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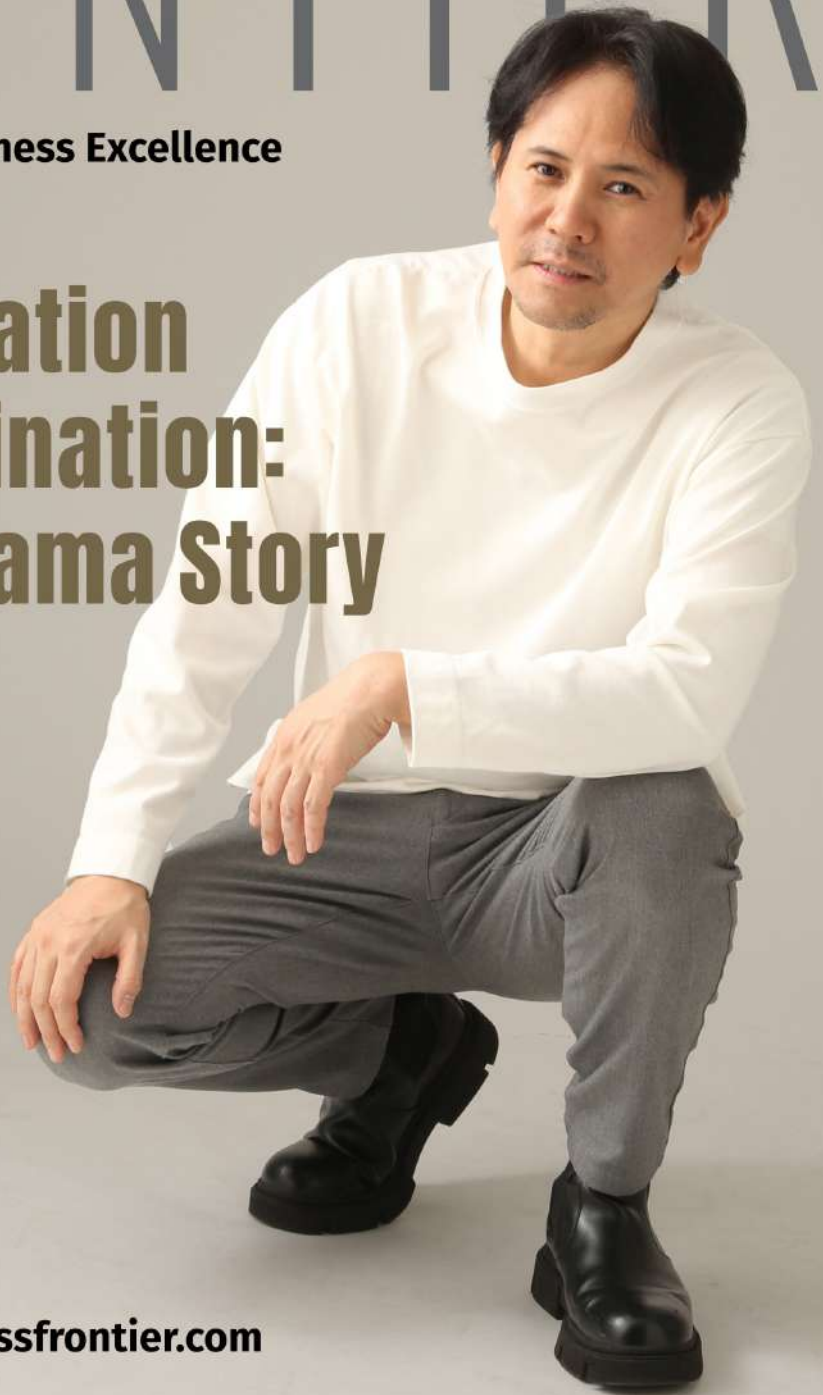
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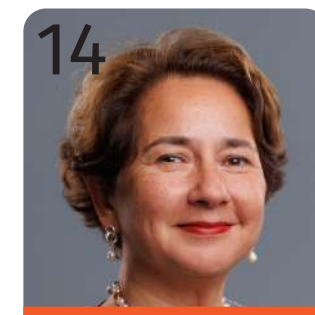
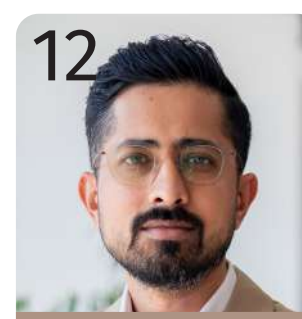
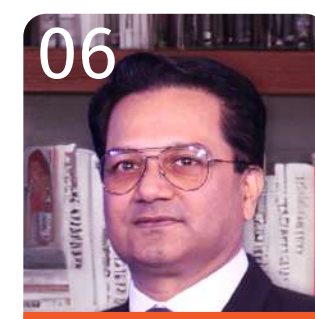


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From the EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Often, when I'm engrossed in work, I notice my little one beside me, completely absorbed in sketching her own little characters and stories. Watching her, I'm reminded that imagination has no boundaries — it flows freely, asking only to be nurtured. And isn't that where so many of our greatest ventures begin? With a simple spark of creativity?

This is why our cover story with **Jake Ohama, Founder & CEO of Rabbitwarren Animation Studios**, feels so special. His journey reflects that same spark — a childhood love for storytelling that grew into a studio redefining animation. Jake's story is a powerful reminder that dreams, when matched with persistence, can indeed become legacies.

We also bring you the heartfelt journey of **Parveen Brar**, who turned her personal experiences as part of an Indian Defence family into a trusted platform, **Defence Wards Matrimony**. Her story shows us how empathy and community can be the strongest foundations for any enterprise.

And in a completely different industry, yet driven by the same resilience, we feature **Jekaterina Shalopanova, Chief Business Officer at Aerviva**. Her leadership in aviation HR and recruitment is all about adaptability, vision, and the courage to keep flying higher, no matter how turbulent the skies.

We also speak to **Sayed Musaddiq, Managing Director and Partner at Skha Consulting**, who shares how strategic thinking can turn obstacles into trillion-rupiah opportunities, and **Satyajeet Singh, Chief Business Officer at The Narayana Group**, who reflects on education's far-reaching power to transform society.

Across these pages, you'll find a common thread — the human spirit's ability to imagine, to adapt, and to create. Whether through art, empathy, or leadership, each of these voices reflects a different way of shaping the future.

As you read this issue, I hope you too are reminded — as I often am when I watch my daughter sketch — that the seeds of possibility are everywhere, waiting for us to believe in them.

On that note, I wish you a very

Happy Reading!



Deepa Natarajan Lobo
Assistant Editor,
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‘Education Creates A Ripple Effect That Benefits The Nation’

In an exclusive conversation with **Business Frontier**, **Satyajeet Singh, Chief Business Officer at The Narayana Group**, reflects on his three-decade career journey, and outlines strategies driving growth and transformation in the education sector

With over three decades of experience in the education sector, **Satyajeet Singh, Chief Business Officer at The Narayana Group**, has carved a distinguished career in marketing, operations, and business development. His journey spans senior leadership roles at some of India’s most prominent educational institutions and edtech leaders, including Unacademy, Allen Career Institute, NMIMS, and Resonance. Currently steering one of Asia’s largest education groups—impacting over 600,000 learners annually across 900+ institutions—Singh combines strategic foresight with hands-on operational expertise.

Based in Jaipur, the dynamic professional has a deep commitment to transforming education by balancing tradition with innovation, ensuring sustainability, and driving large-scale impact. In this conversation with **Business Frontier**, he shares his professional journey, leadership philosophy, and his vision for the evolving education ecosystem in India and beyond.

Give us a brief about your professional journey and how your career evolved into becoming the Chief Business Officer?

With over 30 years of experience, my career has been rooted in marketing



and business development within the education sector. From the outset, I have worked closely with educational institutions and edtech companies, with a significant focus on the coaching segment for engineering and medical entrance examinations in India.

I have held leadership positions at some of India’s most respected educational organisations, including Narayana, Unacademy, Allen Career Institute, NMIMS, and Resonance.

My journey from junior management to the C-suite has given me deep, hands-on exposure to the full spectrum of market dynamics. I’ve developed a strong understanding of what it takes to build and sustain profitable business models in this competitive space.

Having worked with globally renowned organisations, what are some of the most defining moments in your career?

Among the many experiences in my professional journey, two stand out as the most defining. The first was during my tenure as Director–Marketing at a nationally reputed university, where I was entrusted with the high-stakes responsibility of leading a complete brand identity transformation for an institution with a prestigious 32-year legacy in management education. From developing a timeless and future-ready brand theme to collaborating with a globally renowned branding agency, I navigated complex layers of internal approval and stakeholder alignment to execute the initiative successfully. The transformation was not only implemented seamlessly but also earned widespread appreciation—making it one of the most fulfilling achievements of my career.

The second defining moment came when I joined a leading national test prep organisation as a founding member of a new venture aimed at generating ₹100+ crores in revenue within five years. Tasked with building operations from the ground up, we exceeded expectations by reaching the target in just over three years. Following the success, I was entrusted with developing a detailed operational blueprint of the model, which became the cornerstone for the company’s successful expansion across multiple cities.

What inspired you to specialise in the education sector, and how has it shaped your leadership style?

My initial inspiration to join the education sector stemmed from the compelling success stories shared by leading test prep companies—stories of young aspirants achieving admission into prestigious engineering and medical institutions through dedicated coaching and mentorship. As I immersed myself in this field, I began to see its far-reaching impact: not only does it transform the lives of students, but it also creates a ripple effect that benefits families, society, and the nation at large.

Having spent a significant part of my career in the test prep domain, I’ve observed that the sector demands a radical shift in strategy every two to three years. In response, I have consistently adopted a transformational leadership approach. Each year, I make it a priority to identify emerging trends and shifts in the market, stimulate intellectual engagement within my team, and collaboratively develop business strategies that are timely, relevant, and impactful.

How do you balance strategic vision with operational execution?

To ensure that the strategic vision remains closely aligned with operational execution, I focus on five key measures:

- 1. Participative Decision-Making:** Strategic decisions are made through a collaborative approach. I actively involve experienced stakeholders—especially faculty members and department heads—in key discussions to assess the 360-degree impact of proposed initiatives.
- 2. Continuous Resource Optimisation:** In a growth-oriented environment, optimal resource utilisation is critical. Without compromising on quality, I ensure that key resources are planned and deployed with precision. This level of planning forms the foundation for achieving both academic excellence and financial goals.
- 3. Timely Review and Course Correction:** Effective execution of strategic plans requires ongoing monitoring. I conduct regular review meetings, audits, and feedback sessions. While some deviations are addressed

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through standard procedures, others necessitate deeper strategic discussions and decisions at the top management level to recalibrate direction.

- 4. Performance Monitoring and Capacity Building:** Delegated responsibilities are paired with robust performance monitoring mechanisms. When performance gaps are identified, training and mentorship is provided.
- 5. Efficient and Transparent Information Flow:** The timely and accurate communication is essential hence a wide range of communication channels are used including digital and physical.

How do you design business strategies to ensure sustainability and growth and remain competitive in the education industry?

I firmly believe that fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement is a key driver of a sustainable business growth. I make it a point to identify individuals from various departments whose experience and perspective could add meaningful value to the business. Often, the most innovative ideas come from those who are not confined by the usual mental frameworks of a specific business strategy. I see it as a leadership responsibility to nurture an organisational environment where departments are not only open to cross-functional input but also



Where Animation Meets Imagination: The Jake Ohama Story

Jake Fumitaro Ohama, Founder and Creative Director of RABBITWARREN Animation Studios, opens up about the origins of the genre-defying animation project and why staying rooted in sincerity is more powerful than any algorithm

Jake Fumitaro Ohama, Founder and Creative Director of RABBITWARREN Animation Studios, represents a new generation of creative entrepreneurs blending business strategy with philosophical depth and cultural ambition. With a professional background that spans digital innovation, brand development, and creative direction, Ohama has led ventures across industries—from fashion and organic cosmetics to large-scale marketing and technology initiatives. His latest focus, however, is firmly on the intersection of storytelling, identity, and next-generation media.

Launched in 2022 with the UNCONDITIONAL PROJECT, RABBITWARREN is a multimedia creative universe that incorporates animation, music, fashion, books, and games. At its core is a consistent message around shared human values and the potential for global collaboration through creativity. Ohama's vision is to build a sustainable, long-term storytelling ecosystem that appeals to diverse audiences while remaining independent and unconstrained by short-term market expectations.

In this in-depth interview with **Business Frontier**, Ohama discusses

the foundations and aspirations behind RABBITWARREN, his approach to collaboration, technology, and team building, and the broader cultural shifts shaping how stories are created and experienced today.

You've built RABBITWARREN around a powerful vision for future storytelling and creative leadership. What inspired you to start the company, and how has that original idea transformed as the business has grown?

We originally believed that February 22, 2022, would mark an important turning point in Earth's long cycle. Guided by this idea, our team travelled to Hiroshima, Japan, to launch the UNCONDITIONAL PROJECT (<https://unconditionable.org/>), sending a message to the world. The first chapter of this project is an animation called RABBITWARREN, whose core message is: "On this small planet, there is no need for us to hurt one another. We are originally one, and by remembering our 'unconditional hearts,' we can work together to transform the Earth into a richer and more beautiful place."

RABBITWARREN is a space fantasy that incorporates perspectives from quantum mechanics and explores parallel universes. It's not designed to be educational or preachy—it's simply entertainment with a deep message. That message will remain constant as we expand into serialized videos, picture books, films, fashion, and games. If audiences recall "a small courage" from the story during difficult times in their lives, that would bring us great happiness.

“
On this small planet, there is no need for us to hurt one another. We are originally one, and by remembering our 'unconditional hearts,' we can work together to transform the Earth into a richer and more beautiful place.”

Much of your work explores intersections between identity, philosophy, technology, and culture. How do you approach translating those complex ideas into experiences that connect with both niche and mainstream audiences?

We believe audiences worldwide are highly intelligent and sensitive. No matter their age, people's intuition and perception are fundamentally similar. Although animation is often seen as content for children, we rejected the notion of targeting specific age groups. Instead, we focus on creating stories for fans who genuinely enjoy our animation. Even if someone doesn't grasp the story fully at first, we believe repeated viewings will gradually reveal its essence.

Honestly, we're still in the experimental phase. In the beginning, we're focusing on trial and error, particularly centred around music. But once we reach 80 to 100 million

subscribers, our project will begin in earnest, with multiple storylines unfolding simultaneously. Through RABBITWARREN, we hope to inspire people to reflect on life and reconnect with the idea of unconditional love.

You've spoken about creating the "next-generation creative enterprise." In today's rapidly evolving media

landscape, what does that look like in practice—and what do you believe needs to change in the way we tell stories?

Times change rapidly, but stories that touch people's hearts are timeless. I've launched many cutting-edge IT ventures, but those fields are fiercely competitive, with constant pressure around funding and innovation. In contrast, stories and messages that resonate emotionally scale more deeply and have greater longevity.

In Japan, I've initiated projects like KOBE COLLECTION, a post-earthquake recovery initiative, TOKYO GIRLS COLLECTION, launched to revitalize Japan's textile industry, and Cosme Kitchen, the country's first organic cosmetics select shop. These ventures continue to thrive after 20 years. On the other hand, my IT businesses haven't had the same lasting impact. Based on that experience, we launched RABBITWARREN—a project built around a universal message we hope will be passed down for hundreds





or even thousands of years. We're genuinely excited about where it could be 30 years from now.

Your company spans continents and cultures. How do you balance global ambitions with staying grounded in community values and personal authenticity?

In truth, to us, having a "global perspective" means viewing the world in a minimised way. We don't carry global ambition for its own sake—we just aim to keep our perspective as broad as possible. Humanity has far more important responsibilities on this planet.

We prefer a "galactic perspective"—recognising that humanity is just a small presence in the Milky Way. It seems foolish that we continue to hurt each other on this tiny planet. We simply want to share that realization. In all our projects, we respect local culture, history, and values. Our guiding

philosophy, "For Unconditionable Heart," helps us act with integrity and consistency in any region.

We also plan to collaborate with local communities around the world. While maintaining a galactic perspective, we hope to be a company that's locally beloved.

As a founder and creative director, what role does technology play in shaping your strategy not just in content creation, but in how you build teams, scale ideas, and reach new markets?

We use technology, but never depend on it entirely. AI can streamline production, but it cannot create a vision or message that resonates across generations. A truly moving story reflects real-life experiences and the creator's personal journey—it's about their way of living. Without authenticity, a story cannot genuinely move or persuade.

AI might suggest new ideas based on historical data, but that alone doesn't create originality. In a world where AI is accessible to everyone, that isn't a competitive edge. In fact, overreliance on AI may result in something soulless. Audiences aren't inspired by perfect efficiency—they're moved by the human story: the failures, the perseverance, and eventual triumph.

We should not expect too much from AI—it has limits, and human experience is irreplaceable.

You often collaborate across disciplines from architecture and animation to social movements. What do you look for in collaborators, and how do you create space for truly generative partnerships?

A collaboration with Takashi Murakami gave us a unique insight: creative collaboration is like resonance—or even a kind of "nuclear fusion." In quantum

“

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physics terms, it might be called a form of "quantum entanglement."

Whether a collaboration happens by our wish or the other party's, we can't always perceive the true cause (laughs). That's why we don't impose expectations on collaborators. If the project helps people remember their unconditional heart, that's more than enough.

If someone resonates with our message, collaborations happen naturally—an inevitable phenomenon that arises neutrally. Since we've started emitting the 'DENSITY' of the UNCONDITIONABLE PROJECT, we hope to connect with others who match that frequency.

Entrepreneurship is filled with uncertainty. What have been some of your biggest leadership lessons so far, and what advice would you give to emerging founders who want to build culturally relevant, purpose-driven companies?

My life has been filled with uncertainty and unexpected events. Looking back, I realise that every one of those experiences was necessary. Setbacks

and failures become the foundation and fuel for the next phase. Even when obstacles feel overwhelming, it's important to treat them as "new life challenges" and move forward positively and steadily.

I've experienced betrayal and disappointment, but those very moments became catalysts for growth. To anyone starting a new venture: don't overthink it. Believe that life will work out in the end. Chase your dreams without clinging to the outcome. Something good is surely waiting.

You're juggling a lot—business, art, strategy, global projects. How do you stay motivated and centred through the inevitable highs and lows of creative leadership?

I never set out to work across so many fields. By sincerely responding to the needs of the times and of my clients, I naturally found myself in many roles. Every step has been unexpected.

When I was young, I never imagined I'd become an internet entrepreneur or creative director. But titles are not something you pursue—they're something you realize you've acquired along the way. What matters is staying focused on the present and calmly doing the work without obsessing over results.

I even wrote a song called 'Now Here (Focus On Now)'. I believe that by focusing on now, everything will work out. That alone is enough. I've had my share of struggles, but I now believe the principles of the universe are actually quite simple.

Looking ahead five or ten years, what's your boldest vision for RABBITWARREN—and how do you see it influencing broader cultural, creative, or even societal narratives in the years to come?

Here's something paradoxical: we intentionally avoid setting fixed goals or detailed business plans. That's because goals can lead to attachment, and attachment can cause you to miss rare, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

Instead, we focus on what's in front of us each week. Honestly, we don't know what's coming next! Nothing has ever gone according to plan anyway—it's always been a series of unexpected events. But each time, the result has exceeded our expectations.

Now, we simply surrender to the flow of the universe. With countless proposals and requests arriving, we've accepted that our job is to address each one calmly and steadily when the time is right. We're excited to see how the magic of RABBITWARREN continues to unfold and influence the world.



UAE RETAIL SECTOR BOOMS AS MALLS EVOLVE INTO EXPERIENTIAL HUBS

The growth driven by demand for immersive and experience-focused environments, observes **Anand Kumar, Managing Director** at luxury fit-out company **Abra**



Global consumer habits have shifted due to the convenience of online shopping. However, while many countries are seeing fewer populated shopping malls, the Middle East retail spaces are still driving excitement for consumers.

This growth is reinforced by a recent report, which shows that the overall UAE retail industry is projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.4% through 2028, supported by increasing demand for experiential retail that goes beyond product purchasing. Reflecting the change in consumer behavior and a new generation of shoppers who now seek integrated environments where dining, leisure, wellness, and social interaction come together under one roof.

Mall experiences across the region have migrated from traditional brick & mortar retail to experiential offerings. As malls become more complex and multifaceted, the interiors of retail spaces now need to do much more than look attractive. They must create atmospheres that engage visitors emotionally, offer flexibility for changing retail concepts, and seamlessly incorporate technology for enhanced interaction. This has been integrated due to consumer preferences with nearly 71% of consumers incorporating digital features into their shopping experiences and nearly 43% of all consumers doing so to improve their in-store shopping experiences.

As of 2025, the UAE has witnessed an 88.5% increase in the number of expats migrating, with a significant proportion being families seeking enhanced lifestyle experiences. The retail industry has pivoted towards creating immersive



experiences, particularly within indoor environments; positioning malls as ideal destinations to deliver these enhanced consumer engagements. Beyond creating these attractions for the residents, the UAE has become a family holiday destination. In 2024, Dubai welcomed 18.72 million international visitors, a 9.15% increase from the previous year.

While creating these hubs, the UAE wants to closely embody its vision for sustainable practices, aligning with national goals like the UAE's Net Zero 2050 initiative, which encourages developers and fit-out specialists to seek out eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient solutions that don't compromise on quality or design. One shift towards sustainable living is offering everything from fitness studios and wellness clinics to co-working lounges and event programming in

these small hubs. Newer communities are developing every so often, like Dubai Hills and Nad Al Sheba, creating sustainable neighborhoods where residents can avoid traffic and enjoy the UAE's vision of integrated urban living, exemplified by the '15-minute city' concept, which aims to ensure that residents have easy access to all essential services within a short distance. This transformation plays a vital role by serving as multifunctional hubs that complement schools, hospitals, parks, and residential areas – supporting not only convenience but also the social fabric of these neighborhoods. Therefore, the demands placed on its design and fit-out have evolved significantly and especially where fit-out companies like Abra can make a meaningful difference.

The UAE is adapting retail in the region to fit the new consumption habits,

and luxury fit-out companies are supporting the creation of designs with digital integration and experiential elements while meeting the standards of performance and durability demanded by high-end brands. Abra's expertise includes creating interiors that balance modern luxury, ensuring that furniture and finishes respect both the brand identity and the cultural context of the UAE. Their work often involves collaborating with luxury brands and incorporating sustainable design elements that can evolve with retail trends and seasonal activations, allowing them to longlist and adapt to the nature of today's consumer experiences.

In the evolving retail industry, success is more than a space, but rather how the concepts connect and adapt as the consumer preferences shift.

‘People Follow Leaders They Trust and Respect’

Global leadership coach **Dr. Pari Namazie** shares her insights in an exclusive conversation with **Business Frontier**

Deepa Natarajan Lobo

For more than three decades, **Dr. Pari Namazie** has earned global recognition as a trusted advisor, leadership coach, and organisational transformation expert to executives around the world. From guiding Fortune 500 leaders through complex change to helping diverse teams align around shared purpose, her work blends strategic acumen with a deep belief in human potential.

Today, as the **Managing Partner of Next Era Partners (NEXEPA)** in Dubai — the regional arm of **Eurasian Nexus Partners (EUNEPA)**, headquartered in Vienna, Austria — she draws on her experience as a seasoned facilitator across cultures and continents to bring empathy, insight, and a truly global perspective to the boardroom.

In this exclusive interview with **Business Frontier**, the sought-after mentor reflects on her remarkable journey, shares her vision for the MENA region, and explores what it truly takes to lead with heart, purpose, and impact in a rapidly changing world.

You’ve built a remarkable career over three decades, working with leaders and organisations around the world. Could you walk us through your professional journey and what inspired you to focus on leadership coaching and transformation?

“You live life forwards and understand it backwards.” This quote deeply resonates with me. Looking back, I see a thread of heart, purpose, and impact throughout my journey. I began as a management



consultant, building companies over 30 years and working with leaders globally—including in Fortune 500 firms.

Coaching found me unexpectedly when a CEO asked me to coach him. Though I wasn’t formally a coach then, I said yes—and discovered my calling. For me, coaching is a space of love and transformation, where people reconnect with their light. That’s where real transformation begins.

Today, I focus on executive coaching, leadership team development, and organisational transformation. I see leaders, teams, and organisations as interconnected systems. Like a bicycle, each part alone does little—a saddle, wheels, handlebar—but together, aligned in one direction, they create motion and impact.

“You live life forwards and understand it backwards.” This quote deeply resonates with me. Looking back, I see a thread of heart, purpose, and impact throughout my journey. I began as a management consultant, building companies over 30 years and working with leaders globally—including in Fortune 500 firms.

In a world of conflict and complexity, my core values remain harmony, sustainability, and meaningful impact—built on trust and partnership.

With the launch of Next Era Partners (NEXEPA) in Dubai, what vision are you bringing to the MENA region, and how does it build on the work you’ve been doing globally?

I deeply believe in tapping into our collective wisdom, using what already exists within us and around us. My vision is to grow from this shared energy, much like a garden where the flowers bloom from local soil and air, nourished by a global sun. It’s about blending local roots



with global insight to create something truly ‘glocal’.

Across my global work with leaders, teams, and organisations, I’ve seen that each one is unique. Leaders often ask how they compare to global standards. Women leaders sometimes wonder if their challenges differ from those of the men I coach. Leaders in Asia ask me how different I find them to leaders in Europe and North America. And yet, I’ve found more that unites us than divides us — and greater strength and power from our shared values.

In a world of growing complexity and uncertainty, I believe in focusing on shared values and collective humanity. When we align with our purpose —individually and together— we become stronger, more connected, and better equipped to lead and grow.

As someone who partners closely with C-suite executives and leadership teams, what qualities do you believe define truly effective leadership in today’s dynamic business environment?

It may sound cliché, but leadership truly matters, often more than strategy, structure, or even culture. People follow leaders they trust and respect, and just as often, they leave great companies because of poor leadership.

In today’s fast-paced, ever-changing world, the leaders who inspire and motivate others share a few key qualities. They lead with humility, kindness, and genuine curiosity. They’re not afraid to

say, “I don’t know,” because vulnerability builds trust. They dream big and take people with them, creating a shared vision that energises teams.

Most importantly, they show strength in adversity, standing by their people during challenges, fighting for the team, not just for profits. These qualities don’t just build better teams; they create resilient, purpose-driven organisations.

Leadership today isn’t about having all the answers, it’s about being human, being present, and helping others grow and thrive alongside you.

How do you strike a balance between guiding leaders and giving them space to evolve on their own terms?

For me, it’s all about meeting someone where they are, not where I assume they are. Striking the right balance starts with a meaningful dialogue: understanding what matters to them, where they are now, and where they want to go. From there, we create a roadmap that aligns with their goals, not mine.

I often use the word ‘co-creation’, because that’s what it is. We co-create the space for growth, identifying where support is needed and where a gentle nudge might help. Knowing the difference is key.

Sometimes, my role is simply to be an accountability partner. Why? Because leaders today are overwhelmed, balancing priorities, teams, projects, and tight deadlines. They don’t need more complexity. If I can help simplify things,



bring structure, and support consistent follow-through, that's what I'll do. It's about creating the space that helps them succeed, grow, and stay aligned with what truly matters to them.

This is what I call being a trusted partner to my clients.

As someone who travels and works across cultures and continents, how do you personally maintain energy, balance, and presence? And what advice do you offer leaders seeking the same?

This is a common issue I have encountered in executive coaching. Many leaders feel stuck because they've lost touch with what brings them joy and fulfillment. And many times, this is the work we do together.

Personally, I've learned to intentionally schedule recovery time into my calendar as down time is essential. I encourage leaders to do the same and discover

what truly recharges them and to build that into their daily or weekly rhythm.

As an extrovert, I gain energy from connection, so I plan for that. When I need calm, I paint. For a creative boost, I dance. When I need to think deeply, I listen to a curated playlist. And when I need grounding, I turn to quotes and art that inspire me.

The key is knowing your energy buckets—what fills them, what drains them, and when they need refueling. I've learned never to let them drop below one-third. And once this energy and balance return, so do clarity, momentum, and flow.

How are leadership development and coaching evolving in the age of AI, remote work, and rapid organisational change? What should companies be doing now to stay ahead?

Leadership development and coaching are evolving rapidly in today's world of AI,

remote work, and constant change. What used to be top-down and structured is now more fluid, human-centered, and adaptive. Leaders are no longer expected to have all the answers—they're expected to ask better questions, foster connection, and lead with empathy.

Coaching is shifting too. It's becoming more about presence, adaptability, and purpose-driven leadership. In this fast-paced, tech-driven era, we need to help leaders stay grounded, self-aware, and emotionally intelligent.

Companies that want to stay ahead must invest in creating cultures of continuous learning and psychological safety. They need to prioritise human skills—curiosity, resilience, empathy—alongside digital fluency. And they should view coaching not as a luxury, but as a strategic tool for navigating uncertainty and enabling transformation. In a world driven by speed and systems, the real edge lies in how deeply and authentically we connect—with ourselves and others.

Looking ahead, what are your focus areas at NEXEPA—and what advice would you offer business leaders who want to lead with impact and stay future-ready?

At NEXEPA, our focus is on executive coaching, building stronger and more aligned leadership teams through team facilitation and coaching, and helping companies define what leading with impact truly means to them. We work with organisations to create a shared language around leadership, alignment, and being future-ready. What are you seeing? What might you be missing? Where are your blind spots? These are the powerful questions we explore together.

Our approach starts with where leaders are today and where they aspire to be tomorrow. From there, we co-create the path forward—through coaching, team facilitation, strategy development, or fractional HR support.

To business leaders: impact starts with clarity. Be intentional about how you lead, communicate, and evolve. Stay curious, build aligned teams, and create space for honest reflection. The future belongs to those who are not just reacting to change—but consciously shaping it. That's the mindset that keeps you future-ready.

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The Next Big Leap in Workplace Culture: WOW Workplaces Certification Launches in UAE and KSA

From awards to action — **WOW Workplaces Certification** sets a new standard for employee experience

The ballroom at the **Employee Happiness Awards** was buzzing — the kind of energy you feel when great ideas and great people collide. EHA, a platform that celebrates inspiring employee happiness stories with a merit-based ethos, shone as it officially launched the **WOW Workplaces Certification** in the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It wasn't just another announcement. It felt like the beginning of a movement.

Where Recognition Meets Action

For years, the Employee Happiness Awards have been the region's stage for celebrating exceptional workplaces — the companies introducing groundbreaking well-being programs, pioneering fresh approaches to leadership, and creating environments people are proud to be part of. The Awards have uncovered hundreds of initiatives proving that when you put people first, business thrives.

But as inspiring as those nights have been, a question always lingered in the



background: What happens after the award? How do you take that recognition and turn it into lasting change?

From Inspiration to a Year-Round Commitment

That's where WOW was born. Inspired by the success stories of EHA winners, WOW Workplaces Certification was designed as the natural next step — a way for companies to turn a trophy into a transformation. Rather than focusing on one highlight moment each year, WOW looks at the entire employee journey and gives organizations the tools, insights, and visibility to keep building on their success.

The approach is refreshingly holistic. It considers how you attract and onboard talent, how you help people



learn and grow, how you support their well-being, how you lead with trust and strategy, the culture you nurture day to day, and even how you retain talent or part ways when the time comes. These six elements are woven together into a blueprint for workplaces that inspire loyalty and drive performance.

A Clear Path to Better Workplaces

Every great workplace rests on a foundation. For WOW, that foundation has six pillars:

- Attraction & Onboarding
- Learning & Growth
- Well-Being
- Leadership & Strategy
- Culture
- Exit & Retention



These pillars turn good companies into great ones — and great ones into legends.

The certification process is straightforward but revealing. It begins with a complimentary self-audit, followed by an in-depth review with experienced auditors, and ends with an anonymous employee survey that gives leaders a true picture of what's happening inside their organisation. The outcome is a clear, data-backed roadmap for improvement — one that leaders can act on immediately.

More Than Certification — It's a Market Advantage

While WOW is a powerful internal tool, it's also a statement to the market. In an era when employer branding is as important as customer branding,

being WOW-certified tells potential hires, clients, and partners that your organisation is a destination worth choosing. Companies also benefit from tailored visibility opportunities — media features, podcasts, events — that amplify their reputation and help position them ahead of the competition.

With its launch in the UAE and KSA, WOW is inviting organisations from every sector to join a global community of forward-thinking employers. It's an opportunity to go beyond "business as usual" and create a workplace that people genuinely want to be part of.

The first step? Take the self-audit. See where you stand. And from there, take your workplace from good to WOW.

For more details, visit www.wowworkplaces.com

Reshaping the Matrimony Space for Indian Defence Families

In conversation with **Business Frontier**, **Parveen Brar** – Founder of **Defence Wards Matrimony**, shares how purpose, empathy, and community-rooted values built a trusted platform for the defence fraternity

When traditional matrimonial platforms fell short of addressing the values, lifestyle, and emotional nuances of defence families, **Parveen Brar**, an Army wife and passionate community builder, saw an opportunity to create something different – something deeply personal and purpose-driven. That vision led to the founding of **Defence Wards Matrimony**, a growing niche platform dedicated exclusively to the children of India's defence personnel.

Built and run by individuals from defence backgrounds themselves, the platform offers a secure and culturally aligned space for matchmaking – where trust, discipline, and shared upbringing form the foundation of every connection. What started with just five profiles and a strong belief in community has grown into one of India's fastest-rising matrimonial networks within the defence circle, known for its authenticity, verified profiles, and values-first approach.

In this exclusive conversation with **Business Frontier**, **Parveen Brar** talks about scaling a tech-enabled platform without compromising on emotional intelligence, blending innovation with integrity, and why the best startups often begin with something profoundly personal.

What gap did you identify in the traditional matrimony space that led to the creation of Defence Wards Matrimony?

The idea behind **Defence Wards Matrimony** was born out of a deeply personal experience. While searching for suitable matches for my daughters, I realized how difficult it was to find a platform that truly understood the unique upbringing of defence kids. The traditional matrimonial sites lacked the cultural sensitivity, trust, and shared values that defence families hold dear.

There was no space where parents could meaningfully participate, and no system that catered to the disciplined, diverse, and service-oriented background of Army, Navy, and Air Force families.

Through conversations with other defence parents, it became clear that many faced the same frustration – and that we needed something tailored to our community. That's when Defence Wards Matrimony, a platform that's secure, respectful, and built specifically for the wards of defence personnel, was born. It goes beyond matchmaking – it's about bringing together families who share a legacy of integrity, service, and values.

How have you scaled a niche platform while maintaining exclusivity and trust within the defence community?

Though none of us came from a tech background, we were driven by a clear purpose – to create a trusted space for defence families. We started small, with a committed team and just five profiles on the day we launched. Those first families registered purely on trust, because we came from the same defence ecosystem.

Then came our first success story, and we knew we were on to something meaningful. We scaled organically, prioritising authenticity over volume. Every profile is verified and belongs to serving defence personnel, veteran, or their ward. Our early growth was built on referrals, word-of-mouth, and deep-rooted trust across messes and cantonments.

Today, we've evolved – with a growing team, targeted marketing campaigns, and user-friendly mobile apps to simplify the search process. But at our core, we remain committed to what matters most: exclusivity, trust, and shared values within the defence community.

How has technology helped you evolve the user experience on your platform, and what innovations are you most proud of?

Technology has been at the heart of our growth journey. We started with manual matchmaking, but as the community expanded, we built a secure, user-friendly platform and launched dedicated mobile apps to make the process simpler and more accessible for both users and their families.

What we're most proud of is how we've blended technology with a values-driven, personal approach. Our platform features smart filters specifically designed for defence families – taking into account lifestyle, background, and family expectations, far beyond just basic biodata.



“
Leading Defence Wards Matrimony means walking the line between technology and human connection. Every decision impacts not just individuals, but entire families – so empathy and responsibility are at the heart of how I lead.”

We've also integrated dedicated customer support, especially to assist parents who may not be as comfortable with technology – ensuring no one is left behind.

Looking ahead, we see AI-led matchmaking as the future. We're actively exploring how AI can deliver deeper compatibility-based suggestions, making the process not only efficient, but also thoughtful and emotionally intelligent.

How do you approach leadership in a business that deals with both emotional connections and technological evolution?

Leading Defence Wards Matrimony means walking the line between technology and human connection. Every decision impacts not just individuals, but entire families – so empathy and responsibility are at the heart of how I lead.

Being the wife of a Brigadier in the Indian Army, I've lived the life this platform is built around. I understand the values, challenges, and unspoken nuances of the defence community – from constant relocations to the deep-rooted sense of trust and discipline. This lived experience gives me clarity when making decisions that feel authentic and genuinely serve our users.

On the tech side, I rely on a strong team and data-driven insights, but always filter decisions through the lens of our community's emotional and cultural needs. We adopt technology only when it improves trust, accessibility, or connection.



In what way does your involvement with Army Wives Welfare Association (AWWA) and other women empowerment NGOs influence the values and mission of your company?

My journey with AWWA and Retired Defence Officers Wives Welfare Association (RDOWWA) has been one of the most enriching parts of my life, and it continues to shape how I lead Defence Wards Matrimony.

Being a part of these organisations gave me a front-row view into the strength, compassion, and resilience of defence families – especially the women. I’ve seen how women support one another through transfers, separations, and uncertainty, all while holding their families and communities together with quiet strength. These experiences taught me that empowerment isn’t just about opportunity, it’s about creating safe, supportive spaces – and that’s exactly what I wanted this platform to be.

“
My biggest advice: start, even if it’s small – and especially if it’s personal. Some of the most impactful ventures are born from lived experiences and real gaps we see around us.

What advice would you give to aspiring women entrepreneurs building niche startups in underserved markets?

My biggest advice: start, even if it’s small – and especially if it’s personal. Some of the most impactful ventures are born from lived experiences and real gaps we see around us.

If you’re building in a niche or underserved space, don’t be afraid of starting with limited resources. I had no tech background when I started Defence Wards Matrimony. But I had a deep understanding of my community, a purpose I believed in, and the willingness to learn and build the right team around me. Before you build, invest time in market research. Talk to your potential users. Understand their pain points, behaviors, and what truly matters to them – not just as consumers, but as people. In underserved markets, these insights are gold. Your lived experience is powerful, but validation through real conversations and observations gives your idea a stronger foundation.

As women, we often wait until everything feels “ready.” My advice is – you are more ready than you think. Use your emotional intelligence, your instinct, and your ability to multitask and build relationships – they are your biggest assets. Also, it will be a challenging journey but if you believe in your idea do not give up. And finally, don’t be afraid of slow growth. In niche markets, trust is everything. If you build slowly, honestly, and stay true to your values, people will follow.

Build something that solves a real problem – and do it with heart. The rest will follow.



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Transforming Challenges into Trillion-Rupiah Opportunities

Sayed Musaddiq—Managing Director and Partner at Skha Consulting, and Founder of StrategicThink.id — speaks about the power of fusing theory with practice to drive transformative impact in Southeast Asia

A distinguished strategic consultant and business leader with over 15 years of experience in corporate strategy, portfolio management, and organizational transformation, **Sayed Musaddiq serves as Managing Director and Partner at Skha Consulting.** Armed with an engineering degree from **Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB)**, management training from Toyota, and ongoing Ph.D. research in Management, he bridges theoretical rigor with real-world implementation. As the founder of **StrategicThink.id**, Musaddiq continues to democratise strategic thinking for broader organizational impact.

In this wide-ranging conversation with **Business Frontier**, he reflects on his leadership evolution, his passion for inclusive strategy, and his vision for future-ready business transformation in the age of AI.

You've held several leadership roles in corporate strategy and consulting. How would you define your core leadership philosophy, and how has it evolved over the years?

My core leadership philosophy centres on 'Strategic Pragmatism with Collaborative Excellence'. Over my 15+ years in strategic consulting, I've learned that effective leadership isn't about having all the answers—it's about asking the right questions and empowering teams to discover innovative solutions together.

Early in my career at Skha Consulting, I focused heavily on technical expertise and analytical rigor. However, as I



progressed from Consultant to Managing Director and Partner, I realised that sustainable transformation requires emotional intelligence alongside strategic acumen. My philosophy has evolved to encompass three pillars: data-driven decision making, stakeholder-centric approach, and adaptive execution.

Leading teams of over 50 consultants across billion-rupiah projects has taught

me that the best strategies emerge from diverse perspectives. My engineering background from ITB provided a foundation in systematic problem-solving, which was further honed by management training at Toyota that instilled the philosophy of Kaizen (continuous improvement). However, I've learned that true differentiation comes from blending this analytical rigor with human-centred leadership to deliver exceptional client outcomes.

“

Over my 15+ years in strategic consulting, I've learned that effective leadership isn't about having all the answers—it's about asking the right questions and empowering teams to discover innovative solutions together.

critically needed at all levels of an organization and across businesses of all sizes, including SMEs and startups that may not have access to premier consulting services.

StrategicThink.id was created to bridge that gap. It's a platform to distill complex strategic concepts into accessible frameworks and actionable insights for a broader audience.

It complements my consulting work in a symbiotic way:

- **From Consulting to Platform:** My real-world engagements with clients provide a rich source of practical challenges and proven solutions, ensuring the content on StrategicThink.id is relevant and grounded, not just theoretical.
- **From Platform to Consulting:** The platform allows me to engage with a wider ecosystem of business professionals and entrepreneurs. This sharpens my understanding of emerging market trends and grassroots-level challenges, which in turn enriches the advice I provide to my corporate clients. It acts as a continuous feedback loop, keeping my perspectives fresh and expansive.

Your expertise spans across sectors like banking, real estate, and energy. What common strategic challenges do you see across these industries, especially in Southeast Asia?

Across these seemingly disparate sectors in Southeast Asia, I observe three common strategic challenges:

- **Navigating Digital Disruption vs. Legacy Inertia:** All three sectors are grappling with digital transformation. Banking has fintech, real estate has PropTech, and energy has cleantech and smart grids. The core challenge is not the lack of awareness but the difficulty of integrating new, agile technologies and business models with deeply entrenched legacy systems, processes, and corporate cultures.
- **The Talent and Capability Gap:** A fierce war for talent with future-ready skills in areas like data analytics, AI, and digital product management is underway. Legacy organizations struggle to attract, develop, and retain this talent, creating a significant gap between their strategic ambitions and

their organizational capabilities to execute them.

- **The ESG Imperative:** Stakeholder expectations regarding Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria are no longer a peripheral concern but a central strategic issue. For banks, it's about sustainable financing; for real estate, it's green buildings and sustainable communities; for energy, it's the transition to renewables. The challenge is to embed ESG into the core business strategy in a way that creates genuine value and is not just a "greenwashing" exercise.

How critical is strategic restructuring for legacy organizations today, and what are the biggest mistakes companies make during transformation efforts?

Strategic restructuring has become existential for legacy organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption by decades, and organizations that delay transformation risk irrelevance.

However, I've observed critical mistakes that undermine transformation efforts:

- **Technology-First Mindset:** Organizations often prioritise technological solutions over process optimization and cultural change. Technology should enable strategy, not drive it.
- **Underestimating Change Management:** Technical implementation represents only 30% of transformation success. The remaining 70% involves people, processes, and cultural adaptation.
- **Lack of Stakeholder Alignment:** Transformation requires coalition building across all organizational levels. When leadership fails to invest in comprehensive stakeholder engagement, resistance can undermine even well-designed strategies.
- **Insufficient Resource Allocation:** Many organizations underestimate the financial and human capital required for successful transformation, leading to incomplete implementations.
- **Absence of Continuous Learning:** Transformation is iterative, requiring constant adaptation based on market feedback and performance data.

Being a Ph.D. candidate in Management, how does academic research inform your real-world advisory practice, and vice versa?

It creates a powerful virtuous cycle between theory and practice. My academic work equips me with rigorous, evidence-based frameworks that go beyond passing management fads. It allows me to diagnose a client's problem with greater depth and precision, applying theoretical lenses (like resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, or institutional theory) to uncover the root causes of their challenges.

My consulting work, on the other hand, is a real-world laboratory. It exposes me to the complex, messy, and context-rich problems that business leaders face daily. This experience keeps my research grounded and relevant, ensuring that I am investigating questions that have a real-world impact. It allows me to test theoretical models against the harsh realities of execution and bring those practical insights back into my academic inquiry.

How do you see the role of AI and digital innovation shaping corporate strategy and decision-making in the next five years?

AI and digital innovation will fundamentally transform corporate strategy through 'Intelligent Strategy Architecture' from being a periodic, top-down exercise to a continuous, data-driven dialogue. I anticipate five critical developments:

- **Predictive Strategy Development:** AI will enable real-time scenario modeling and predictive analytics, allowing organizations to anticipate market changes rather than merely react to them.
- **Automated Decision Support:** Complex analytical tasks will be augmented by AI, freeing strategic leaders to focus on creative problem-solving and stakeholder relationship management.
- **Dynamic Resource Optimisation:** Machine learning algorithms will continuously optimise resource allocation across business units, improving capital efficiency and operational performance.
- **Enhanced Stakeholder Intelligence:** AI-powered sentiment analysis and



relationship mapping will provide deeper insights into stakeholder dynamics, improving strategic communication and relationship management.

- **Democratised Strategic Insights:** Advanced analytics will become accessible to mid-level managers, distributing strategic thinking capabilities throughout organizations rather than concentrating them at senior levels.
- However, successful AI integration requires human judgment for ethical considerations, cultural nuances, and strategic vision. The future belongs to leaders who can effectively combine artificial intelligence with emotional intelligence.

What advice would you give to young professionals who aspire to enter the world of strategic consulting and become impactful advisors?

To become truly impactful advisors, I would offer this three-part advice:

1. **Think Like a True Strategist.** Anyone can analyse data, but a true strategist finds meaning within it. It's about moving beyond the "what" (the analysis) to the "so what" (the implication) and the "now what" (the actionable plan). This requires both deep analytical rigour to deconstruct complex problems and a wide-angle, creative lens to see patterns and connect disparate ideas that others miss. Your value is not in presenting facts, but in forging them into a clear, decisive strategic direction.
2. **Become a Master Storyteller.** A brilliant strategy is useless if it remains a concept in a slide deck. Your analysis and frameworks are just the beginning. You must learn to weave your strategic insights into a compelling narrative that connects with your audience on both an intellectual and emotional level. Impact is not achieved through presentation, but through persuasion.
3. **Cultivate Radical Empathy.** A strategy, no matter how brilliant or well communicated, will fail if it doesn't resonate with the client's reality. Strive to deeply understand your client's world—their pressures, their aspirations, and their fears. Impactful advisors don't just solve a problem on paper; they build trust and act as a true partner by ensuring the solution is right for the people who must execute it.

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‘Abu Dhabi is Entering a Promising Period’

With its unique mix of cultural capital, long-term incentives, and controlled supply, Abu Dhabi is drawing serious investor attention. Industry leaders weigh in on what’s driving the capital’s evolving real estate story

Deepa Natarajan Lobo



In a market often overshadowed by Dubai's fast-paced momentum, Abu Dhabi is steadily and strategically emerging as the UAE's most promising destination for long-term real estate investment.

In the first half of 2025 alone, the emirate recorded AED 51.72 billion in real estate transactions, marking a 39% year-on-year increase, according to the latest data from the Abu Dhabi Real Estate Centre (ADREC). With more than 14,000 property deals, including AED 32.69 billion in sales and AED 19 billion in mortgage activity, the capital

is emerging as one of the most resilient and rewarding property markets in the region.

What's driving this unprecedented growth? A strategic shift towards community-based developments, streamlined digital services, and a marked increase in foreign direct investment — over 85 nationalities have invested in the market this year, with FDI surpassing AED 3.38 billion.

Business Frontier speaks to leading industry experts to uncover what's driving Abu Dhabi's real estate momentum in 2025—and what lies ahead.

History Museum is creating many job opportunities and boosting confidence in the local economy," he says.

He further points out that government reforms such as the Golden Visa residency program and 100% foreign ownership rights have made property investment more accessible and appealing to global buyers. "The arrival of world-class luxury brands, including the Ritz-Carlton and Nobu, is raising the standard for waterfront living. Limited prime supply is helping to secure strong rental yields and steady increases in property value. Ongoing upgrades to



Sunny Kumar Tyagi



Dr. Hussain Harhara



Ben Crompton



Ali Ishaq

A Lifestyle-Focused Urban Vision

Sunny Kumar Tyagi, CEO of Under One Roof Real Estate, paints a confident picture of the capital's emerging waterfront and lifestyle communities. "Abu Dhabi is entering a promising period. The arrival of global names like the Guggenheim, Disney, and the Natural

infrastructure, smart city innovations, and sustainable development are improving accessibility and liveability. As a result, these areas are becoming attractive to both international and regional buyers," Tyagi adds.

The result: growing demand, steady capital appreciation, and strong rental performance, especially in luxury-segment areas like Saadiyat and Yas Islands.

Investor Magnet – Top Drivers in 2025

- **Golden Visas and 100% foreign ownership** continue to be major incentives
- **Cultural and hospitality mega-projects** such as Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Natural History Museum, and Disney drive global visibility
- **High rental yields (6–8%),** with zero property tax and improved transparency, enhance long-term appeal

A Strategic, Stable Investment Hub

Even as its neighbouring Dubai is known for quick real estate cycles and high-volume launches, Abu Dhabi is consciously positioning itself as a long-term, low-volatility investment hub. **Dr. Hussain Harhara, General Manager of East West International Group,** points to Abu Dhabi’s maturing economic strategy.

“While emirates like Dubai and Sharjah thrive on rapid real estate cycles, Abu Dhabi is steadily establishing itself as a stable, long-term investment hub. In 2024, real estate contributed approximately 6.4% to Abu Dhabi’s 54.7% non-oil GDP—underscoring its expanding role in the emirate’s diversification strategy under Vision 2030, which emphasizes sustainability, technology, and innovation,” he says.

Dr. Harhara also points to the role of government-backed platforms like DARI and ADREC, which have significantly improved transparency and digital access for investors. “Key legal reforms from 2019 allow foreigners to buy freehold property in designated zones such as Yas and Saadiyat Islands. Investors also benefit from zero property taxes, 10-year Golden Visas, and high rental yields (6–8%).”

He further adds, “Infrastructure developments such as Masdar City, Yas Bay, and the expansion of Abu Dhabi Global Market further enhance demand and capital growth.”

With a controlled supply pipeline, premium lifestyle offerings, and a clear pro-investor stance, Abu Dhabi is now widely seen as the UAE’s most resilient and rewarding real estate market for long-term capital investment.

Key Freehold Investment Zones

Zone	Investment Appeal
Saadiyat Island	Cultural institutions, luxury properties, limited supply
Yas Island	High tourism footfall, entertainment and retail
Reem Island	Proximity to CBD, strong rental yields
Maryah Island	Financial free zone, commercial growth hub
Masdar City	Green tech, smart city credentials

A Design-Led Future

According to **Ben Crompton, Managing Partner of Crompton Partners,** 2025 has seen a shift in how major developers approach residential communities. “This year, we’ve seen several new launches—mostly single towers by sub-developers—with a few larger community-based projects like Solea by Taraf. Aldar, however, has pivoted from earlier high-rise projects such as Nouran and the Manarat towers (2024) to more holistic communities like Mamsha Gardens, Mamsha Palm, Waldorf Astoria, and Fahid Island. These developments prioritize aesthetics, user experience, and lifestyle—focusing on value creation, liveability, and emotional connection.”

He highlights luxury offerings that include amenities such as meditation zones, co-working spaces, pet sitting, and concierge services. “Yes, they come with a premium service charge—but the market response suggests buyers are more than willing to pay for emotional connection and quality of life,” he says.

What Buyers Want in 2025

- **Experience-first design:** Community interaction, wellness amenities, aesthetic value
- **Smart homes:** Energy-efficient tech, automated controls, security systems
- **Location + Livability:** Proximity to schools, retail, transport, and nature

Where the Smart Money Is Going

Ali Ishaq, Head of Residential Agency – Abu Dhabi at Savills Middle East, confirms that investor appetite is diversifying across established zones and emerging sustainable districts. “Abu Dhabi’s most promising micro-markets for long-term investment include Reem Island, Yas Island, Saadiyat Island, and Maryah Island. Reem offers strong rental yields and proximity to the city

centre, while Yas Island benefits from ongoing tourism and entertainment development, making it attractive for long-term, short-term, and lifestyle-focused investments,” he says. “Emerging areas like Masdar City and Khalifa City also show strong potential, especially for sustainable and affordable housing aligned with Abu Dhabi’s strategic growth. These micro-markets are well positioned due to infrastructure upgrades, freehold ownership

zones, and government support for diversification and innovation across real estate, tourism, and finance.”

Building a Legacy

Abu Dhabi’s real estate sector is aligning more closely with UAE Vision 2030 — promoting innovation, sustainability, and global competitiveness. From the rise of digital transaction platforms to an investor-friendly legal framework, the capital is offering not just premium property but a compelling future-proof investment environment.

As real estate experts weigh in, it’s clear: Abu Dhabi is not chasing trends—it’s building a legacy. This is a place for serious, strategic investors who understand value over time. “With controlled supply, a premium lifestyle offering, and a clear pro-investor stance, Abu Dhabi stands out as the UAE’s most resilient and rewarding real estate market for long-term capital,” sums up Dr. Harhara.



Building Trust at 30,000 Feet: Aerviva's Leadership Edge in Aviation HR and Recruitment

Jekaterina Shalopanova, Chief Business Officer at Aerviva, reflects on her leadership values and standing out in a highly competitive arena

With over 15 years of experience in the aviation HR and recruitment sector, **Jekaterina Shalopanova** has built her career on resilience, adaptability, and vision. As **Chief Business Officer at Aerviva**, she has been instrumental in transforming the company from its inception into a trusted global partner for aviation talent solutions.

Backed by her financial training with Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Jekaterina brings a sharp strategic lens to every decision—balancing operational excellence with sustainable growth. Today, she oversees a global talent network of more than 50,000 professionals, driving Aerviva's mission of connecting skilled aviation experts with opportunities worldwide. In an interview with **Business Frontier**, the champion of integrity, cultural intelligence, and empowerment, reflects on her leadership values and standing out in a highly competitive arena.

You've had an impressive journey leading business operations at Aerviva. What were the pivotal moments that shaped your career in aviation HR and recruitment?

My journey began with Aerviva years ago when launching from inception taught me resilience in a niche, regulated industry. The 2020 pandemic was a critical turning point: global aviation collapsed, forcing a dramatic rethinking of recruitment models amid mass layoffs and grounded fleets. As the market



began to recover, I led Aerviva's strategic pivot to digital-first sourcing and remote onboarding—anticipating the industry's agility needs.

The global rebound in 2024 provided further validation: global passenger traffic surged 10%, reaching 9.5 billion passengers, surpassing 2019 levels. Leveraging that surge, together with the team we expanded Aerviva's footprint, optimising deployments across markets. Such moments shape the leadership: always balancing opportunity with operational discipline. Dedication and determination show results as cultivating a global talent network—comprising more than 50,000 seasoned aviation professionals—has been instrumental in establishing Aerviva as a trusted partner.

How does Aerviva differentiate itself in the highly competitive aviation talent and HR consultancy space, especially in a post-pandemic industry landscape?

Aerviva differentiates itself through its deep global network, with credibility backed by over 15 years of

“*Our personnel leasing model offers seamless recruitment, HR, and payroll management, letting clients stay focused on core operations while we manage administrative logistics.***”**

industry experience and more than 10,000 unique contractors placed. Our personnel leasing model offers seamless recruitment, HR, and payroll management, letting clients stay focused on core operations while we manage administrative logistics.

Post-pandemic, we embraced recruitment digitalisation, using optimised tools for candidate selection along with streamlining process that leads to efficiency and enhancement of the candidate experience. Tailored, relationship-driven model, grounded in operational fluency and market foresight, allows Aerviva to deliver reliable, scalable workforce solutions that rise with industry recovery.

You have had financial training from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). How does that help you make strategic decisions in your leadership role?

My ACCA background fosters a robust financial lens when steering Aerviva's strategy. This discipline ensures our recruitment solutions remain operationally viable and financially sustainable, essential in aviation where margin sensitivity is high. It empowers me to evaluate investments—such as digital recruitment tools or geographic expansion—in terms of both cost efficiency and long-term ROI. Moreover, ACCA's emphasis on leadership clarity, such as translating vision into actionable outcomes, underpins how I guide teams through uncertain change.

What motivates you personally in this line of work, and how do you stay inspired in a high-pressure, global-facing industry like aviation?

I draw deep motivation from our mission—matching talent with roles that contribute to aviation safety and performance globally. The industry's complexity energises me—the interplay of regulations, cross-border talent flows, and technology-driven change demands creative, adaptive leadership.

Witnessing how our strategies—from leveraging digital tools to close staffing gaps to supporting professionals in their aspirational transitions—deliver tangible impact keeps me inspired. Remaining client-focused and people-centric amidst complexity defines our commitment and purpose.

Can you share a challenge you've faced as a leader in a multicultural business environment, and how you navigated it successfully?

Working across diverse cultures posed the challenge of harmonising varied communication norms and client expectations. To address this, I introduced clear, inclusive communication protocols and prioritised listening to cultural cues, ensuring every partner—whether client or candidate—felt understood. This inclusive approach fostered trust and collaboration, ultimately elevating our service agility and team cohesion. It's a reminder that cultural intelligence is the strategic capital in global aviation HR.

What leadership values do you prioritise when building and guiding teams at Aerviva?

At Aerviva, I uphold integrity, trust and compliance are foundational in aviation HR; accountability, ensuring outcomes reflect our team's ownership; and adaptability, enabling responsive solutions amid market shifts. I also champion empowerment—inspiring teams to take initiative within our global framework—and collaborative leadership, where direction comes with trust and respect as well as recognition and transparency.

For young professionals—especially women—eyeing leadership roles in aviation or HR, what's your top advice for standing out and making a meaningful impact?

My advice: embrace continuous learning and confidence. Cultivate technical acumen—whether in aviation regulation, digital recruitment, or financial literacy—and combine it with cultural agility. For women, this means asserting your expertise and pursuing leadership opportunities even in male-dominated spaces.

Build trusted networks and mentors who champion your progress. Finally, frame challenges as platforms to demonstrate strategic insight under pressure. Leadership is defined by impact and influence, not titles—delivering clarity, integrity and innovation will make you stand out in aviation and HR.

MATCHA FACES GLOBAL BOOM AMID RISING DEMAND AND LIMITED SUPPLY

As demand for the vibrant green tea skyrockets, it's creating both challenges and exciting opportunities for Japanese producers, global retailers, and tea-lovers



Matcha, the vibrant green Japanese tea once niche outside its homeland, is now a global obsession — and it's creating a supply crisis. From Starbucks lattes in London to Krispy Kreme doughnuts in Singapore, the powdered tea is everywhere, fueled by TikTok trends and post-pandemic tourism to Japan. But with this newfound fame comes growing pains.

"Some cafes are even asking for a kilo a day. They're desperate to keep up," says Lauren Purvis, Founder of US-based Mizuba Tea Co. "What was once a month's supply now runs out in days."

Matcha's popularity stems from more than just social media. Japan's weaker yen has attracted a record number of tourists and lifted the global appetite for authentic Japanese products. Yet, while demand skyrockets, the supply of tencha — the green tea leaves used to make matcha — is under pressure.

Matcha is produced through a delicate, centuries-old process: tencha leaves are shaded for weeks to develop their signature umami flavor before being stone-ground — a painstaking process yielding just 40 grams of matcha per hour. Climate change is now disrupting this. In the Kyoto region, which supplies around a quarter of Japan's tencha, extreme heat has damaged crops.

To make matters worse, Japan is grappling with an aging agricultural workforce, and there are not enough younger farmers stepping in. Retailers in famous matcha destinations like Uji have resorted to limiting purchases, as shelves are cleared by tourists almost immediately.

"Matcha is the highest grade of tea and it's so special to us," says Atsuko Mori, director at Kyoto-based Camellia Tea Ceremony, where customers are restricted to one tin each. "So there's a bit of a contradiction when I hear stories about how it's resold or used in food."

Rising costs are also driven by geopolitics. A recent US-Japan trade deal includes a 15% tariff on Japanese imports, which could further hike matcha prices in America. "As Japanese tea is not grown in the US, there is no American industry under threat that tariffs need to protect," Purvis notes.

Still, there's optimism. Matcha production nearly tripled between 2010 and 2023, and green tea exports rose 25% last year to ¥36.4 billion (\$250 million). Some believe the market will balance out. "There is a boom at the moment... but we think that will calm down a bit in two to three years," says Masahiro Nagata, Co-Founder of Matcha Tokyo.

In the meantime, tea purists urge consumers to be mindful and savor matcha for what it is — not just a trend, but a tradition.

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Building Circular Economies Through Local Collaboration

Bjarke Kovshøj, Strategic Programmes Manager at Climate KIC, Europe's leading climate innovation agency, talks about climate innovation and the vitality of upstream circularity

Deepa Natarajan Lobo

The Strategic Programmes Manager at Climate KIC, one of Europe's leading climate innovation agencies, **Bjarke Kovshøj** is a Danish national with a deep-rooted passion for sustainability shaped by his upbringing in one of the world's greenest countries. Having built a career at the intersection of climate innovation, entrepreneurship, and systems thinking, his early experiences—ranging from academic research in international business with a climate focus to hands-on work with CLEAN, Denmark's Cleantech Cluster—laid the foundation for his current work driving systemic change and climate action in urban environments.

At Climate KIC, Bjarke plays a pivotal role in developing and managing 'Innovation Clusters' in emerging cities, with a special focus on accelerating the topics such as circular economy in high-growth urban centres like Nairobi, Kenya and Bengaluru, India.

Currently, he is leading the Circular Economy Innovation Cluster (CEIC) project in Bengaluru, developed by Climate KIC in collaboration with SecondMuse and funded by the IKEA Foundation. The initiative addresses urban waste challenges through upstream innovation, support for informal waste workers, and cross-sector collaboration. The CEIC has already benefited over 130 informal workers (in both Nairobi and Bengaluru) and contributed to carbon dioxide reduction working directly with circular entrepreneurs through the Circular Economy ClimAccelerator.

In an interview with **Business Frontier**, Kovshøj talks about his journey into climate innovation, the importance of upstream circularity, and how cities like Nairobi and Bengaluru are becoming testbeds for scalable, locally driven circular economy solutions.

Can you share a bit about your journey into climate innovation and how you came to focus on circular economy systems in cities like Nairobi and Bengaluru?

I have always been passionate about climate innovation, shaped by growing up in Denmark (a global leader in the green transition). While studying International Business, I focused my coursework on climate innovation whenever possible. During a wave of new green initiatives in Denmark, I landed an internship with the newly launched Cleantech Cluster. That opportunity turned into five years of hands-on climate innovation experience before I moved on to Climate KIC, Europe's leading climate innovation agency and community.

Climate KIC's Innovation Clusters strengthen climate innovation ecosystems by connecting different actors who typically work in isolation. These clusters foster collaboration, innovation, and learning to build inclusive and circular economies. They are designed to address systemic challenges at the local level.

In cities like Nairobi and Bengaluru, waste is an escalating issue with wide-reaching impacts on areas such as public health and financial resilience. This highlights the urgent need for a shift toward a circular economy. In response, Climate KIC, in collaboration with our partners SecondMuse and GrowthAfrica,



chose to focus on Circular Economy solutions—leveraging entrepreneurship as a key driver of systemic change.

The CEIC has been active in two very different urban environments—Nairobi and Bengaluru. What inspired this cross-continental approach?

Nairobi and Bengaluru have a lot in common. Both are growing fast and are dealing with more waste as their population increases. At the same time, they have lively entrepreneurial ecosystems and more organisations stepping up on climate action and circular economy initiatives. Finally, informal waste workers play a key role in waste management and circularity in both cities, supporting the everyday collection, sorting, and disposal. However, their role goes beyond keeping the city clean; they possess invaluable expertise and skills that can significantly benefit the economy.

By bringing different sectors and entrepreneurs together, we want to speed up the creation of circular solutions and help them learn from one another and share ideas. That way, we can build a model that other cities, whether in emerging or developed countries, can replicate and adapt to tackle similar big challenges.

One of your key insights from the initiative is around "upstream circularity." How can this concept be applied to the real estate and construction sectors in cities where urban expansion is accelerating?

Upstream innovation refers to designing products and systems in a way that prevents waste from being created in the first place. It focuses on minimising environmental impact early in the product lifecycle, so that products and processes are inherently more sustainable. In rapidly expanding cities like Nairobi and Bengaluru, embedding this mindset into urban development is critical. It calls for meaningful collaboration across sectors—bringing

fast-growing economies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa are facing. The real solution comes from their local communities and ecosystems. That's why Climate KIC's Innovation Cluster approach focuses on nurturing locally led initiatives. Achieving a circular economy—through material reuse, modular construction, and design for disassembly—requires first establishing a clear vision centred on refusing, rethinking, and reducing waste. Equally important is fostering meaningful collaboration among diverse actors who don't usually work together, including the informal sector, which holds vital knowledge about waste management.

Looking towards 2030, what would a circular, climate-smart real estate and urban ecosystem look like in an African city like Nairobi?

I think it begins with a mindset shift. All actors involved need to see why

" It is important to foster meaningful collaboration among diverse actors who don't usually work together, including the informal sector, which holds vital knowledge about waste management. "

together architects, developers, policymakers, and informal actors—to co-create circular solutions. In the real estate and construction sector, this includes designing for disassembly, using regenerative or low-impact materials, and integrating reuse and recovery strategies into urban planning frameworks.

Construction and demolition waste are growing problems in many African cities. Do you see viable circular solutions—such as reuse of materials, modular construction, or design for disassembly—emerging within real estate development?

Nairobi and Bengaluru really show the kind of big challenges a lot of

circular solutions matter and what they can actually achieve. This has to be followed by a strong local push to build new forms of collaboration, including partnerships beyond the traditional real estate sector. We need a strong pipeline, one that brings together early- and late-stage startups, investor support, and enabling policies to truly nurture innovation. It's also important that this work happens locally. In fact, there are a lot of promising local initiatives happening right here in Nairobi and Bengaluru. What's needed is a unifying, locally grounded vision that channels collective efforts towards upstream innovation. These cities, with their dynamic ecosystems, are uniquely positioned to lead and to develop scalable, transformative solutions by 2030 that inspire globally.

How Technology is Transforming Holistic Health?

Gautam Kapadi, Chief Executive Officer at Luke Coutinho Holistic Healing Systems, explores the future possibilities of wellness



Gautam Kapadi

In recent years, holistic health has experienced a significant surge in popularity. People are increasingly seeking approaches that treat the entire person—mind, body, and spirit—rather than simply addressing isolated symptoms. But what's truly remarkable is how technology has begun to transform this ancient practice, ushering in a new era of wellness that combines time-honoured wisdom with cutting-edge innovations.

Let's take a journey through the evolving relationship between holistic health and technology, exploring the role of artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and the future possibilities that are just beginning to unfold.

Holistic Health and Technology: A New Paradigm

For many, holistic health once involved visiting practitioners in person and relying on hands-on treatments. Today, however, technology has dramatically expanded access to these services. With

the rise of mobile health apps, wearable devices, and telehealth services, individuals now have powerful tools to monitor and manage their well-being from anywhere in the world.

Imagine waking up in the morning and instantly knowing how well your body has rested, how balanced your activity levels are, or how much stress you've carried throughout the day. This is the reality of living with wearable health devices—tools that track vital signs like heart rate, sleep cycles, and physical movement. Such real-time insights empower individuals to make conscious decisions about their health on a daily basis, leading to more proactive care.

Telehealth services have similarly revolutionised access to holistic wellness. Consultations that once required physical presence can now be conducted from the comfort of home. Whether it's a session with a nutritionist, a yoga instructor, or a health coach, individuals can now access tailored guidance and support with just a few clicks. This shift is not only making holistic health more accessible but also more inclusive, catering to people regardless of geographic limitations.

Power of AI

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Predictive Analytics is creating a paradigm shift in how we approach wellness. Previously, most health interventions were reactive—people would seek help after experiencing symptoms. However, with AI and data-driven tools, we can now foresee potential health issues before they arise.

AI has the ability to process vast amounts of data—often from wearables and other personal health devices—and deliver personalised insights based on the individual's unique profile. For example, data gathered over weeks might show subtle changes in a person's sleep patterns, physical activity, or even heart rate variability. An AI system could then analyse these trends and predict potential health risks, such as elevated stress or sleep deprivation, and recommend preventive actions.

This type of insight allows for a level of personalization that was once unimaginable. Rather than offering general advice, AI-driven platforms can recommend highly specific wellness solutions tailored to an individual's lifestyle, body composition, and daily habits. Whether it's suggesting a change in diet, a mindfulness exercise, or a daily movement routine, the recommendations are rooted in real-time data.

Predictive Analytics goes a step further by identifying patterns and anticipating future health challenges. For instance, if a person's data over time shows decreasing activity levels and rising stress, predictive tools can flag this trend and offer early intervention strategies. This ability to forecast potential health concerns transforms wellness from a reactive to a preventive practice—empowering individuals to take control of their well-being before symptoms even appear.

AI also improves efficiency by automating many aspects of wellness support, from managing appointments to sending reminders for daily exercises or mindfulness practices. These technologies allow health practitioners to focus more on offering personalised guidance and less on administrative tasks, enriching the overall experience for individuals seeking holistic care.

Future of Holistic Health

The future of holistic health lies in personalised wellness, with technology serving as a powerful enabler. For example, two people may follow the same diet plan, but one might experience better results due to genetic differences in how their body metabolises certain nutrients. By analysing these genetic markers,



professionals can create more effective, personalised plans that address the root cause of imbalances, rather than applying a generic solution.

This is the kind of future we're heading toward—where a deeper understanding of our biology allows us to design highly individualised wellness plans.

Looking further, AI-powered health assistants and digital tools will likely continue to evolve. Imagine having a digital assistant that checks in with you daily, offering reminders for hydration, movement, mindfulness, or nutrition based on your real-time data. These assistants could provide constant guidance, helping people stay on track

with their health goals and adjusting recommendations based on progress and changing needs.

Blending Technology and Holistic Principles

While technology is undeniably transforming the way we approach wellness, it's important to remember that it acts as an enabler, not a replacement. The essence of holistic health remains rooted in the connection between body, mind, and spirit—elements that technology can support but not fully replace.

At its core, holistic health is about balance and mindfulness. While AI,

wearables, and personalised data can offer guidance, the true power of wellness lies in our ability to be present with ourselves and make conscious choices that align with our well-being. Technology enhances this journey, offering tools and insights that help individuals become more aware of their bodies and behaviours.

As we move toward a future where technology continues to play a bigger role, we must also ensure that the human connection—whether it's a conversation with a health coach, a quiet moment of meditation, or a personalised wellness journey—remains at the heart of holistic care.

Agentic AI: Redefining Contact Centres Without Replacing People

Kevin McGachy, Head of AI Solutions at Sabio Group, unpacks why Agentic AI is less about replacing people and more about transforming customer experience and redefining the contact centre workforce



Kevin McGachy

offer next-best suggestions.

This is a step beyond human augmentation. It's about replicating the behaviour of highly capable agents in a scalable, intelligent way. While the industry often defaults to language about "agent assistance", Agentic AI systems are increasingly capable of completing tasks without human oversight, a key differentiator from traditional bot or assistive models.

In the report, ContactBabel highlights the challenge that human agents face when switching between several systems to serve a single customer. This creates complexity, delays, and inconsistency. For an AI agent, those same tasks can be streamlined and orchestrated instantly. There's no fatigue, no deviation, and no lag in processing.

The Real Drivers of Agentic AI Adoption

The top reasons cited by organisations for deploying Agentic AI were:

- Greater accuracy in responses
- Improved understanding of customer needs
- Faster resolution times
- More effective self-service journeys

These aren't abstract benefits. They directly correlate to measurable CX and operational improvements: higher customer satisfaction, better first contact resolution, reduced handling time, and improved digital containment rates.

And while only 19% of organisations stated that reducing headcount was of "major importance", we should not

ignore the implicit efficiency gains that flow from automation at scale.

Redefining Metrics for the AI-Enabled Contact Centre

This raises a critical point. If your only success metric for AI is headcount reduction, you're thinking too small. But equally, if your business case ignores the indirect impact on human workload and resourcing, it's incomplete.

The future of measurement will be broader and more balanced, focusing on metrics that capture true transformation rather than just tactical optimisation. These include task completion rates (both human and agentic), the balance of agent effort versus AI resolution, end-to-end containment, cost-to-serve per interaction, time-to-value of AI investments, and the evolving full-

time equivalent (FTE) requirements for agentic agents—measures that reflect lasting impact and meaningful change.

What It Means for Leaders in CX

For contact centre and CX leaders, Agentic AI is not about a binary choice between human or machine. It's about designing an operating model where AI can handle what it's best at, and people are deployed where they add the most value: empathy, judgement, and complex exception handling.

At Sabio, we see Agentic AI as an opportunity to move beyond the legacy debate of 'AI vs people'. The conversation now must shift to:

- Where should automation be fully owned by Agentic AI?
- What work should be left to humans?

How do we transition intelligently from today's hybrid models?

This is not just about improving performance. It's about reimagining service design for an AI-first era.

Final Thought: Agentic AI Is the Catalyst, Not the Threat

Agentic AI won't replace the contact centre. But it will redefine how it works – who it employs, what skills are needed, and what customers come to expect. That's not something to fear. It's something to lead.

The organisations who embrace Agentic AI today are not just modernising their tech stack. They're preparing for a future where customer service is faster, smarter, and fundamentally different.



AFRICA EMERGES AS GLOBAL SOLAR POWER HOTSPOT

Africa defies global solar slump, adding record capacity as South and North Africa drive installations



Africa is witnessing an unprecedented surge in solar energy adoption, transforming a continent long plagued by energy poverty into a rising global leader in renewable power. According to the Africa Solar Industry Association (AFSIA), the continent now boasts more than 20 gigawatts (GW) of installed solar capacity across utility-scale projects, commercial and industrial setups, mini-grids, and home systems.

This milestone, nearly invisible on the global solar map a decade ago, comes as other regions report declines. SolarPower Europe projects a 1.4 per cent contraction in global solar installations in 2025—the first negative growth since 2015. The United States has already seen a sharp 43 per cent drop in installations between late 2024 and early 2025. By contrast, Africa recorded a 44 per cent increase in new installations in 2024, building on a 22 per cent rise in 2023.

South Africa remains the epicenter of Africa's solar revolution, accounting for nearly half of installed capacity. Years of crippling power cuts forced the country to aggressively adopt solar, with investments at both industrial and household levels averaging 3,000 megawatts (MW) annually since 2022. North Africa is also making significant strides, led by Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Algeria has recently launched an ambitious 3 GW programme spread across 20 projects, several of which are expected online before the end of 2025.

Other emerging hotspots include Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Senegal, reflecting a more even spread of solar growth across the continent. In total, more than 10 GW of additional projects are currently under construction.

This rapid uptake is powered by Africa's vast solar potential—most regions

enjoy over 3,000 hours of sunshine annually, with solar irradiation levels among the world's highest. Coupled with a dramatic 90 per cent fall in solar equipment costs over the last decade, the momentum is proving transformative.

Yet, challenges remain. High upfront costs and inadequate storage solutions continue to hinder adoption, particularly in poorer nations. To offset this, governments are rolling out incentives: South Africa offered household rebates of up to 25 per cent on solar installations, while Zimbabwe scrapped import duties on solar products.

The potential impact is profound. With nearly 600 million Africans still lacking access to electricity, the International Energy Agency projects solar could supply 15 per cent of Africa's power by 2030, doubling to 30 per cent by 2040.

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