”

Akash Ambani
Chairman, Reliance Jio



“I can envision that enterprises in the near future will move away from traditional methods and advance to the next level, the next leap, and perhaps the next orbit of what an enterprise can achieve.”

Anish Shah

President and Chief Operating Officer
Jio Platforms Ltd



to identify the most meritorious finalists. These carefully selected finalists are then bestowed with the prestigious honor of CIO&Leader Samman.

CIO&LEADER SAMMAN 2024 RECIPIENTS

- **Aparna Kumar**, Former Chief Information Officer of SBI
- **Ashish Kshetry**, Vice President Information Technology & Chief Information Officer of Asian Paints Limited
- **Dr Prashant Atrey**, Executive Director - IT at NHPC
- **Dr Sandip Pradhan**, Chief Information Officer at Exide Industries Limited
- **Nitin Rohilla**, Chief Information Officer at Adani Power Limited
- **Sanjay Rao**, President, Group Chief Information Officer & Shared Services Head, of SRF Limited
- **Sumit Duttagupta**, CIO & Head Synergy at Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd
- **Umacharan Singh**, Chief Information Officer at CEAT

CIO&LEADER SAMMAN 2024 JURY PANEL

The jury panel for 2024 CIO&Leader Samman consisted of **Deepak Agarwal**, former ED- IS, Indian Oil Corporation Limited, **Dr Prashun Dutta**, former CIO, Tata Power & Reliance Energy, and **Vijay Sethi**, former CIO, Hero MotoCorp.

The conference concluded with the announcement of the Prestige POints winner and prize distribution. After three days of learning, networking, and celebration, the CIOs were ready to depart. The 25th Annual CIO&Leader Conference not only highlighted the critical role of AI in the future of business but also provided a platform for meaningful discussions, connections, and forward-thinking strategies. ■

- Strategic Business, Kyndryl India
- **“Beyond Digital: Crafting Adaptive Organizations in the Age of AI”** by Ranjit Metrani Executive Vice President, CtrlS
- **“How Far Can Your IT Infrastructure Go? Integrating AI-driven Future-ready Datacenters”** by Dr AS Prasad, Vice President – Product Development & Engineering, Vertiv

Game, Set, Match was an activity that captured the audience's interest where they were given a set of cards and had to interact with other CIOs to complete their set. The CIOs were seen running around and shouting, doing their best to complete the task and be the first ten to submit the completed set.

The day concluded with the energetic performance by True Blue, a rock band from Goa that enthralled the audience with their vast range of songs. The discussions continued on Day 3.

Day 3: Reflecting and Forward Thinking

The final day opened with a welcome note by Jatinder Singh, Executive Editor, CIO&Leader, who addressed

the audience with a quick recap and exciting activities yet to come.

After the welcome note, Vijay Sethi, Chief Mentor at MentorKart, spoke on the journey from NEXT100 winner to successful CIO, offering inspiration and guidance for aspiring tech leaders.

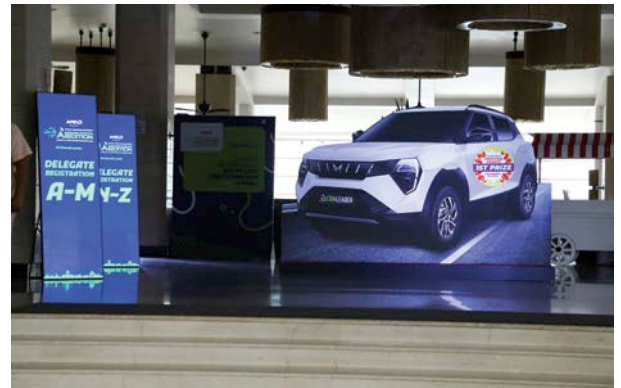
A key feature of the day was the AI Workshop, where participants worked in teams to solve case studies, followed by presentations that showcased innovative solutions to real-world challenges. The event culminated in the CIO&Leader Samman ceremony, celebrating veteran CIOs for their outstanding contributions to the industry.

CIO&Leader Samman was the main event of the day. The jury, consisting of three tech grandmasters, played a crucial role in selecting the eight veteran CIOs who were honored with the unique CIO&Leader Samman. This honor, bestowed by CIO&Leader annually, is a recognition of the significant contributions of these CIOs.

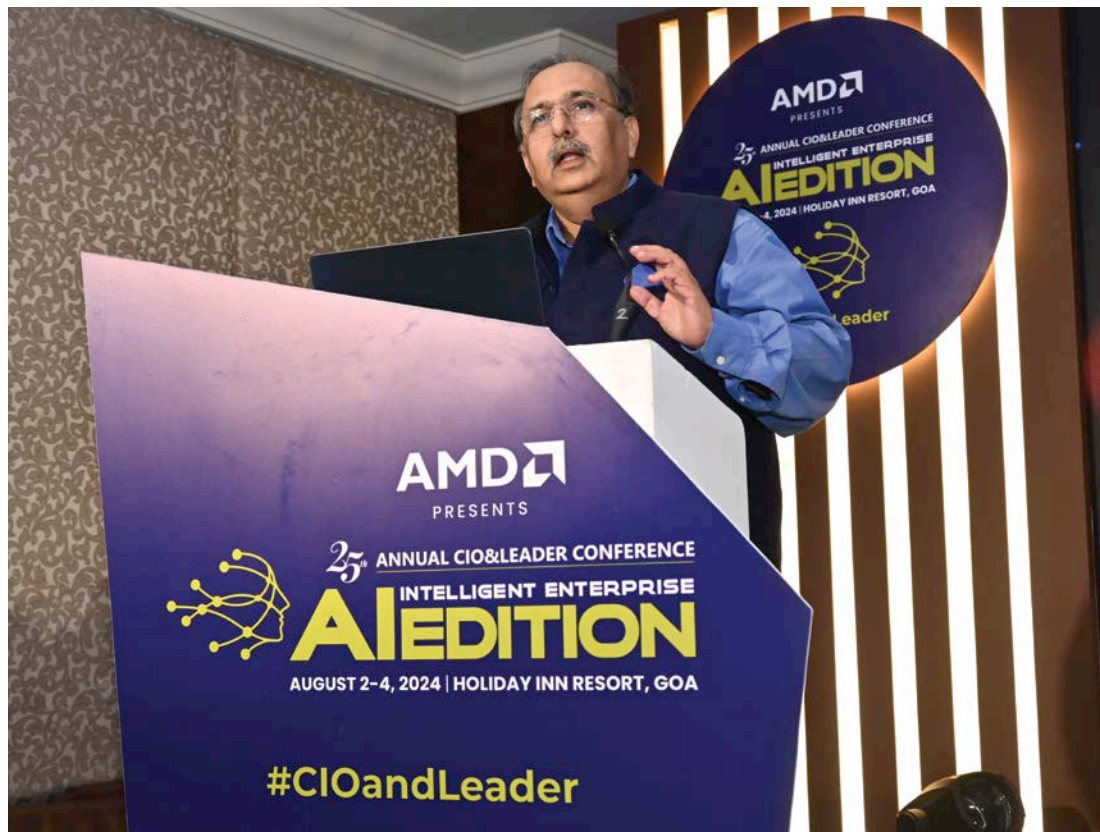
The brainchild of Shyamanujan Das, the CIO&Leader Samman is a meticulously structured event. It follows a rigorous procedure of multiple rounds, each designed



DAY 1: FRIDAY, 2ND AUGUST, 2024 AS THE DAY UNFOLDED...



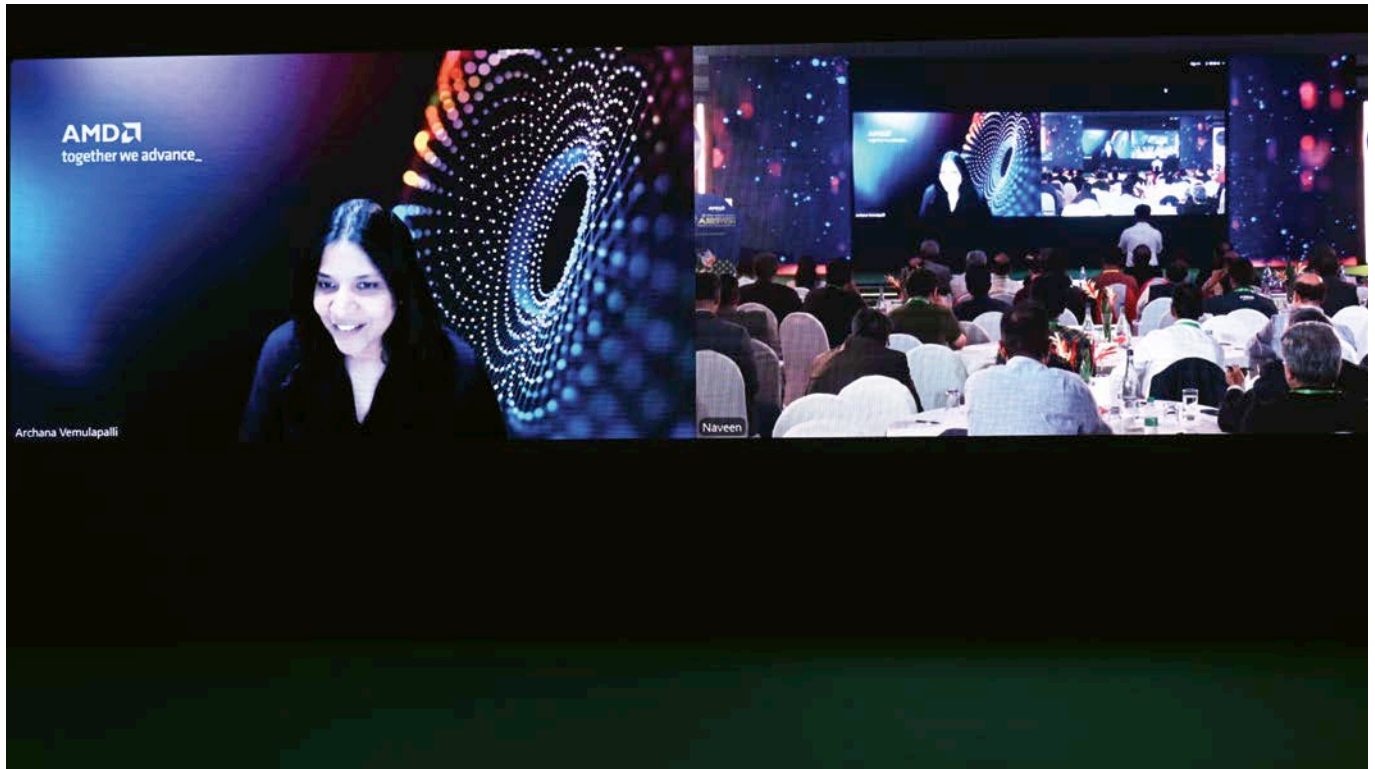
📍 **Delegates @ Registration desk:** On the arrival of delegates, the registration desk fills up and boost our enthusiasm.



← **Welcome note** by **Vikas Gupta**, Publisher and Director, CIO&Leader, 9.9 Group welcoming delegates



↑ **Creating an AI Strategy for Your Organization** by **Ashvin Vallody**, Chief Strategy Officer - Consulting, Deloitte AP & India



↑ **The Road Ahead: AI in the Next Decade** by **Archana Vemulapalli**, Global Corporate Vice President, AMD



↑ **Fireside Chat** featuring **Archana Vemulapalli**, Global Corporate Vice President at AMD, in conversation with **R Giridhar**, Group Editor, 9.9 Group.



↑ **Digital Transformation Powered by AI & Generative AI** by **Mohit Kapoor**, Group Chief Technology Officer, Mahindra & Mahindra



↑ **Harnessing AI for Your Business Transformation Ambition** by **CR Srinivasan**, Chief Executive Officer, Sify Digital Services



↑ **Driving Efficiency & Innovation in an Era of AI-Powered Automation** by **Siddhesh Naik**, Country Leader - data, AI & Automation, IBM India



↑ CIOs enhance their networking in a dynamic **Speed Dating** session



↑ Industry leaders share insights on 'Modernizing Digital Infrastructure for the Future of Business' at an engaging Wine & Cheese Session.
 Speakers: **Harvinder Singh**, Chief Revenue Officer (North) & **Jitender Durairajan**, VP & Head - Cloud Engineering & Solutions, Sify
 Moderator: **Vikas Gupta**, Publisher and Director, CIO&Leader, 9.9 Group.



↑ Exploring the milestones and innovations in the Customer's AI Journey in Wine & Cheese Session.
 Speakers: **Shrirang Deshpande**, Country Head, DataCentre Business & **Ashok Yadav**, Director - Product Development & Engineering, Vertiv
 Moderator: **Jatinder Singh**, Executive Editor, CIO&Leader



↑ Navigating the future of technology and innovation in the State of IT in 2024 & Beyond Wine & Cheese Session.
Speakers: **Mohit Patle**, Senior Director - India, Freshworks
Moderator: **Vandana Chauhan**, Director - Community Engagement, 9.9 Group



↑ Transforming the industry with Financial Services on Cloud by harnessing the power of innovation and agility in Wine & Cheese Session.
Speakers: **Sreekrishnan Venkiteshwaran**, CTO, Kyndryl
Moderator: **Sachin Mhashilkar**, Executive Director, B2B Technology, 9.9 Group





↑ **Leaders discussing the pervasive role of AI in modern business**
Speakers: **Vinay Sinha**, Corporate VP & MD - Sales, India Mega Region & **Sanjiv Mehta**, Country Manager, AMD India
Moderator: **R. Giridhar**, Group Editor, 9.9 Group



↑ **Abhishek Jain**, Versa addressing the audience



↑ Day 1 ended with the lively Casino themed party



DAY 2: SATURDAY 3RD AUGUST, 2024 POWER-PACKED SESSIONS



↑ **Breakfast & Morning Activities** (Beach Volleyball, Beach Photo shoots, Beach Football)



← **Welcome note by Sachin Mhashilkar**, Executive Director of CIO&Leader, greeting delegates on Day 2.



↑ **Unlocking Business Value with GenAI: The Truth Behind the Hype!** by **Saurabh Chandra**, Managing Director, BCG Platinion



↑ **Revolutionize Service Management with Gen AI** by **Dhivakaran Thamichelvan**, Regional Head, Freshworks



↑ **IDEAS CAFE**



↑ **Driving Digital Excellence in Banking Session** Speaker: **Rakesh Dosi**, Business Head - Network Services & Jitender Durairajan, Vice President & Head - Cloud Engineering & Solutions, Sify, Moderator: **Jatinder Singh**, CIO&Leader



↑ **Leveraging Data Center & Hybrid Cloud for Your AI Transformation Session** Speaker: **Amit Agrawal**, Chief Business Officer, Web Werks, Moderator: **Vikas Gupta**, CIO&Leader



↑ A session on **Network & SASE Foresight**, Speaker: **Vijay Reddy**, Vice President, Tata Communications, Moderator: **Sachin Mhashilkar**, Executive Director of CIO&Leader



↑ CIO Knowledge Exchange: Topic: **AI Euphoria Vs AI Reality**, Speaker: **Amol Deshpande**, Group Chief Digital Officer & Head - Innovation, RPG Group



↑ Power Lunch



↑ Panel Discussion on Information Reimagined with Trust Panelists: **Pravin Patel Kulkarni**, Country Director-Sales, Cyber Security, OpenText India; **Apurva Dalal**, Chief Information Officer & acting CISO, Adani Green Energy; **Indradyumna Datta**, Group Chief Digital Officer, Jindal Steel & Power and **Manish Grover**, Executive Director - Strategic IS & IS, Indian Oil Corporation



↑ **Panel Discussion on Augmenting Cybersecurity with AI** Panelists: **Sujith Immanuel Pellican**, Head - IT Security, ManageEngine; **Sendil Kumar Venkatesan**, CTO, Shriram Capital; Anand Deodhar, Group Chief Digital & Information Officer, Force Motors; **Rupesh Nirgude**, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Prism Johnson; **KRC Murty**, Senior President & Head IMG - Business & Digital Technology Solutions, Yes Bank; **Nirupmay Kumar**, Executive VP - IT, Vodafone Idea and **Sivasubramanian M**, Chief Digital Officer, Welspun Corp



↑ **Elevate CX to Drive Business Outcomes** Panelists: **Ashish Sharma**, Vice President - Strategic Business Accounts, Ishan Technologies; **Tushar Vagal**, Chief Information Officer & Digital Head - L & T Realty, Larsen & Toubro; **Vininder Baweja**, Chief Digital & Information Officer, Saint-Gobain India; **Seema Gaur**, Senior Executive Director - IT, IFFCO; Padmabhushan Bahadure, Chief Technology Officer, IDBI Bank; **PS Sundaram**, Executive Director & Chief Information Officer, Power Finance Corporation Limited and **Ashish Desai**, Chief Information Officer - Textiles, Grasim Industries Limited



← CIO Talk 1: **Implementing a Data Driven Culture in Insurance**, by **Goutam Datta**, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance



→ CIO Talk 2: **Intelligent Transformation - My Thinking & Learnings**, by **Rajeev Jorapur**, Bajaj Auto



→
CIO Talk 3:
Applying Systems
Thinking to Digital
Transformation,
Dr Prashun Dutta,
 ex-CIO, Tata Power



↑ **Panel Discussion on AI in Financial Services** Moderator: **Ramesh Narayanaswamy**, CTO, Adiya Birla Capital;
 Panelists: **Ananth Subramanian**, EVP & Head - IT, Kotak Mutual Fund; **Aparna Kumar**, Former Chief Information Officer,
 State Bank of India; **Avinash Naik**, Chief Information Officer, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company and **KV Dipu**, Senior
 President, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company



↑ **Panel Discussion on AI in Manufacturing** Moderator: **Sanjay Mishra**, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Jindal Stainless; Panelists: **Aashish Kshetry**, Vice President - IT & Chief Information Officer, Asian Paints; **Atanu Roy**, President & Group Chief Information Officer, PI Industries; **Ajay Rambal**, Head - IT, LG Electronics India; **Parveen Dhingra**, Chief Information & Digital Officer, Vedanta; **Chetan Trivedi**, Chief Information Officer, Hindustan Zinc and **Dheeraj Sinha**, Group CIO, Sun Pharmaceuticals



↑ **Panel Discussion on AI in HR & People Management** Moderator: **Vinod Bhat**, Chief Information Officer & Chief Ethics Counsellor, Tata SIA Airlines; Panelists: **Sanjay Rao**, President, Group Chief Information Officer & Shared Services Head, SRF; **Dr Prashant Atrey**, Executive Director & Head of Department - IT & Communication, NHPC; **Kishore Hirani**, Chief Information Officer, Amara Raja Energy & Mobility; **Mahesh Patil**, Senior Vice President - IT, Axis Bank; **Anand Hadgaonkar**, Chief Information Officer - Asia, Whirlpool Corporation and **Rupesh Nain**, Chief Information Officer, Adani Enterprises Limited



↑ **Delivering Data-Driven, Personalized, and Delightful Omnichannel Customer Experiences in Wine & Cheese Session**
Speaker: **Sunil Sharma**, Head- Enterprise Accounts Customer Interaction Suite, Tata Communications



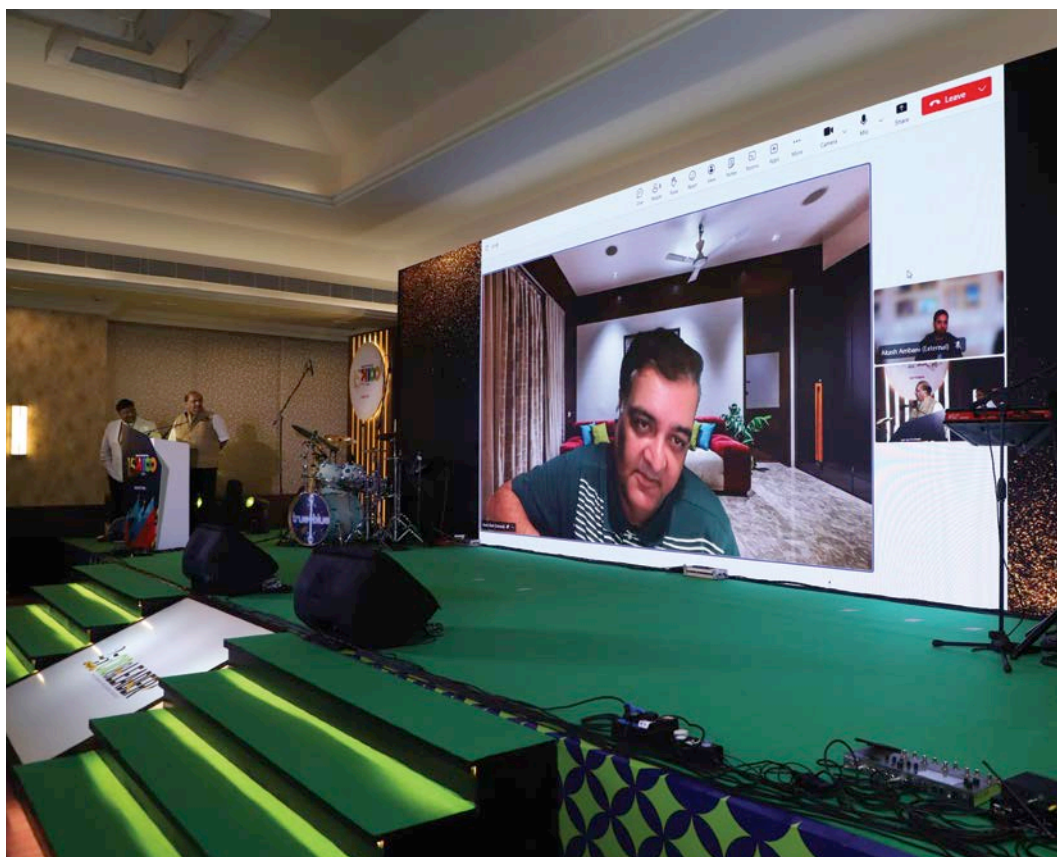
↑ **Pervasive AI in Your Business in Wine & Cheese Session**, Speaker: **Vinay Sinha**, Corporate VP & MD - Sales, India Mega Region & **Prabhat Sharma**, Director- Sales, AMD India



↑ **Enabling Intelligent Manufacturing in Wine & Cheese Session** Speaker: Anuj Vaid, Vice President, Kyndryl India



↑ **Digital Transformation in Logistics & Supply Chain in Wine & Cheese Session**
Speaker: **Ashish Mathur**, Global CIO, ECU Worldwide



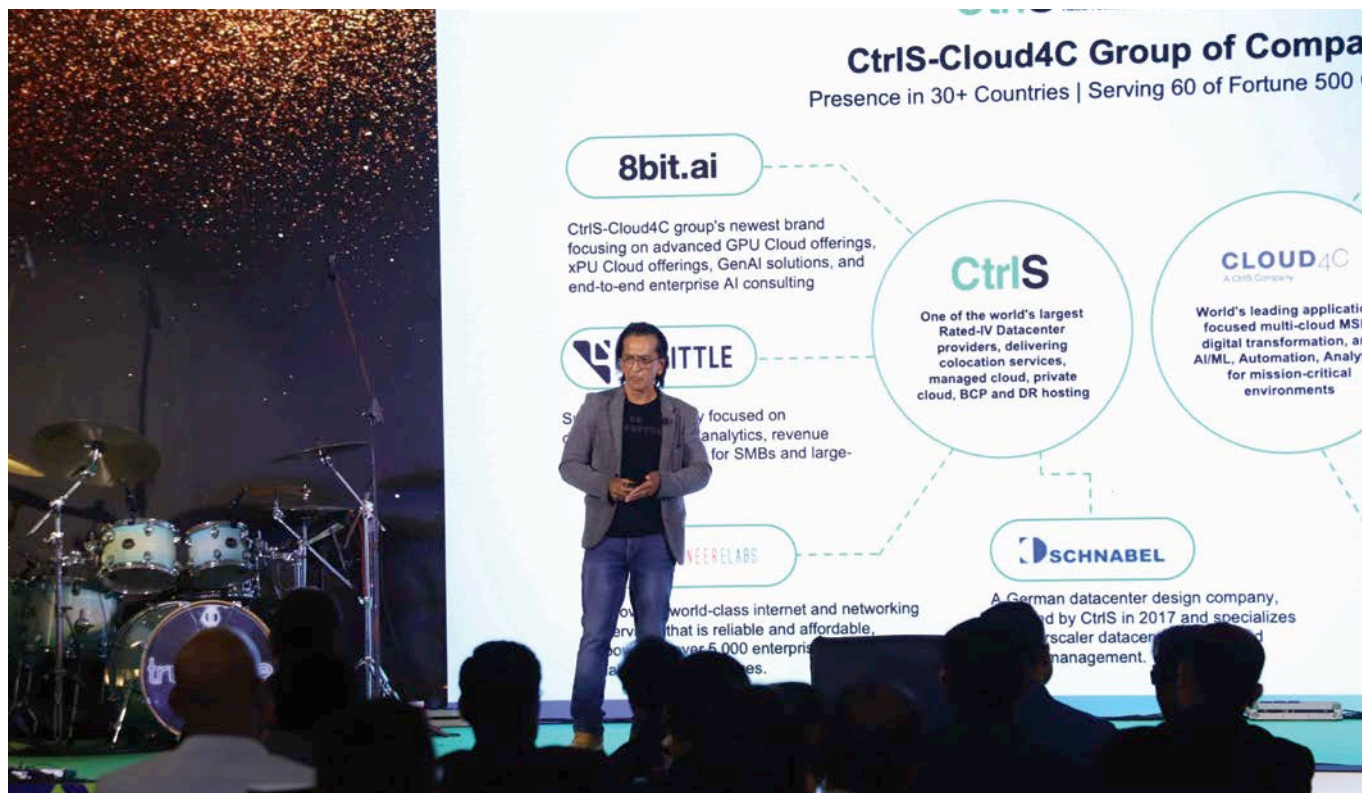
➤ **The highlight of the conference:** A live interaction with **Akash Ambani**, Chairman of Reliance Jio, and **Anish Shah**, President & COO of Jio Platforms



↑ NEXT100 Awards: Honoring the 2024 Class of Future CIOs



↑ **Future of GenAI: The Path to General Intelligence** by **Sreekrishnan Venkiteshwaran**, CTO & Anuj Vaid, Vice President - Strategic Business, Kyndryl India



↑ **Beyond Digital: Crafting Adaptive Organizations in the Age of AI** by **Ranjit Metrani**, Executive Vice President, CtrlS



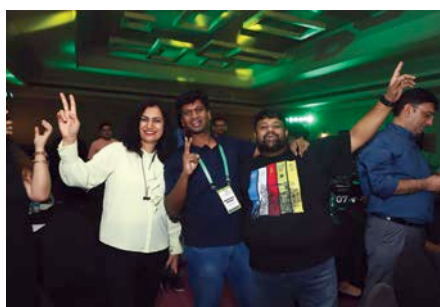
↑ **How Far Can Your IT Infrastructure Go? Integrating AI-driven Future-ready Datacenters** by **Dr AS Prasad**, Vice President – Product Development & Engineering, Vertiv



↑ **NEX100 Jury Felicitation**



↑ Electrifying scene at Game, Set, Match



↑ CIOs enjoying Rock Band night with True Blue



DAY 3: SUNDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 2024 END ON A HIGH NOTE



↑ CIOs enjoying morning beach activities



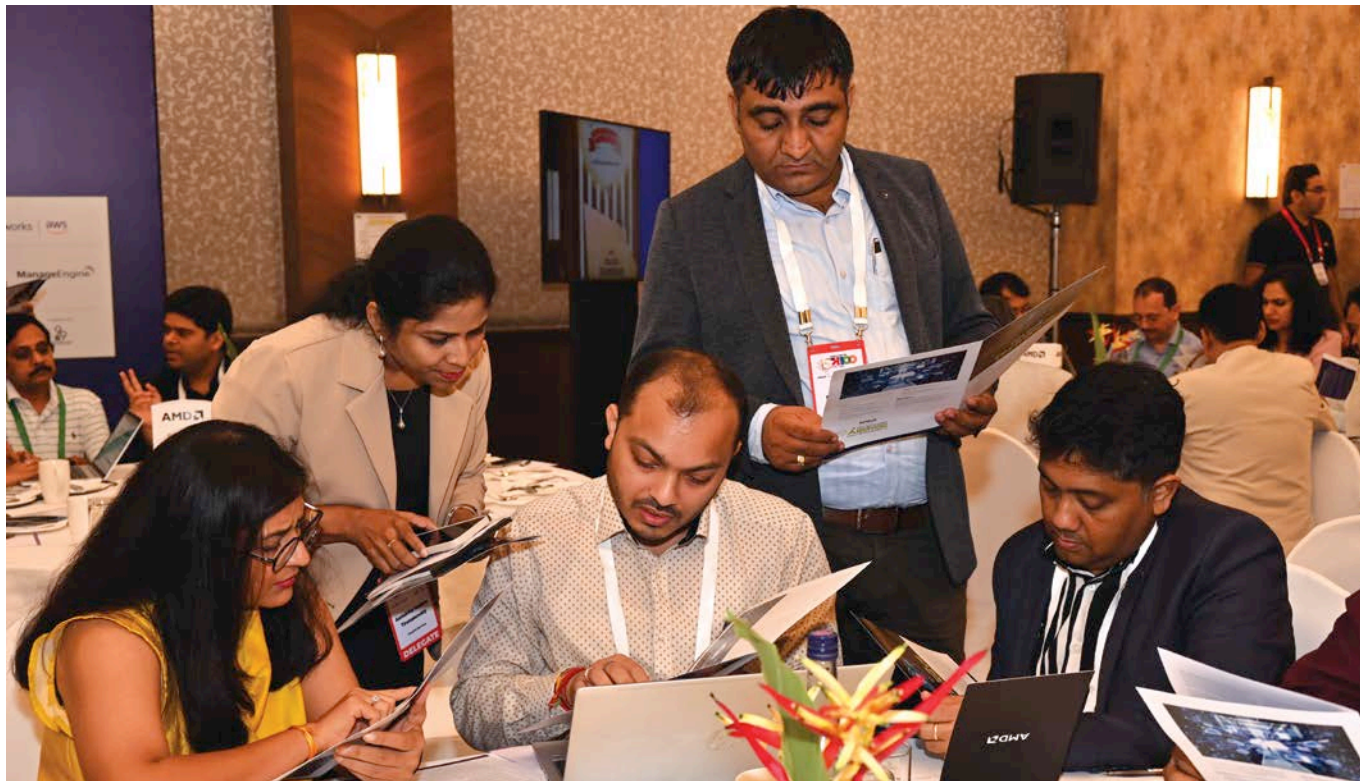
← Welcome to Day 3 by **Jatinder Singh**, Executive Editor, CIO&Leader



↑ From **NEXT100 to CIO: The Road Ahead** by **Vijay Sethi**, Chief Mentor, MentorKart & Former CIO, CHRO & Head-CSR, Hero MotoCorp



↑ Technology briefing by AMD



↑ Teams solving Case study, preparing slide decks



↑ **Samman Jury facilitation** by **Vikas Gupta**, Publisher & Director, 9.9 Group; **Deepak Agarwal**, former ED- IS, Indian Oil Corporation Limited; **Vijay Sethi**, former CIO, Hero MotoCorp, and **Dr Prashun Dutta**, former CIO, Tata Power & Reliance Energy



↑ **6th CIO&Leader Samman Recipients 2024:** **Aparna Kumar**, Former Chief Information Officer of SBI; **Ashish Kshetry**, Vice President Information Technology & Chief Information Officer of Asian Paints Limited; **Dr Prashant Atrey**, Executive Director - IT at NHPC; **Dr Sandip Pradhan**, Chief Information Officer at Exide Industries Limited; **Nitin Rohilla**, Chief Information Officer at Adani Power Limited; **Sanjay Rao**, President, Group Chief Information Officer & Shared Services Head, of SRF Limited; **Sumit Duttagupta**, CIO & Head Synergy at Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd; **Umacharan Singh**, Chief Information Officer at CEAT



↑ **CIO Prestige Points Gold Coin winners**



↑ CIO Prestige Points Silver Coin winners



↑ CIO Prestige Points Car Winner



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A BRAND OF





Navigating tomorrow: AI's resonance in taxation and the role of tax professionals

AI integration transcends mere technological upgrades; it signifies a strategic shift toward resilience and agility.

By **Raj Mohan Natarajan** | editor@cioandleader.com

A

AS WE NAVIGATE the intersection of technology and taxation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerges as a transformative force, reshaping the tax landscape. With its rapid adoption resembling a revolution, AI's influence on tax authorities, corporations and tax professionals grows ever more crucial.

In this analysis, we examine AI's profound impact through the following three lenses:

- **Empowering tax authorities**
- **Corporate adoption of AI**
- **Augmenting tax analysis**

I. Empowering tax authorities: AI as catalyst for data-centric governance, compliance, fraud detection and economic growth

Tax authorities worldwide are experiencing a transformative shift that urges governments to push for operational reinvention. AI has emerged as a key mechanism, positioning tax authorities as vital interfaces between government and citizens, particularly amid rapidly transforming economies.

■ **Overcoming historical challenges:** AI, especially generative AI (GenAI), has the ability to address historical inefficiencies and information gaps between tax authorities and businesses. Businesses now benefit from AI-powered chatbots, offering real-time guidance on tax regulations and data requirements, enhancing compliance accuracy.

■ **Transformative tools for tax authorities:** AI adoption can empower tax authorities with transformative tools, streamlining compliance, detecting fraud, and bolstering economic growth. Through AI-driven analytics,

economic data is analyzed in real time, enabling authorities to better predict and prevent potential fraud and thereby fostering economic growth.

■ **Digital capabilities for taxpayer experience:** AI-driven digital advancements enhance taxpayer experience through improved accessibility, communication, and efficient deployment of government services. Virtual assistants powered by AI have the ability to deliver personalized insights, simplify intricate tax inquiries, and mitigate tax fraud, saving governments trillions of dollars annually.

■ **Citizen-centric governance:** AI can provide tax authorities with greater access to taxpayer and transaction-level data, enabling a potential shift toward citizen-centric governance. AI-powered citizen portals deliver personalized tax insights, which can foster transparency and create a more engaging experience for citizens.

II. Corporates embracing AI: Adapting to complexity and driving compliance

In the corporate world, AI emerges as an invaluable ally, enabling businesses to navigate complex tax laws, compliance hurdles, and global regulatory frameworks. AI integration transcends mere technological upgrades; it signifies a strategic shift toward resilience and agility.

■ **Strategic resilience and efficiency in compliance:** AI can serve as a strategic ally for corporations, aiding in navigating complex tax laws and adapting to new regulations like the Global Minimum Tax (GMT), BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) and sustainability laws. AI-powered compliance platforms can automatically analyze changes in tax laws to better enable rapid



Raj Mohan Natarajan
Tax Transformation & AI Leader,
EY Global Delivery Services (GDS)

adaptation to regulatory shifts.

■ **Revolutionizing transfer pricing:** AI's transformative impact on transfer pricing becomes evident as it enhances efficiency in data management and strategic decision-making. Innovations like GenAI can optimize transfer pricing strategies, affirming both compliance and informed and strategic decision-making.

■ **Addressing global challenges:** AI aids corporates in filing returns with greater accuracy and adherence to sustainability regulations. It standardizes data for more seamless interaction with modern tax administration systems. AI-powered sustainability analysis tools have the ability to align tax strategies with global sustainability regulations, enabling long-term strategic resilience.

III. Augmenting tax analysis by empowering tax analysts: AI elevating expertise in business tax strategy

AI's influence on tax professionals and analysts marks a significant shift, freeing up time for higher-value tasks, strategic decision-making, and navigating the

complexities of business tax strategy.

■ **Automated processes and strategic decision-making:**

AI-driven automation tools streamline tax document preparation, enhancing accuracy and compliance. This allows tax analysts to focus more on strategic tax planning and decision-making, contributing to the overall business tax strategy.

■ **Real-time compliance**

monitoring: AI's potential to monitor an organization's tax data in real time accelerates compliance with changing laws and regulations. AI-driven real-time monitoring tools assist tax professionals in identifying and addressing compliance issues promptly, minimizing the risk of retroactive corrections.

■ **The need for AI literacy among tax professionals:**

As AI takes center stage in the tax landscape, tax professionals embark on a journey of continuous learning. AI literacy programs empower them to more skillfully harness AI tools, enriching their proficiency in navigating the dynamic tax landscape.

IV. The global EY organization's trailblazing journey with AI innovation

■ **Industry transformation with AI integration:**

The infusion of AI into taxation sparks a major industry shift, offering firms like EY fresh opportunities for innovation and market redefinition. As a global leader in tax, transaction, and advisory services, EY is a leader in AI integration within its tax services, empowering professionals with leading-edge tools and fostering continuous development.

■ **Pioneering AI integration by EY GDS:** EY GDS leads the charge in pioneering AI integration within

AI-powered sustainability analysis tools have the ability to align tax strategies with global sustainability regulations, enabling long-term strategic resilience.

tax services, positioning itself as an industry trailblazer. Through its commitment to technological innovation, EY equips tax professionals with state-of-the-art tools, helping them to stay ahead of the curve in an ever-evolving landscape.

V. From compliance to consultation: The dynamic evolution of tax professionals

■ **Transition to consultative roles:**

As AI streamlines routine tasks, tax professionals are poised to transition toward consultative roles, where they can focus on high-level strategic endeavors. This shift allows professionals to enrich their experience in strategic tax planning and risk management, fostering greater client engagement and value creation.

■ **Collaborative culture in an AI-driven environment:**

AI emerges as a potential strategic cornerstone for organizations in pursuit of a collaborative culture. By leveraging AI-driven translation algorithms, organizations may better bridge the communicative divides that have historically hindered cross-functional synergy. An AI-driven environment helps streamline interactions, keeping teams synchronized and working

on a unified objective — factors that are essential to nurturing a collaborative environment.

■ **Global engagement opportunities with AI:** Engagement with AI tools on international tax projects presents tax professionals with invaluable networking opportunities and facilitates cross-border collaborations. Exposure to diverse global tax environments can not only advance career prospects but also can enhance professionals' skill sets.

The future road map ...

In the world of taxation, AI is emerging as a transformative force, creating a future of greater efficiency, transparency, and collaboration. Real-world examples, such as the implementation of the GMT proposed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the emergence of BEPS and sustainability laws, especially in G20 nations, highlights the ever-evolving Tax landscape and underscores the inevitability of AI adoption in taxation.

As we navigate this dynamic landscape, tax professionals are not just witnesses but active participants. They must embrace AI literacy for a seamless transition into the future. By mastering AI, tax professionals not only affirm their relevance but also become architects of a tax ecosystem that will resonate with the demands of tomorrow.

Disclaimer: The views reflected in this article are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the global EY organization or its member firms. ■

—Raj Mohan Natarajan is the Transformative Growth Strategist at GDS Tax Transformation & AI Leader (EY Global Delivery Services).



Complexity: To Shun or to Embrace?

Global physical and communication networks expose every societal entity—from businesses to individuals—to external influences, adding complexity to their environments. These distant, unfamiliar factors can pose unexpected risks.

By **Prashun Dutta** | editor@cioandleader.com

COMPLEXITY IS USUALLY viewed as an anathema by most managers. In the last two decades, if you were to compile the results of surveys, carried out on senior business functionaries, you will discover that a substantial proportion of respondents have cited complexity as the main source of worry, in the current environment.

Manifested in a variety of ways it ushers in uncertainty, ambiguity and immense volatility

resulting in a whole host of associated problems in the management of any organization. It is because of such adversarial association that complexity is sought to be shunned by managers and individuals alike.

What is Complexity?

However, despite these alarming probabilities one must appreciate that complexity is an

integral part of the reality encountered and shall only grow with time. It is imperative therefore to understand the nature and causes of complexity, if we want to satisfactorily manage organizations within this complex environment. Today's world is an interconnected one where effects of actions are often felt, both spatially and temporally, far away from the cause.

Deriving out of extensive physical and communication links world-wide every societal entity be it business organizations, educational organizations, non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations, health care and even families and individuals are all impacted by external factors. This is precisely the causes that introduce complexity in the work arena. When you are influenced by factors that are far away and not even familiar to you, danger could be round the corner.

Consider the following facts. During the pandemic there was an acute shortage of toilet paper in the US and one was at a loss to understand why some people having one type of food several thousand kilometres away could cause toilet paper to vanish from shelves of stores in the US.

Similarly, when decisions are taken with a particular objective in mind the result turns out to be completely different simply because all factors that could impact the outcome had not been considered. Consider the zero covid policy that was strictly followed resulting in fewer cases initially but also not building immunity resulting in a deluge when the lock down was lifted.

Several such instances can be cited where external factors have substantially influenced the outcome, much to the chagrin of



Prashun Dutta
Former CIO
Tata Power

the stakeholders. Often at the start of an initiative one is not sure what are indeed the factors that influence the outcome and for tasks that are spread over longer duration of time the factors emerge as we go along. Managing in such an ambience must be necessarily different from the traditional way of functioning.

Is complexity growing with time?

Interconnections have always existed but effects of that was not so pronounced level till sometime back. However, with growing connections both physical and electronic, the density of interconnections has been growing rapidly and the effects are much more prominent. Even a few decades back long-distance travel was limited to certain sections of the society and going abroad was even more scarce.

Today, though, travelling is much more common place resulting in transfer of ideas and practices some of which, overtime, blossom to a new adaptation that may alter conditions in the host system. Such proliferation of interconnections is exacerbated several notches by the electronic exchange of information.

The world wide web brings at one's finger tips information from every part of the world in fraction of seconds.

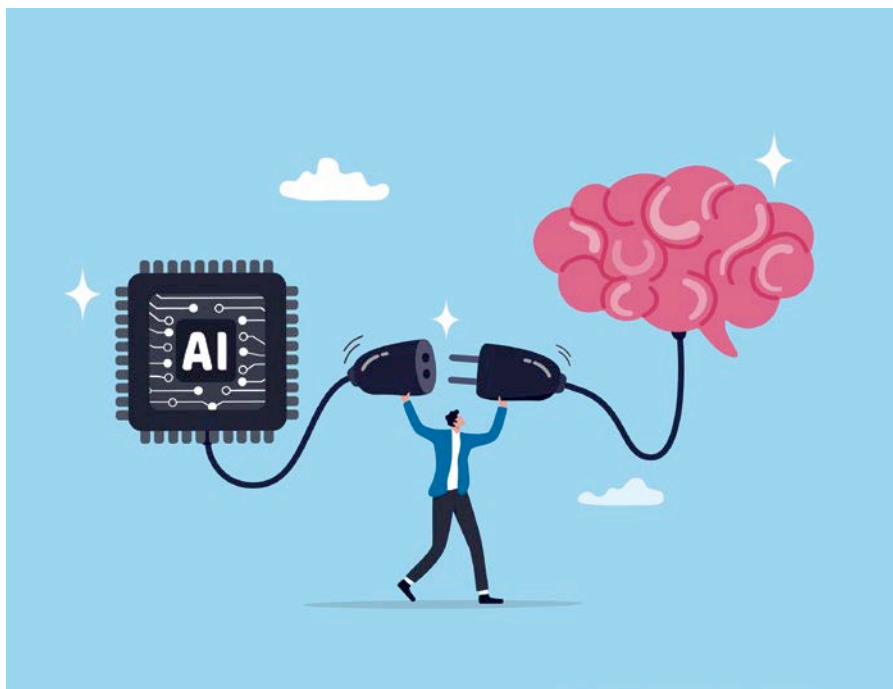
Practically nothing is hidden from the earnest seeker. The combined effect of these factors is the formation of a formidable web of significant interconnections within which all of us are constrained to function. Owing to this explosion of interconnections that has been possible because of recent technological improvement, complexity has, in recent times, increased by leaps and bounds and hence managers all over the world, who are compelled to operate in this background of ever-growing complexity, are apprehensive.

Is complexity all bad?

However, is complexity all bad? Is no good to be expected from complexity? Let us discuss this concept a bit more. There are clearly two sides to complexity the first being that which we encounter in managing our organizations. The part that is affected by an interconnected world and gives us nightmares. The second side of complexity is the way we handle this external complexity. In order to handle this external complexity, we need to develop our own internal complexity (capability).

Tasked with handling the high level of external complexity one can survive if, and only if, one can enhance one's own internal ability to manage that complexity because if we cannot do so we will no longer exist, but if you can then we shall remain in business.

Matching the external complexity with our own internal complexity is, therefore, key to survival in today's world. But what does "enhancing one's internal complexity" mean? It means increasing your capability to encounter and manage the



An interesting Case Study

This is about a medium sized financial institution headed by a seasoned executive who had many years of work experience and an excellent appreciation of the business. As is well known, the financial industry landscape has been changing rapidly and this change has been triggered largely by technology. About two decades ago an economist had declared that computerization will, in future, not yield any competitive advantage to its users.

His basic contention was that standardised packages, that have invaded the market, offer the same features to all adopters, and hence could not possibly furnish any comparative advantage. In other words, the economist was not accounting for any advantage deriving out of the quality of implementation of such prepackaged software.

Probably sharing the same view, the experienced CEO of the finance organization decided to develop, ab initio, a major part of their basic operational systems. The idea was to devise digital solutions not available among competitors and thereby gain a competitive advantage. He was willing to invest the time, effort, and resources for this purpose. To this end he engaged a set of capable professionals and initiated the process.

Technologies were finalized and within the guard-rails of the technology choices made at the program level, individual teams were given the liberty to suitably select/adapt technologies to build their respective components. Standards pertaining to general programming practices were specified including latency, resiliency, SLAs related to response time along with cost objectives for

Matching the external complexity with our own internal complexity is, therefore, key to survival in today's world. It means increasing your capability to encounter and manage the complexity that this interconnected world can throw at you.

complexity that this interconnected world can throw at you.

This may sound simple but is anything from being so, because external complexity comes in many flavours and one will need to identify these and build capabilities to handle the same. Additionally, complexity does not come in nicely packaged boxes but emerge as we proceed. Hence preparation is often not possible and these are some reasons why managers list this as the most pressing issue faced by them. The way forward is to enhance internal capability in all areas of functioning, in strategy, structure, systems, personnel, technology, partnerships and so on.

In my book "Systems Thinking for Managers – A Road Less Travelled" published by Sage Publications I have discussed

several examples of mismatch of complexity throwing up a motley host of problems for managers. The approach therefore is to enhance internal complexity on a continuous basis so that when crunch time arrives the organization is ready.

Explaining this with an example if one were designing a system for transaction processing and reporting a higher level of complexity may be incorporated so that the system is capable of more wider range of options, may be customers, situations or have the ability to furnish real time data for reporting and so on. However, this understanding is not as common as may be expected given the uncertainty inherent in the environment. Here's an actual and interesting case study that highlights this shortcoming.



each component, and teams were expected to ensure that the way they designed their components would ensure all standards and SLAs were met.

Change in Team

The teams worked on their components for a year, however management was not happy with the progress and changed the leadership team. The new leadership team mandated that all components must follow a common architecture and focus on implementing existing business processes. All technology-based constructs related to integration, resiliency, instrumentation was supposed to be fixed and handled by common libraries and teams were instructed that in no scenario should solutions be over-engineered, instead all solutions must ensure they are implemented in the simplest manner.

These restrictions were enforced in response to the situation and would assist by reducing the overall customers'

time and cost. The organization was keen to develop, through introduction of this complex IT system, special capabilities that would differentiate them from competitors. Superior services coupled with quick responses perfectly secure systems covering the range of services etc. that would be available to customers would help the organization stand out as an excellent institution.

That would extend competitive advantage to the organization. Now the attempt of the boss to restrict variety in development by insisting on a standardised solution was completely in contrast to the overall organizational objective. Standardised solution is usually a default option for most implementations and will be unable to help differentiate the organization from its competitors.

Reduce options to contain complexity

There are several ways of handling complexity and one of the ways is to reduce options. If the decision is

to utilise standard components and processes the task of management for designing and implementation of the system becomes a lot easier.

Adherence to stated norms is the main aspect that needs supervision. Compare this to when autonomy is awarded to developers to be creative and develop solutions that go far beyond the standard. Such a step would introduce a variety that would require individual attention of the supervisor and several iterative rounds of discussion and proto typing before finalization.

Clearly the cost and time required would be more, a fact strongly resented by senior management. However, the benefit would be a more comprehensive application that would subsequently provide the organization a decided advantage.

Another additional issue would be the dissatisfaction of the programmers who would not be intellectually challenged and hence would end up being disillusioned with the entire development process. However, the most serious outcome of this step would be non-achievement of the organizational objective.

Conclusion

Complexity, as I hope you agree by now, is a two-edged sword that can cut both ways, one detrimental to the organization and other beneficial. The attempt is always to enhance the internal one and thereby manage the external one effectively. In the case discussed above a step simplifying the process of design, development and implementation of systems threatens to contain the internal complexity and hinder the achievement of the stated objective. ■

—Prashun Dutta is the former Chief Information Officer at Tata Power.

Empowering tomorrow's workforce by building future-ready skills

It is a pivotal time for India as it is poised to become a global hub for a skilled workforce, yet current realities underscore significant challenges.

By **Nishchae Suri** | editor@cioandleader.com

IN TODAY'S RAPIDLY evolving world, where the pace of change has become constant, organizations are navigating unprecedented challenges and opportunities. One of these is the profound impact of generational diversity on how we approach work and learning. With Gen Z (youth) entering the workforce alongside seasoned professionals extending their careers, there's a dynamic interplay of skills and expectations.

This multi-generational tapestry demands adaptive strategies that empower individuals to thrive in their unique journey. In the dynamic and modern landscape of work, the intersection of technology, talent, and leadership is profoundly reshaping the future of work where it will be imperative for organizations to adopt a skills-based approach.

Moreover, globalization and geopolitical shifts add layers of complexity. Elections, geopolitical tensions, and legislative changes globally reshape business landscapes overnight. Organizations must navigate these uncertainties with agility and foresight, leveraging them as challenges and avenues for innovation and growth. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a central force, transforming the hiring

scene with its promise of enhanced productivity and efficiency.

It is a pivotal time for India as it is poised to become a global hub for a skilled workforce, yet current realities underscore significant challenges. 87% of the organizations are grappling with skills gap. While 40% of employees' skills will no longer be relevant in just four years. According to an IBM report, only 48% of India's youth are deemed employable, revealing that half of the country's young population lacks essential job-ready skills.

This gap not only highlights a critical issue in talent development but also underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions in education and vocational training. Digital skills are becoming increasingly vital in India, with 67% of employees prioritizing them more than any other country in Asia-Pacific except Singapore, according to a report by Economist Impact supported by Google. Two-thirds of employees look to their employers for new digital skills, as the country continues to be a prominent outsourcing hub due to its cost advantages and high digital competencies.

As India advances its digitalization journey, the emphasis on advanced digital skills and

soft skills will become paramount. Technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT), and cybersecurity are transforming business operations, necessitating a workforce proficient in these areas. Advanced digital skills enable employees to implement and leverage these technologies, which will, in turn, maintain India's competitive and economic edge in the global market. Furthermore, economic growth is directly impacted as businesses scale faster and enter new markets, contributing significantly to GDP. The potential of AI alone to add the substantial value of 500 billion dollars by 2025 is a cause for anticipation and excitement.

A critical concern emerging from these evolving changes is the widening skills gap. As technology advances redefine job roles and requirements, the ability to rapidly reskill and upskill becomes imminent. This isn't just about keeping pace with change but proactively shaping it, ensuring that every member of the workforce has the tools and opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

40% of HR leaders report that they can't develop skill development solutions quickly enough. To close this gap, organizations need a holistic and comprehensive workforce agility strategy that recognizes the importance of continuous learning and development.

Another pivotal aspect is the evolving nature of work itself. The rise of gig economies and project-based engagements underscores a shift towards flexibility and meritocracy. This paradigm shift necessitates reevaluating traditional structures and embracing agile workforce models that foster innovation and inclusivity.



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According to an IBM report, only 48% of India's youth are deemed employable, revealing that half of the country's young population lacks essential job-ready skills.

Another critical dimension is aligning workplace strategies with Gen Z's expectations. With preferences leaning towards flexible work arrangements, purpose-driven roles, and technology-enabled environments, organizations are redefining their cultures to attract and retain the next generation of talent. By prioritizing these aspects, leaders can cultivate environments where employees can grow in professional roles.

Skill alignment remains pivotal as employees prioritize acquiring skills, such as Generative AI skills and programming languages, while employers may seek cybersecurity expertise and data science proficiency. This divergence underscores the importance

of fostering a learning culture that bridges these skill gaps, ensuring teams remain agile and capable in an era defined by rapid technological advancement, including the youth and older generations.

At the heart of these transformations lies a call for leadership and vision. It's not only about envisioning the future but actively shaping it. Whether it's through fostering learning cultures that adapt to individualized learning paths or embracing technologies that enhance productivity and engagement, the mandate for leaders today is clear: to lead with empathy, foresight, and a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation.

As I look forward, I'm inspired by the collective journey toward workforce readiness and agility that incorporates the hard and soft skills critical for managing remote teams, fostering productive collaborations, and navigating the dynamic workplace environment. This journey should encompass efforts across the spectrum, including employers and the government, to create a culture of continuous learning, providing access to training programs and resources that align with industry needs.

By focusing on upskilling, India can sustain its global leadership in IT (Information Technology), drive long-term economic growth, future-proof its enterprises, and cultivate a more resilient and prosperous economy. The journey ahead is filled with challenges and opportunities alike. By championing lifelong learning, we can build a future where every individual can thrive, and every organization can lead with purpose and impact. ■

—Nishchae Suri is the Managing Director at Cornerstone OnDemand India

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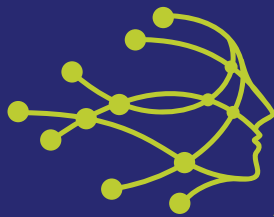
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