BUSINESS FRONTIER

The Leading Voice of Business Excellence

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From the
EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of Business Frontier, where we bring together stories of leaders who are building with vision, clarity and long-term intent.

Across industries and geographies, the leadership conversation is shifting. Success today is no longer defined only by scale or speed, but by the ability to adapt, anticipate change and create lasting impact. From technology and real estate to tourism, healthcare, infrastructure and entertainment, this issue explores the people and ideas shaping that next frontier.

Our cover story features Liakat Sultan Dhanji, Chairman & CEO of Columbia Pictures Aquaverse, whose career spans technology, real estate, tourism, hospitality and entertainment. As the driving force behind the world’s first Columbia Pictures-themed waterpark, he is helping position Thailand as a global entertainment destination while exploring how artificial intelligence, robotics and experiential design will redefine the attractions industry.

We are also hosting Business Frontier Leadership Conclave & Awards 2026 on September 4, 2026, at Taj Dubai, Business Bay, and look forward to meeting you there!

Additionally, inside this edition, we bring together leadership stories from across the world, each reflecting courage, reinvention and conviction. Together, they capture the spirit of this edition and of the Conclave itself: global in outlook, grounded in purpose and focused on what comes next.

Until then,

Happy Reading!

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Senior Editor
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SOBHA REALTY AND KEETA DRONE BRING DRONE DELIVERY TO DUBAI'S COMMUNITIES

Sobha Realty has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Keeta Drone to integrate drone-based last-mile air delivery across its UAE residential communities, becoming the green air delivery company's first official Smart Community partner in the country. The agreement was signed in the presence of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, with phased deployment beginning at Sobha Hartland. The DCAA's direct involvement is significant; air delivery in densely built urban environments has historically been slowed by airspace and safety approvals. Its presence at the signing signals that Keeta Drone's rollout will operate within an approved regulatory framework from launch, rather than waiting on case-by-case clearances.

H.E. Mohammed Abdulla Lengawi, Director General of DCAA, said the authority was pleased to support the responsible advancement of air deliveries within Sobha Hartland, framing the move as part of Dubai's broader future mobility ecosystem. For the real estate sector, the partnership signals something more structural than a technology announcement. Integrated logistics infrastructure such as drone landing zones, airspace coordination, and last-mile integration with FM and concierge operations requires decisions taken at the master-planning stage, not retrofitted later. Developers that build this capacity in now will carry a meaningfully different value proposition in Dubai's premium residential market. **Sobha Realty's Managing Director Francis Alfred** linked the partnership to the developer's Backwards Integration model, while **Keeta Drone's President Dr Mao** described it as foundational to the company's UAE deployment roadmap across 2026 and beyond.

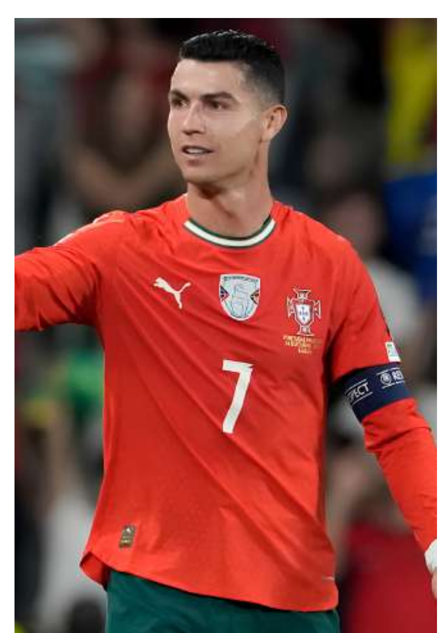
CRISTIANO RONALDO SIGNS GLOBAL AMBASSADOR DEAL WITH DREAME TECHNOLOGY

Dreame Technology has named Cristiano Ronaldo as its new global brand ambassador in one of the year's most consequential tech-meets-sport endorsement deals, announced from Dubai under the campaign theme "Dreame to Win."

The appointment comes at a defining moment for Dreame. After several years of rapid expansion and consistent breakthroughs in high-speed motor technology and AI-driven home systems, the company is repositioning itself from a value challenger into a global premium brand benchmarked against the likes of Dyson, iRobot, and Samsung.

"This is more than a sponsorship; it is a powerful alliance between a technology leader and a world-class sports IP. Cristiano's spirit of focus and excellence resonates deeply with our mission to lead the industry and influence the world through intelligent technology," said **Toni Xia, General Manager of Dreame Emerging Region.**

Ronaldo framed the partnership as a values fit. "Dreame is a brand that innovates and delivers top-tier performance, making life easier and better. I am excited to join the Dreame family and support their mission to lead the global market," he said. The "Dreame to Win" campaign will integrate Ronaldo's image across Dreame's full product ecosystem, including its smart cleaning solutions, robotic vacuum range, premium hair-care line, and connected-home portfolio. For the smart-home sector, the deal signals three things: Chinese consumer-tech brands are actively buying global brand prestige; the Gulf is becoming the launchpad of choice for global campaign announcements; and smart home is emerging as the next major endorsement category as AI-driven home ecosystems mature.



$77 TRILLION AND COUNTING: THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE STOCK MARKETS IN 2026

Every year, the distribution of global equity value shifts, reflecting economic momentum, policy changes, technological dominance, and investor sentiment. The 2026 rankings reveal a market landscape increasingly defined by artificial intelligence, Asia's rise, and Europe's structural lag. Here is where the world's capital sits today.

The United States commands approximately $77.95 trillion in market capitalisation, more than the next nine largest markets combined. Nvidia, now the world's largest company at $5.23 trillion, is worth more than the entire French stock market. Except for Berkshire Hathaway, every company in the global top 10 by market cap is in technology.

China holds second at $15.61 trillion, but Greater China combined, mainland plus Hong Kong, still amounts to less than one-third of US market value. Asia dominates the next tier: Japan ($8.70 trillion) on corporate governance reform; Taiwan ($4.95 trillion) almost entirely due to TSMC; and India ($4.92 trillion), the standout climber from under $2 trillion a decade ago. Europe trails while the UK and France together are worth less than half of Japan alone, and continental Europe has yet to produce a single trillion-dollar technology company.

The $77 trillion US figure is not just a number, it is a signal of how aggressively AI and technology have concentrated global capital, and how much further that concentration may still have to run.

Source: Bloomberg, Visual Capitalist, AlphaSense, FTSE Russell, Yahoo Finance

Rank	Country	Market Capitalisation
1	United States	$77.95 trillion
2	China	$15.61 trillion
3	Japan	$8.70 trillion
4	Hong Kong	$7.25 trillion
5	Taiwan	$4.95 trillion
6	India	$4.92 trillion
7	South Korea	$4.54 trillion
8	Canada	$4.54 trillion
9	United Kingdom	$3.99 trillion
10	France	$3.50 trillion

FERRARI LUCE MARKS THE BRAND'S LONG-AWAITED ENTRY INTO ELECTRIC CARS

For decades, Ferrari resisted the electric revolution. At the end of May, in Rome, it arrived on its own terms. The Ferrari Luce, the company's first fully electric production car, was unveiled at the Vela di Calatrava, Città dello. The name means "light" in Italian. The strategic message was equally clear: Ferrari is not following the market into electrification. It is attempting to redefine what the category means at the luxury end. The Luce is a four-door, five-seat executive car, Ferrari's first five-seater, priced at €550,000 and designed in collaboration with Jony Ive, former Apple design chief, and his creative collective LoveFrom. It delivers 1,035 hp from four permanent-magnet synchronous motors, a 122-kWh battery, 529 km of WLTP range, and 350 kW DC fast charging. First deliveries are scheduled for Q4 2026.

The business logic behind the Luce is as significant as the car itself. Ferrari enters the electric segment at a moment when competitors including Porsche and Lamborghini are scaling back EV ambitions citing weak demand. Rather than retreating, Ferrari is using the opening to establish a premium position in a segment its rivals are vacating. CEO Benedetto Vigna was explicit when he said, "This is an addition to the lineup, not a transition." Ferrari's 2030 strategy calls for 20% electric, 40% hybrid, and 40% internal combustion vehicles, a deliberate hedge that preserves optionality while staking a claim in electric. Investors were not immediately convinced. Ferrari's stock felt the pressure the day after the unveiling, though the market's verdict, like the car itself, remains to be tested. At €550,000, the Luce is not chasing volume. It is chasing relevance in a segment where brand identity, not price sensitivity, determines the outcome.

RAKBANK LAUNCHES 'SHE MEANS BUSINESS' PACKAGE FOR UAE FEMALE FOUNDERS

RAKBANK has launched She Means Business, a banking and support package for female entrepreneurs in the UAE, timed to coincide with International MSME Day and the bank's 50th anniversary year. The package responds to RAKBANK's 2025 research among female business clients, which found that community networking, capability building, and access to the right tools were as critical to business survival as financing.

At its core is a zero-balance multi-currency business account, available in Islamic and conventional formats, with no monthly maintenance fees for 12 months for eligible founders who open and activate an account by December 10, 2026. There is no minimum balance requirement, and digital onboarding can be completed within 48 hours. The package also includes complimentary access to a cloud-based platform for up to four users, covering accounting, payroll, VAT, and banking management. Founders gain access to a learning programme covering AI, leadership, pricing, cash flow, and marketing, plus curated networking with ecosystem partners, AED 1,500 off an annual CrunchMoms membership, and a complimentary Personal Banking Financial Needs Assessment.

The package is open to new RAKBANK customers operating as sole proprietors or individual LLCs, via quickapply.rakbank.ae under the RAKStarter Account. "For 50 years, RAKBANK has supported over 250,000 SMEs across the UAE, and we proudly bank over 20,000 female-led businesses," said Vishal Shah, Managing Director and Head of Business Banking Group. RAKBANK Group CEO Raheel Ahmed added, "We have to look at the bank's role beyond banking into a partnership and being a trusted advisor."

UAE RETAINS SECOND PLACE IN DMCC'S 2026 TRADE INDEX

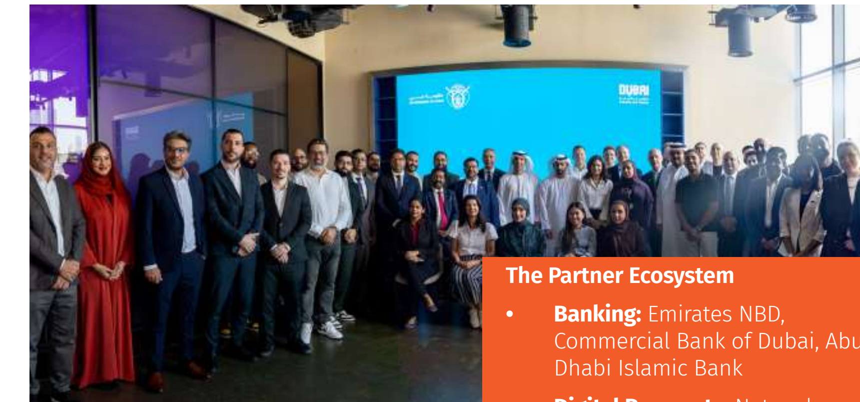
The UAE has retained second place in DMCC's 2026 Commodity Trade Index, outranking Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, the UK, and China, behind only the United States. The finding comes from DMCC's Future of Trade 2026 report, "Rebuilding Through Rupture," which assessed 10 major commodity trade hubs across commodity endowment, locational and trading partner factors, and institutional strength. The UAE scored 47%, tied with the Netherlands but holding the higher rank, with its strongest performance in commodity endowment (61%) and institutional factors (61%), the latter driven by its corporate tax regime, the most competitive among all ten hubs assessed.

Its score fell three points from 2024, largely due to a drop in petroleum exports tied to regional shipping disruptions earlier in the year. A larger decline was averted by resilient trade through Fujairah and Khor Fakkan ports, which enabled rerouting. "The UAE's second place ranking reflects the strengths that matter most to businesses making long-term investment decisions," said Feryal Ahmadi, Deputy CEO and COO of DMCC. Executive Chairman Ahmed Bin Sulayem added, "The map of global trade is being redrawn. The UAE has spent decades building the stability businesses now seek."

Rank	Country	Score
1	United States	57%
2	UAE	47%
3	Netherlands	47%
4	Switzerland	44%
5	Hong Kong SAR, China	43%
6	Singapore	41%
7	United Kingdom	36%
8	China	29%
9	South Africa	21%
10	Nigeria	18%

DUBAI LAUNCHES 'SME IN A BOX' FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

The Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism has launched SME in a Box, a single platform consolidating essential business services, from banking and payments to logistics, HR, and cloud technology, into one coordinated onboarding journey. Instead of sourcing vendors independently, businesses access 18 pre-vetted partners through one entry point, reducing setup time and administrative friction.



Any business with a valid Dubai trade licence is eligible, including new setups, existing SMEs, Emirati-owned businesses, and Dubai Founders HQ members, the latter two receiving preferential offers and enhanced onboarding support.

Together, these partners unlock more than AED 80,000 in potential value per business through discounted rates, fee waivers, and subsidised onboarding. There is no charge for accessing the platform itself; normal charges apply for activated services.

Founders can save up to 200 hours typically spent sourcing and onboarding providers, with some services activated in under 24 hours.

To access it, businesses confirm their trade licence, visit Dubai Founders HQ's "Launch Your Business" section, select partner deals, and apply directly, with no obligation to use all 18. Future phases will integrate the platform with Invest in Dubai and Dubai Founders HQ under the D33 Agenda.

"SME in a Box is designed as a working product that removes friction from the system," said Ahmad Al Room Almheiri, CEO of Dubai SME.

The Partner Ecosystem

- **Banking:** Emirates NBD, Commercial Bank of Dubai, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank
- **Digital Payments:** Network International, Paymob, Ziina, Tabby, Arab Financial Services, Mamo, Qashio
- **Logistics:** Aramex, DHL
- **Telecom:** du
- **Finance & Accounting:** Crossval
- **HR & Payroll:** Bayzat
- **Business Setup:** Ascentia
- **IT Equipment:** Revent
- **Cloud Technology:** Maison Cloud Technologies

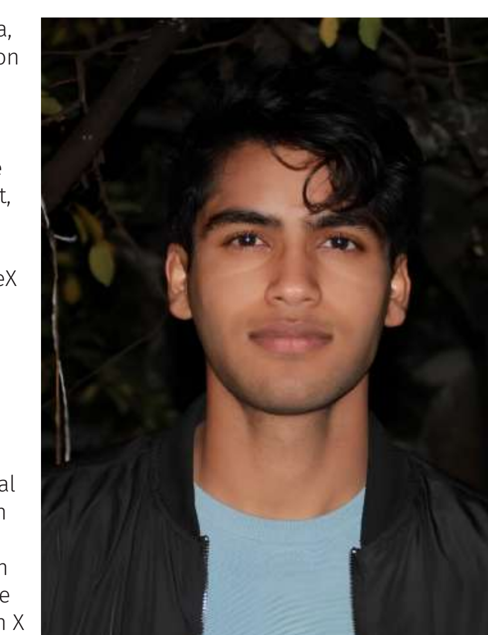
INDIAN-AMERICAN AMAN SANGER SELLS CURSOR TO ELON MUSK FOR $60B

Aman Sanger, a 25-year-old Indian-American from New York, now belongs to that rare club of founders whose companies Elon Musk's SpaceX wants to own. SpaceX has agreed to acquire Cursor, the AI coding platform Sanger co-founded, in an all-stock deal worth $60 billion, one of the biggest acquisition stories in AI history.

Sanger began coding at 14. His father, Arvind Sanger, is an IIT Bombay alumnus and hedge fund professional, while his mother, Shilpa Sanger, is an orthodontist and entrepreneur. Before MIT, he interned at Bridgewater Associates and Google. At MIT, he met Michael Truell, Sualeh Asif, and Arvid Lunnemark, the co-founders who built Cursor with him after leaving university in 2022.

Cursor is an AI-powered coding platform used by 64% of Fortune 500 companies, including teams at Nvidia, Adobe, and PayPal. It crossed $1 billion in annualised revenue in November 2025 and reached about $4 billion by June 2026. SpaceX announced the deal days after its Nasdaq debut, the biggest IPO in history. Cursor's parent, Anysphere, will become a wholly owned SpaceX subsidiary once the deal closes in Q3 2026, helping SpaceX compete with Anthropic and OpenAI after Cursor's market share slipped from 41% to 26%.

Forbes estimated Sanger's net worth at $1.3 billion before the acquisition, based on his 4.5% stake, a figure expected to rise sharply once the deal closes. Cursor crossed $100 million in annualised revenue without a single salesperson, growing entirely through word of mouth. "Excited to train some very strong models!" Sanger wrote on X after the announcement.



HOW LIAKAT SULTAN DHANJI IS REDEFINING ENTERTAINMENT IN ASIA

The world's most successful destination developers rarely think in years. They think in decades. For **Liakat Sultan Dhanji**, **Chairman & CEO of Columbia Pictures Aquaverse**, long-term vision has been a defining characteristic throughout a career that has spanned technology, real estate, tourism, hospitality, and entertainment. Today, he stands at the forefront of a new era in immersive entertainment. As the driving force behind Columbia Pictures Aquaverse, the world's first Columbia Pictures-themed waterpark, he is helping position Thailand as a global entertainment destination while exploring how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and experiential design will redefine the attractions industry. In this exclusive Business Frontier cover story, Dhanji shares the lessons, decisions, and leadership principles that continue to shape his vision for the future.

Few business leaders have consistently positioned themselves at the centre of transformational growth stories quite like Liakat Sultan Dhanji.

Across a career spanning technology, consulting, real estate, tourism, and entertainment, he has repeatedly demonstrated an ability to identify emerging opportunities before they become mainstream. Whether recognising the potential of Asia's economic rise, understanding shifts in Thailand's housing market, or pioneering globally branded attractions, his approach has remained rooted in long-term thinking and strategic execution.

Today, as Chairman & CEO of Amazon Falls Co. Ltd., the company behind Columbia Pictures Aquaverse, Dhanji is once again focused on the future, this time through the lens of immersive entertainment and destination tourism.

Take us through your professional journey. What were the pivotal milestones that shaped your career?

"My career began at IBM's Large Systems Division, where I learned the importance of long-term thinking and delivering measurable value. Our clients included airlines, banks, and insurance companies where customer retention was critical. That focus on consistency, integrity, and value creation has remained with me throughout my career."

Dhanji credits both IBM and several influential mentors for helping shape his strategic mindset. A major turning point arrived in 1990 when he relocated to Asia during one of the region's most significant periods of economic transformation.

"Being in Asia at that moment placed me on a path aligned with extraordinary growth. From consulting in Hong Kong to leading Golden Land and eventually developing globally branded theme parks, each stage built upon the previous one."

Building successful destination businesses requires more than strategic vision. It demands the ability to maintain culture, standards, and execution while managing constant change.

How do you cultivate and sustain strong organizational culture during periods of rapid growth?

"It starts with leadership by example. If you expect commitment, honesty, and teamwork, you must demonstrate those values yourself. Teams reflect what they see."

For Dhanji, culture is reinforced through accountability and an uncompromising commitment to excellence.

> *"The leaders who embrace transformation early will not simply adapt to the future—they will help create it.*

"You cannot tolerate mediocrity. One weak link can lower standards across the entire organization. At the same time, rapid growth requires decisive action, informed judgment, and the willingness to adapt quickly when circumstances change."

He also believes that strong leaders surround themselves with talented individuals who challenge assumptions rather than simply agree with them.

"As Andy Grove famously said, 'Only the paranoid survive.' You must continually assess the competitive landscape and surround yourself with people confident enough to tell you when you're wrong."

The launch of Columbia Pictures Aquaverse represented more than the creation of a new attraction. It was part of a larger vision to strengthen Thailand's position as a world-class entertainment and tourism destination.

What was the strategic vision behind Columbia Pictures Aquaverse?

"The strategy was straightforward. Thailand needed a globally branded destination capable of competing with world-class attractions across the region. Partnering with Sony gave us access to one of the strongest entertainment ecosystems in the world."

With franchises including Spider-Man, Ghostbusters, Jumanji, Venom, and Hotel Transylvania, Sony's intellectual property portfolio provided a unique opportunity to create an attraction with broad international appeal.

The project also aligns with Thailand's broader tourism ambitions.

"Countries today must think about branding themselves just as businesses do. Aquaverse contributes to elevating Thailand's brand across tourism, entertainment, and hospitality."

While many attractions compete through size and scale, Aquaverse has chosen a different path.

What sets Aquaverse apart in today's competitive attractions market?

"Our philosophy has always been simple: think global, act local."

The park combines globally recognised brands with pricing and experiences designed to encourage repeat visitation by local families. Dhanji believes this balance is critical to long-term success.

Beyond the attractions themselves, Aquaverse has invested heavily in immersive entertainment, staging multiple live shows daily and building a strong music-driven culture throughout the park.

The approach has already delivered results. Despite being only a few years old, Aquaverse has received recognition from organisations including CNN, TripBest, MAFTA, and TDM Theme Park of the Year.

"Theme parks are a long-term business. We are still only at the beginning of the journey."

Throughout his career, Dhanji has demonstrated a consistent ability to identify market gaps before they become obvious.

What market insights led you to develop a globally branded attraction destination?

"After the 1997 financial crisis, I identified a major gap in Thailand's housing market and invested accordingly. The same thinking applied to attractions."

He believed tourism would continue expanding rapidly and that Thailand would eventually require globally recognised destinations capable of competing with the best attractions in the region.

The Bangkok–Pattaya–Rayong corridor also played a significant role in that vision.

"With improved connectivity and the upcoming high-speed rail link, this region is evolving into a major metropolitan hub. Accessibility will continue to strengthen Aquaverse's long-term growth potential."

Digital transformation has become one of the most important drivers of visitor engagement and business performance.

How is your digital strategy driving visitor growth?

"Digital marketing is one of our most powerful growth engines."

Aquaverse currently develops native-language content across multiple markets, supported by an in-house creative team and growing AI capabilities that accelerate translation, localisation, and content production.

The company is also investing in loyalty platforms, enhanced digital experiences, and AI-driven productivity improvements designed to improve speed-to-market and customer engagement.

Looking ahead, Dhanji sees artificial intelligence and robotics reshaping every aspect of the attractions industry.

What is your strategic vision for the next chapter?

"The next era will be defined by advances in artificial intelligence and robotics."

He believes AI will dramatically increase productivity across business functions, while robotics and automation will transform operational areas ranging from maintenance and food service to guest experiences.

At the same time, advances in construction technology, experiential design, lighting, and immersive media will create entirely new possibilities for destination development.

"My responsibility is to prepare the company, and our people, for these shifts. The leaders who embrace transformation early will shape the future."

At a Glance

Think Long-Term
Sustainable businesses are built through patience, consistency, and value creation.

Lead by Example
Organizational culture reflects leadership behaviour more than leadership statements.

Think Global, Act Local
Global brands succeed when they remain accessible and relevant to local audiences.

Invest Ahead of Demand
The most significant opportunities often emerge before markets fully recognise them.

Embrace Transformation Early
Technology, AI, and robotics will reward organizations that adapt before disruption arrives.

Build with Purpose
Successful destinations create economic, cultural, and tourism value simultaneously.

BUILDING THE FUTURE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP

As CEO of Digital Planets, **Dr. Ahmed Hanafy** combines entrepreneurial vision with technological expertise to build future-ready businesses across the region.

For **Dr. Ahmed Hanafy**, CEO of Digital Planets, technology is most powerful when it solves real-world challenges and creates measurable impact. From establishing the company in Egypt to expanding across the UAE and Saudi Arabia, he has built a business focused on innovation, operational excellence, and long-term value creation. Today, as artificial intelligence reshapes industries worldwide, he believes organizations must move beyond experimentation and embrace technology as a strategic driver of growth and transformation.

How would you describe your leadership philosophy, and what has shaped it most significantly over the course of your career?

My leadership philosophy is built on empowerment, accountability, and continuous innovation. I believe leaders should create environments where people are trusted to take ownership, challenge conventional thinking, and grow professionally.

Throughout my career, I have learned that sustainable success is never achieved by one individual. It is built by strong teams united by a shared vision. Expanding Digital Planets across different markets and cultures taught me the importance of adaptability, resilience, and leading by example.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

I believe the biggest untapped opportunity is the practical integration of artificial intelligence into operational decision-making.

Many organizations still view AI as a standalone technology rather than a business transformation tool. Across sectors such as manufacturing, hospitality, government, and critical infrastructure, AI can move beyond automation and become a real-time decision-support system that improves efficiency, reduces risk, and delivers measurable business value.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation?

One of the most defining decisions was expanding beyond our home market and establishing a regional presence across the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The move required significant investment, organizational transformation, and the willingness to step outside our comfort zone. It taught me that growth is not simply about increasing revenue; it is about building scalable systems, developing future leaders, and adapting to the unique dynamics of each market. It also reinforced the importance of long-term thinking and strategic partnerships.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our next phase of growth will focus on three priorities: artificial intelligence, regional expansion, and platform-driven innovation. We are investing in AI-powered solutions across cybersecurity, industrial operations, surveillance, and digital services while strengthening our presence across the GCC. Internally, we are evolving from a traditional technology services provider into a more scalable ecosystem that combines consulting, software platforms, managed services, and AI-driven solutions to create greater value for our clients.

> *The organizations that succeed in the future will be those that use technology not for innovation alone, but to create meaningful and measurable impact.*

SECURITY IS NOT YOUR IT TEAM'S PROBLEM ANYMORE

Aromal Ajith, Regional Sales Head at CryptoBind by JISA Softech, has spent his career at the intersection of cybersecurity and business strategy. He emphasises that the organisations that will lead the next decade are not the ones spending the most on security but the ones integrating it most intelligently.

Aromal Ajith has watched organisations invest heavily in cybersecurity while treating it as a compliance exercise rather than a business enabler. Working across India and the MEA region, his conviction is straightforward: data protection is no longer a technical conversation, it is a leadership one.

What principles guide your leadership, and what shaped them?

My leadership philosophy is centred on trust, accountability, and enabling people to perform at their best. I believe strong leadership is not only about directing teams, but about creating clarity, removing obstacles, and helping individuals grow while aligning everyone toward a common objective. These experiences taught me the importance of staying calm under pressure, making transparent decisions, and maintaining accountability even when circumstances are difficult. I see leadership as a responsibility to create both business success and professional growth for the people around me.

What opportunity in cybersecurity do you think leaders are still missing?

Many organisations still approach cybersecurity mainly as a defensive or regulatory function, something driven by audits, penalties, or risk avoidance. The real opportunity is using security and data governance as a strategic advantage that improves customer trust, accelerates digital transformation, and enables faster business growth. The organisations that will lead the next decade are not necessarily the ones spending the most on security, but the ones integrating security intelligently into their business strategy from the beginning.

> *Cybersecurity and data protection are no longer purely technical discussions; they are leadership and business discussions*

What was the most defining decision you made and what did it teach you?

One of the most defining decisions I made was prioritising long-term customer trust and solution alignment over short-term commercial gains during a critical enterprise engagement. I recommended starting with a focused deployment approach instead of pushing an aggressive expansion immediately. While this initially reduced the short-term scope, it significantly increased customer confidence and ultimately created a much stronger long-term partnership. Sustainable success comes from solving the right problem, not just closing the fastest opportunity.

What strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

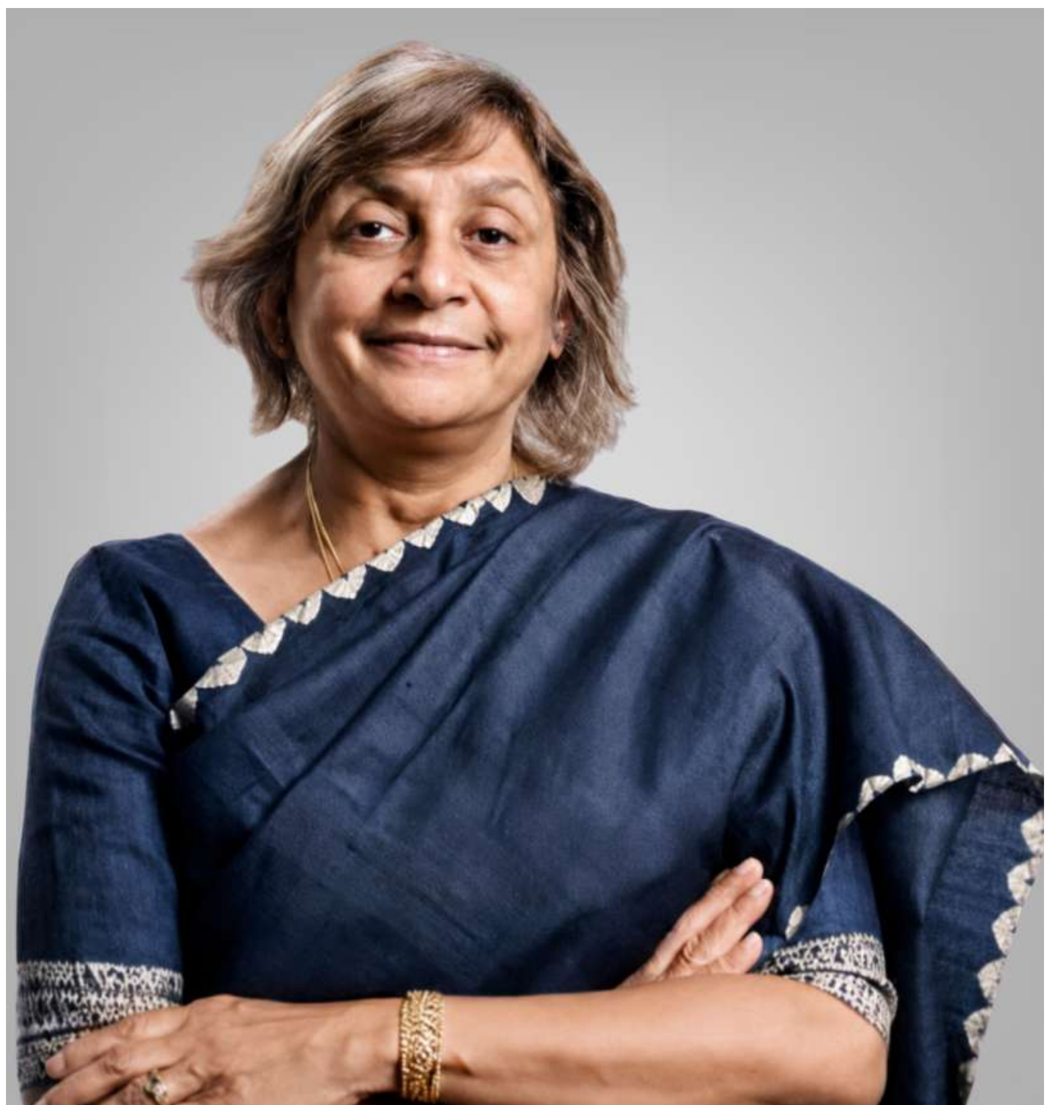
One of the key priorities will be expanding beyond traditional infrastructure security into comprehensive data protection strategies. Another major strategic shift is moving from product-led engagements to solution-led and advisory-driven partnerships. Customers today expect cybersecurity providers to understand regulatory frameworks, operational workflows and business risk, not just technology deployment.

What do you want our readers to take away?

Cybersecurity and data protection are no longer purely technical discussions; they are leadership and business discussions. The organisations that succeed in the coming years will be the ones that treat trust, privacy, and resilience as core business values rather than compliance checkboxes. Technology evolves quickly, but strong relationships, ethical decision-making, accountability, and continuous learning remain timeless qualities.

BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL TURNAROUND IS DISCIPLINE

Anju Madeka, President and CFO of Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Limited, is a turnaround specialist. She does not seek stable environments, she seeks the ones no one else wants to fix.



“Turnarounds demand the ability to understand people, rebuild confidence, and establish a culture of accountability”

Anju Madeka has spent her career doing what most finance leaders avoid, walking into organisations under pressure, navigating crises that test every dimension of leadership, and building for the long term. From FMCG and petrochemicals to large-scale infrastructure, her career has been defined not by the sectors she has worked in, but by what she has been asked to do within them: stabilise, transform, and deliver.

What has remained constant across every sector you have led?

Across sectors, the constants are always hard work, a focused approach, result-oriented time-bound execution. Leadership fundamentally means building trust, making informed decisions, and aligning people around a shared objective. I have always believed that finance is not merely about numbers; it is about enabling sustainable growth and creating long-term value. What has also remained constant is my willingness to step beyond conventional functional boundaries. The ability to remain calm in complex criticalities, breaking down issues into smaller achievable segments, to solve step by step, while keeping the focus on results, has been central to my leadership approach.

What draws you to turnarounds, and what do they demand of a leader?

Transformation environments demand clarity, resilience, and decisiveness, which is precisely what makes them intellectually and professionally rewarding. Turnarounds require far more than financial restructuring. They demand the ability to understand people, rebuild confidence, and establish a culture of accountability. A leader must be comfortable making difficult decisions while still inspiring optimism within the organisation. During periods of disruption, consistency in communication and credibility in action become critical. People follow leaders they trust; you must walk the talk.

How do you build the institutional trust that makes large-scale funding possible?

Investors and institutions are not only evaluating the viability of the project, but also the quality of governance, leadership stability, and execution capability behind it. My approach has always been rooted in transparency, preparation, consistency, and not taking any shortcut approach. Institutional trust is earned by disciplined financial management, realistic projections, and the ability to deliver on commitments. Over time, institutions develop confidence when they see resilience, governance, discipline, leadership, and operational continuity even during challenging phases.

What did navigating COVID and a leadership transition simultaneously teach you?

That period tested every dimension of leadership concurrently. The aviation and infrastructure sectors were among the hardest hit during COVID, and at the same time, we were navigating significant organisational and leadership transitions. The immediate priority was ensuring operational continuity while safeguarding financial stability and employee morale. Leadership cannot operate through hierarchy alone; it requires team building and collective confidence-building. I learned that clarity of communication, calm decision-making, and consensus in decision-making become incredibly powerful during uncertainty. Organisations emerge stronger when they remain focused on long-term purpose and are able to navigate short-term disruption.

What needs to change structurally for women in senior leadership?

The conversation today must move beyond symbolism toward structural change. Organisations need stronger leadership pipelines for women, more equitable access to strategic roles, and ecosystems that support long-term career continuity. Most importantly, leadership should eventually cease to be viewed through the lens of gender. The objective should be to create institutions where capability, vision, and execution define leadership outcomes. When that happens consistently, women in senior leadership will no longer be seen as exceptions.

What will it take for infrastructure finance in India to match its ambition?

For infrastructure finance in India to mature meaningfully, we need deeper long-term capital pools, stronger risk-sharing frameworks, and more patient investment structures. Equally important is policy continuity and institutional coordination. Investors seek predictability, transparency, and efficient execution ecosystems.

The opportunity ahead is extraordinary. The challenge now is to build financial ecosystems that are as ambitious and future-oriented as the infrastructure vision itself.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY MUST BE A BUSINESS STRATEGY

For **David Manners, CEO of Sumillion Ltd**, business success is measured by more than financial performance. Under his leadership, the UK-based technology company has embedded sustainability and social impact into its core strategy, proving that commercial growth and responsible business practices can go hand in hand.

My leadership philosophy is simple: lead with purpose, integrity, and action. I believe people perform at their best when they understand not only what they are doing, but why they are doing it.

Throughout my career, I have focused on building businesses that create value for customers while making a positive contribution to society. The biggest influence on my leadership has been seeing firsthand that long-term success is built on trust, strong relationships, and doing the right thing even when it is not the easiest option.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

I believe the biggest opportunity is treating sustainability as a growth strategy rather than a compliance exercise. Many organisations still view sustainability as a reporting requirement or cost centre. In reality, it can drive innovation, improve efficiency, reduce risk, strengthen customer relationships, and attract talent. Within the technology sector, there is a significant opportunity to rethink procurement, lifecycle management, and circular economy principles.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation?

The most defining decision was embedding sustainability into the heart of our business model rather than treating it as a separate initiative.

We made a conscious commitment to put purpose at the centre of our identity, including dedicating a minimum of 10% of profits to charitable causes through our work with To Live in H.O.P.E. At the time, some questioned whether this approach could be commercially viable. What it taught me is that businesses do not have to choose between profit and purpose. When values are authentic and consistently demonstrated, they strengthen culture, build customer trust, and create long-term resilience.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our focus remains on expanding the impact of our sustainability-led approach while continuing to grow responsibly. At the same time, we want to demonstrate that purpose-led businesses can compete and succeed at the highest level. Receiving the King's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development was a significant milestone, but it also reinforced our belief that sustainability should be viewed as an opportunity for innovation, growth, and long-term value creation.

> *Businesses do not have to choose between profit and purpose. When values are authentic, they become a powerful driver of long-term success.*

EMPOWERING GLOBAL ASPIRATIONS THROUGH ETHICAL EDUCATION

As Founder and CEO of Overseas Education Centre (OVEC), Dr. Dorish Chitson has spent more than two decades helping students access international education opportunities. Combining academic expertise, educational leadership, and a deep commitment to student success, she continues to champion a more accessible, inclusive, and future-focused approach to global education.

Students today are far more informed and strategic than they were a decade ago. Previously, many focused primarily on obtaining an international degree. Today, they carefully evaluate factors such as employability, return on investment, post-study work opportunities, immigration pathways, and long-term career prospects.

They also have access to significantly more information through digital platforms, which makes them better prepared but sometimes more overwhelmed. Our role has evolved from simply providing information to helping students make informed, personalised decisions that align with their aspirations, strengths, and future goals.

> *The true value of international education is not only the degree earned, but the perspective, confidence, and global mindset gained along the way.*

What role does trust play in the overseas education consulting industry?

Trust is the foundation of everything we do. Families are making significant financial and emotional investments when sending their children abroad, and they need advisors who genuinely prioritise student interests.

At OVEC, we have always believed that transparency, ethical guidance, and honest advice are non-negotiable. Sometimes the best advice is not recommending the most popular destination but helping a student choose the option that is truly right for them. Long-term success comes from building relationships based on trust rather than transactions.

How can education consultants remain relevant in an era of AI and digital platforms?

Technology is transforming education consulting, but it cannot replace human judgment, empathy, and experience. AI can help streamline processes, provide information, and improve efficiency, but students still require personalised guidance when making life-changing decisions. The future lies in combining technology with human expertise. At OVEC, we embrace digital innovation while ensuring that every student continues to receive the individual attention and mentorship they deserve throughout their journey.

What is the larger impact of international education beyond academic achievement?

International education is about much more than earning a qualification. It develops confidence, adaptability, cultural intelligence, and a broader understanding of the world.

Students who study abroad often return with new perspectives, stronger leadership capabilities, and the ability to thrive in diverse environments. In many ways, they become bridges between cultures and contributors to social and economic development. That is why I believe international education remains one of the most powerful investments a young person can make.

RELOCATING PEOPLE IS ABOUT MORE THAN LOGISTICS

Most relocation companies measure success in checklists and turnaround times. **Emiko Shimabukuro, CEO of All Japan Relocation**, measures it in something harder to quantify, and the results speak for themselves.

Japan is one of the most complex destinations in the world for international assignees. The country has a distinct culture, intricate administration, and a business environment that rewards patience over speed. Emiko Shimabukuro built All Japan Relocation on the conviction that navigating it well requires more than operational expertise. It requires genuine human care.

Your company is built around the concept of Trusted Care. Where does that come from?

My leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in Trusted Care and leading with empathy. I believe our role is not simply to instruct or direct clients, but to stand right beside them, guiding them with genuine kindness while navigating their unique challenges together. This philosophy was most significantly shaped during my 20 years of experience in the relocation and real estate sectors, particularly when taking on the CEO role during the challenging pandemic period. Overcoming those unprecedented global crises demanded immense resilience, adaptability, and a customer-first mindset, which reinforced my conviction that compassionate, human-centric support is the absolute foundation for building enduring, trust-based professional relationships.

The mobility sector moves fast. Where is it moving too slowly?

A significant, collective opportunity lies in more deeply integrating global efficiency standards with heartfelt, localised hospitality. Relocation is not just a logistical puzzle; it is a profound emotional journey for every assignee and family. By combining rigorous frameworks like our new ISO 9001 certification with the authentic spirit of Japanese Omotenashi, we can transform how we support people. Transitioning from managing simple files to nurturing holistic human well-being drives truly sustainable, collaborative growth.

> *Transitioning from managing simple files to nurturing holistic human well-being drives truly sustainable, collaborative growth*

What was the decision that proved your model worked?

The most defining decision I made was prioritising service quality and cultural insights while expanding our digital communication channels during the global pandemic. We successfully executed a large-scale remote relocation project in 2023, showcasing our ability to adapt swiftly to evolving market needs.

What does the next phase of growth look like for All Japan Relocation?

A key priority is ensuring every client's voice is heard through active listening, allowing us to tailor solutions that transcend basic logistics. Concurrently, we are implementing strategic shifts aligned with the United Nations Global Compact and Sustainable Development Goals.

What would you like global organisations considering Japan to know about working with you?

I want readers to know that All Japan Relocation is more than a service provider; we are a dedicated strategic partner committed to every family's long-term success in Japan. Navigating a distinct culture and complex administrative landscape requires a compassionate, reliable companion. We take immense pride in bridging traditional Japanese business customs with modern global expectations through transparent, ethical guidance. We warmly invite global organisations to walk this transformative path together with us.

BUILDING BRANDS WITH STRATEGY, CONSISTENCY AND PURPOSE

Karla Lizbeth Schuchard, former Marketing & Strategy Director at San Marcos México, is driving brand growth through consumer insight, strategy, and empowered leadership.

My journey has been shaped by continuous learning, perseverance, and the belief that strong strategy only works when it is executed with consistency. Over the years, I have developed expertise across marketing, sales, leadership, analytics, finance, and omnichannel strategy.

For me, leadership is about empowering people, identifying their strengths, and helping them grow while staying focused on clear business objectives. With the right strategy, follow-up, motivation, and perseverance, I truly believe we can achieve anything we set our minds to.

What key specialisations have you developed across marketing and sales?

In marketing, I believe success depends on analytical thinking, strategic vision, and flawless execution. Decisions must be guided by market insights, consumer understanding, and regional sales data.

In sales, strong negotiation and deep client understanding are essential. I believe in asking the right questions, understanding the client's true priorities, and building win-win relationships. Long-term success comes when brands create real value and earn trust through relevance, consistency, and credibility.

Tell us about San Marcos México and your role as Director of Marketing.

San Marcos was founded in 1949 in Puebla, Mexico, and became known for its jalapeños and chipotle peppers. Today, the brand is present in more than 30 countries and is trusted by consumers for its quality and connection to their culinary roots.

As Director of Marketing, my role was to drive consumer preference and strengthen the brand globally, excluding the U.S. market, which is managed separately. My focus is on understanding what consumers value and building strategies that keep San Marcos relevant across markets.

What makes an effective marketing campaign today?

A strong campaign must go beyond visibility. It must feel personal, relevant, and consistent across every touchpoint. That is why omnichannel strategy is so important. We have strengthened our communication and digital presence by giving each platform a clear role and monitoring performance through strong KPIs. For me, credibility is the foundation of brand building. Everything a brand communicates must be supported by real actions.

What challenges do marketing leaders face today?

The biggest challenge is turning large volumes of data into meaningful insight. Marketers must also keep pace with digital change, shifting consumer behaviour, and the pressure to deliver personalised experiences at scale.

At the same time, leaders must balance short-term results with long-term brand building. True brand value is created through consistency, emotional connection, and teams that continue learning as the industry evolves.

> *With strategy, consistency, follow-up, motivation, and perseverance, we can achieve anything we set our minds to.*

BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE WELL-BEING DRIVES SUCCESS

For **Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria**, leadership is about far more than performance metrics. As President and Founding Partner of Liderarte and President and Founder of the University of Happiness and Well-Being in Mexico, he explains why the future belongs to consciously human organisations and how leadership can become a force for lasting social impact.

After a successful career in banking, Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria chose a different path, one centred on purpose, well-being, and human transformation. Today, through Liderarte and the University of Happiness and Well-Being in Mexico, he works to bridge leadership, education, and social impact, advocating for a future where happiness is treated not as an abstract ideal but as a discipline that can be learned, cultivated, and measured.

His mission is simple yet ambitious: to help leaders and organisations place human flourishing at the heart of progress. In doing so, he believes businesses can achieve sustainable success while creating meaningful value for society.

What core principles guide the way you lead today, and how have they evolved through your experiences?

The principles guiding my leadership today are coherence, dignity, care, purpose, and action. My journey from banking to building institutions focused on well-being has taught me that leadership cannot be reduced to targets alone. It must inspire meaning, responsibility, and growth. I lead with the conviction that knowledge should create well-being, and well-being should create a lasting legacy.

What is a shift or trend in your industry that you believe leaders are still underestimating?

Many leaders still underestimate the rise of happiness and well-being as a strategic and economic discipline. Too often, well-being is viewed as a benefit or an HR initiative rather than a leadership imperative. The future will not belong solely to the most technologically advanced organisations, but to those that are consciously human and capable of fostering purpose, emotional health, and cultural transformation.

> **"The future will not be led solely by the most technologically advanced organisations, but by the most consciously human ones."**

How do you see your role as a leader extending beyond your organisation in shaping the broader business ecosystem?

My role extends beyond my organisation by connecting academia, business, and social transformation. Through Liderarte, my books, associations, and social initiatives, I seek to promote a business ecosystem where profitability, education, dignity, and human development advance together. Leadership should create conditions where people and organisations can thrive simultaneously.

Walk us through a pivotal moment in building your organisation, a challenge that, in hindsight, proved to be the making of it.

A defining moment came when I realised that happiness could not remain merely a message, a book, or a conference topic; it needed to become an institution. Transforming that vision into a platform for education, research, and leadership development was a significant challenge. Looking back, it brought together the lessons from my entire professional journey and reinforced my belief that happiness can be taught, cultivated, and led.

How has your approach to talent and team culture contributed to the growth and resilience of your business?

My approach is based on a simple belief: people grow when they feel seen, trusted, and encouraged to become their best selves.

I strive to build a culture of care, creativity, and responsibility, where individuals are united by a shared purpose.

When people feel connected to a mission rather than simply to an organisation, resilience and long-term commitment naturally follow.

As you look ahead, what ambition are you working towards, and what would it take for your industry to advance alongside you?

My ambition is to establish a globally recognised institution for happiness, well-being, and leadership with soul. Achieving this requires courage: the courage to measure well-being seriously, develop emotionally intelligent leaders, and integrate science and humanity into leadership practices. The next frontier of leadership is human flourishing.

Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel is important for our readers to know?

This work lies at the heart of my purpose in life. My journey has taught me that adversity can become a source of strength, leadership can become service, and education can become a path to dignity.

I believe the future depends on building a global movement in which well-being is not merely an aspiration but a shared responsibility.

BUSINESS FRONTIER

AI IS SUPPOSED TO MAKE US BETTER AT OUR JOBS. SO WHY ARE 56% OF US MAKING MORE MISTAKES?

The promise of AI is real. So are the errors. With 95% of AI projects failing to deliver value, KPMG Middle East's latest report identifies what organisations are getting wrong and where they need to start.

By the Numbers

- More than 95% of AI use cases globally fail to deliver measurable value.
- 66% of professionals rely on AI output without evaluating its accuracy.
- 56% report making mistakes in their work due to AI.
- Only 46% of people globally are willing to trust AI systems.
- 70% believe there is a need for national and international AI regulation.
- 66% of people use AI regularly.
- 83% believe AI will result in a wide range of benefits.

Artificial intelligence is moving rapidly into the heart of enterprise cybersecurity. In the UAE, where digital infrastructure underpins economic growth, that adoption is accelerating. The critical question is no longer whether to deploy AI for security, but whether organisations have the governance in place to make it work.

According to KPMG Middle East's report The New Cyber Battleground, the past 18 months have seen a significant increase in AI-driven cybersecurity, analytics, and automation activity across the Middle East and globally. Yet the data behind that surge tells a more complicated story: more than 95% of AI use cases globally are failing to deliver measurable business or security outcomes. The gap between deployment and value is widening, and governance is at the centre of it.

"The UAE has demonstrated strong leadership in digital transformation and AI integration. In a more complex and fast-moving threat environment, organisations need to shift focus from speed of deployment to quality of implementation. Embedding accountability, validation, and lifecycle security into AI systems will be critical to strengthening resilience and maintaining trust as these technologies scale," says **Trevor Niblock, Partner, Digital Trust, KPMG Middle East.**

The Trust Problem

The scale of the challenge is reflected in how people are already using AI at work. According to research cited in the report, 66% of professionals rely on AI outputs without evaluating their accuracy, while 56% report making mistakes in their work as a result. Only 46% of people globally say they are willing to trust AI systems. These figures do not describe a workforce confidently operating within a governed AI framework, they describe one that has adopted AI faster than the structures around it have matured. The KPMG report identifies this as "problem zero". Organisations are racing to implement AI solutions before clearly defining the problems they are trying to solve, and before establishing the governance required to use those solutions safely.

Where to Start

The report's framework is structured around a clear sequence: governance before deployment, not governance retrofitted after the fact. Its Trusted AI framework identifies 10 principles that AI solutions must meet, including accountability, data integrity, transparency, explainability, reliability, privacy, cybersecurity, safety, equity, and sustainability. Together, these form a lifecycle model that embeds security and oversight from strategy through deployment and monitoring. On the technical side, securing AI begins with treating data as a protected asset, enforcing lineage, provenance, rigorous cleaning, bias mitigation, and continuous monitoring throughout the training pipeline. Model protection follows, through adversarial robustness testing and controlled model registries. Infrastructure must be hardened through secure pipelines and trusted execution environments. "Securing AI is no longer about bolting controls; it is about engineering trust into the lifecycle, data, models, infrastructure, and operations, so AI can scale safely, confidently, and sustainably," the report states.

A Five-Step Roadmap

For organisations beginning this process, KPMG outlines five practical steps:

- Establish trusted AI security governance
- Understand the problem before choosing the solution, whether analytics, automation, AI, or agentic AI
- Upskill employees to both secure and use AI for security
- Use existing tools to create iterative value before scaling
- Focus on easier challenges first to realise quick returns on investment

The report is direct on one point: AI is not always the answer, and should not be the default starting point. Quick time to value is more reliably achieved through process automation in the first instance, provided organisations understand their end-to-end internal processes. AI use cases require process maturity, good quality data, trained experts, and supporting infrastructure, building blocks that must be in place before deployment begins. In the UAE, where AI adoption is moving from experimentation to scaled deployment, the organisations best positioned to lead are those treating governance not as a compliance exercise but as a strategic capability.

Packaging Progress with Purpose

For **Kaushik Nag, CEO of Jupiter Laminators Private Limited**, long-term success is built on integrity, accountability, and continuous improvement. Over the past eight years, he has played a key role in driving the company's strategic growth, operational transformation, and market expansion, while Jupiter Laminators continues its two-decade journey as an integrated flexible packaging solutions provider.

Flexible packaging sits at the intersection of performance, sustainability, and consumer expectations. Over the past eight years, Kaushik Nag has helped steer Jupiter Laminators through a period of rapid industry transformation, with a focus on balancing operational excellence with responsible growth. His leadership has helped accelerate the company's evolution into a trusted integrated packaging solutions provider, while maintaining a strong commitment to quality, innovation, and customer-centricity.

Today, as regulatory demands increase and sustainability becomes a business imperative, Nag sees significant opportunities for packaging manufacturers willing to rethink materials, processes, and partnerships. His vision is rooted in creating long-term value, not only for customers and premium brands across India and beyond, but for the broader ecosystem the industry serves.

What core principles guide the way you lead, and how has your journey with Jupiter Laminators shaped those principles?

My leadership philosophy is built on three principles: integrity, accountability, and continuous improvement. I believe sustainable success comes from keeping commitments, empowering people, and creating long-term value rather than chasing short-term gains.

Jupiter Laminators has evolved significantly over the past two decades, and my journey with the company over the last eight years has reinforced the importance of resilience, customer trust, and innovation. While markets and technologies have changed, our focus has remained constant: delivering quality, building relationships, and investing in people, processes, and sustainability.

"Customers should not have to choose between product protection and environmental responsibility. The future belongs to businesses that can deliver both."

Flexible packaging sits at the centre of some of the most pressing sustainability debates in manufacturing. Where do you believe the industry is most getting it wrong?

One of the industry's biggest mistakes is treating sustainability as a compliance requirement rather than a business responsibility. The focus often remains on isolated initiatives instead of redesigning packaging with its entire lifecycle in mind.

Another misconception is that sustainability and performance are competing priorities. Customers should not have to choose between environmental responsibility and product protection. Real progress will come through greater investment in recyclable solutions, material optimisation, and collaboration across the value chain.

Jupiter Laminators serves food, pharma, home care, and industrial clients under one roof. How do you lead an organisation that must be many things to many industries simultaneously?

Serving diverse sectors requires us to focus on what they all have in common: quality, consistency, reliability, and speed. While every industry has unique requirements, trust remains a universal expectation.

My role is to ensure we develop deep expertise within each segment while operating on a common foundation of technology, process discipline, and customer focus. This balance of specialization and integration allows us to deliver solutions that are both relevant and scalable.

Walk us through a pivotal moment in building Jupiter Laminators.

One of the defining moments for our business was navigating the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the supply chain challenges that followed.

The situation tested every aspect of our operations, from procurement and logistics to manufacturing and people management. Rather than pulling back, we focused on agility, operational discipline, and close customer communication. Looking back, that period strengthened our resilience, deepened customer trust, and accelerated improvements that continue to benefit the business today.

You hold certifications across BRC, ISO, and SEDEX. How do you embed compliance and quality into organisational culture rather than treating it as a box-ticking exercise?

For us, compliance and quality are not functions; they are habits. Certifications provide valuable frameworks, but culture is built through daily actions.

We ensure employees understand why processes exist, not just what they require. Quality discussions happen across the organization, not only during audits. By encouraging ownership and treating mistakes as opportunities to improve, compliance becomes part of the culture rather than an obligation.

As you look ahead, what is the ambition you are building toward, and what would it take for the flexible packaging industry to move in that direction alongside you?

Our ambition is to build Jupiter Laminators into one of the most trusted sustainable flexible packaging companies, both in India and globally.

For the industry to move forward, collaboration is essential. Manufacturers, brands, suppliers, recyclers, and policymakers must work toward shared goals. Greater investment in sustainable materials, recycling infrastructure, and innovation will be critical. The companies that embrace change early will help shape the future of packaging.

FROM TELCO TO TECHCO CAN BE MONGOLIA'S NEXT MOVE

Koji Kurushima spent years reshaping how Mongolians think about teamwork, leadership, and what a telecom company can become. His answers are as direct as his philosophy.

When **Koji Kurushima, CEO of Mobicom Corporation LLC**, took the helm at the company, he brought with him a deep belief in collective thinking over individual authority. Having led one of Mongolia's foremost telecommunications companies, he reflects on the decisions and strategic pivots that defined his tenure.

Leadership means different things to different people. What does it mean to you, and what shaped your approach?

My basic principle is that leaders shall make decisions but shall not act solely on their own. Since no human is perfect, it is important to incorporate opinions and input from others in order to enable wider viewpoints to pursue the best decision to be made. An organisation will be more sustainable and resilient if you utilise the power of all your employees, how you encourage them to be proactive, motivated to create new value, and raise constructive opinions, not just listening and being obedient to the boss's instructions, matters greatly.

Where do you think leaders in telecom and ICT are leaving value on the table?

Working in a telecommunication and ICT industry, we tend to think about connectivity only. Once you have a certain level of network coverage, how to use this connectivity infrastructure to make business and people's lives better is the next stage to create value. This will make you see the different value of your core product apart from connecting people, as well as think about the customer first to make your organisation more sustainable and get away from a pricing war.

Looking back at your tenure at Mobicom, what was the decision that changed everything?

I believe the most defining decision I made was creating a mid-term strategy and employee philosophy for the company. CEOs are not in the position forever, but a company should be operational forever. My impression working in Mongolia was that typical Mongolian companies have a very strong leader and a talented team to support the leader's intention. But I always thought teamwork could overpower individual talent since I came from a Japanese background where teamwork was prioritised. It has taught me that you can change anything as long as you have belief.

Telco to Techco is a significant shift. What does that transformation actually demand?

Mobicom has already defined its strategic shift, from Telco to Techco. The world is moving fast and many players conduct their business on top of network infrastructure created by telecoms. Mobicom also needs to be in this field. Doing business as a connectivity provider and as a platform, application, and service provider is quite different.

This will be a big challenge; to transform the way one thinks, the way one works, and the way one approaches the market.

> *Teamwork can overpower individual talent. You can change anything as long as you have belief*

What is your message to leaders who are still finding their footing?

I believe anyone can become a leader. No leaders, especially CEOs, were perfect from the beginning. We may make mistakes or could have made better decisions when reviewing the past. But how much you believe in what you do is important, which will make you accept the consequences of the decisions made. The more mistakes you make, the more you learn and develop yourself. What I want to recommend is: take initiative, be responsible, and challenge yourself. It will make your work life more exciting.

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted while Koji Kurushima was CEO of Mobicom Corporation LLC. He has since been appointed Deputy Head of Global Consumer Division at KDDI Corporation, Japan.

SHAPING GLOBAL CITIZENS THROUGH EDUCATION

Dr. Laura Viban, Director of the American International School of Brazzaville, is championing inclusive, globally minded education that prepares students for lifelong success.

Growing up in a family of educators, I was surrounded by the values of learning, integrity, and perseverance from an early age. My journey began as an English teacher at the British Council before expanding into international education, where I discovered the transformative power of diverse learning environments.

Over the years, I continued to strengthen my expertise through advanced studies in education, educational leadership, and school management. Every stage of my journey has reinforced one belief: education is not simply about academic achievement, it is about empowering individuals to reach their full potential and become responsible global citizens.

As Director of the American International School of Brazzaville, what makes the institution unique?

AISB is a close-knit international community that delivers globally recognised education through the International Baccalaureate programmes alongside the American High School Diploma.

Since our first graduating class, we have maintained a 100 percent university acceptance rate, with students pursuing higher education across the world. Beyond academics, we focus on nurturing confident, compassionate, and internationally minded learners through strong faculty development, community engagement, and a culture that values diversity and inclusion.

What teaching approaches do you believe are preparing students best for the future?

Education today must move beyond traditional classroom instruction. At AISB, we combine inquiry-based learning with project-based activities, technology integration, and personalised learning to develop communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

> *An educator's impact extends beyond the classroom, it shapes communities, drives change, and builds a better future*

Equally important is social-emotional learning, which helps students build resilience, empathy, and self-awareness. Through international collaborations, cultural exchange programmes, and initiatives such as Model United Nations, we encourage students to think globally while remaining grounded in strong personal values.

What has been your biggest leadership challenge, and what continues to motivate you?

Leading an international school in a diverse environment presents challenges ranging from teacher recruitment and infrastructure limitations to supporting students from more than 40 nationalities.

We overcome these through careful planning, strong community partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to inclusion and excellence. What motivates me most is seeing students and educators grow with confidence. Every achievement, whether academic, personal, or professional, reinforces my belief that an educator's impact extends far beyond the classroom.

THE PROBLEM IS THE OPPORTUNITY

Lucas Carvalho Piccinin, CEO and Founding Partner of NetConv Shop, found his business idea in a problem the supermarket industry had decided was too hard to fix. He disagreed.

Lucas Carvalho Piccinin did not set out to disrupt retail technology. He set out to solve a problem, one that most in the industry had either overlooked or chosen to work around. At NetConv Shop, which operates across Brazil and the USA, his focus is expiration date transparency in e-commerce grocery, a capability gap he identified early and built his entire operational model around. The result is a software category he believes is still largely unclaimed.

You built NetConv Shop around a problem the industry had largely ignored. Where did that insight come from?

I have always valued reacting positively for the long run, even when difficult things happen in the short term, because that is how we secure a better future. Right at the beginning of my career, I experienced a rupture with my previous beliefs, triggered by intense pain I was enduring at the time, which compelled me to reflect deeply on the meaning of life. I ultimately arrived at the conclusion that, in order to secure a better future, we must react positively with a long-term perspective, even when difficulties arise in the short term.

What exactly is the blind spot you identified, and why has no one solved it properly?

The opportunity is the freshness marketability unlocked by expiration date transparency in e-commerce. It is a new software category because of its unique capabilities. The operational design uses stock only for e-commerce, with no counter operations because if the same stock is used for both counter and e-commerce, the problem becomes significantly more demanding to solve. It is very common, as a first supermarket thought on selling online, to use the same stock for both operations, making freshness transparency a problem that is hard to solve. This becomes a blind spot where solutions are developed above it, lacking this critical information.

> *Problems are sources of innovation. It is important to pay close attention to them*

What was the decision that locked in your approach and what did it cost you to commit to it?

It was deciding to solve the lack of expiry date information in e-commerce at the very beginning of the organisation, and to use stock only for online operations. If the wrong course is taken, the software ends up with restricted capabilities. This taught me that choices are free but consequences are certain, and that problems are sources of innovation, so it is important to pay close attention to them and react positively for the long run, even when difficulties arise in the short term.

NetConv connects supply and demand to reduce waste and combat hunger. How does growth serve that mission?

NetConv has a mission to explore the connection between supply and demand to reduce waste and combat hunger. We focus on that and use creativity and customer feedback to guide us with evolving needs and expectations.

What would you tell a founder who does not yet know what problem they want to solve?

One piece of advice I would share is to identify the problem you want to solve and use creativity to develop a solution. But if you do not know the problem yet, just start doing it and keep your eyes and ears wide open because opportunities often arrive disguised as problems.

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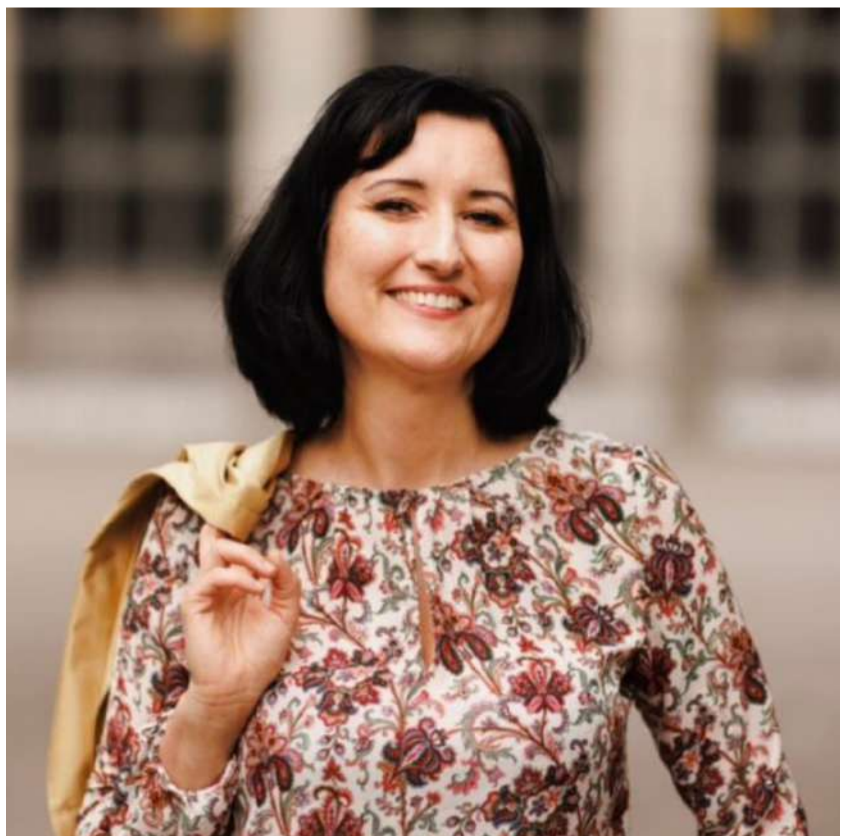
Rethinking Performance Through Better Transitions

Founder of HypnoBond Private, **Martina Maya** believes better leadership begins with awareness, enabling people to navigate high-pressure environments with greater clarity and purpose.



For **Martina Maya**, leadership is not about doing more, it is about becoming more aware. Drawing on her experience working with leaders in high-responsibility environments, she has developed a unique approach that helps individuals transition between demanding moments with greater clarity, focus, and presence. Through HypnoBond Private, she is encouraging organizations to rethink how mental readiness shapes performance.

How would you describe your leadership philosophy, and what has shaped it most significantly over the course of your career?

To me, leadership is less about authority and more about awareness. It is reflected in how we think, communicate, make decisions, and treat the people around us. I do not believe leadership is something we achieve once and keep forever. It is something we continually develop through curiosity, humility, and the willingness to challenge our own assumptions.

Working with people in high-responsibility environments taught me that capability is rarely the limiting factor. More often, the challenge is remaining fully present for what is in front of you. That observation continues to shape both my leadership philosophy and the development of HypnoBond Private.

Looking at the business landscape today, what is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

Many organizations optimise for speed, productivity, and efficiency, yet pay very little attention to the quality of the transition between one responsibility and the next.

“The journey ends. The next responsibility begins.”

Leaders move rapidly between meetings, flights, and decisions, often arriving physically while their attention remains occupied by what came before. I believe this is a significant opportunity that is largely overlooked. Before expecting people to perform at their best, we should also consider the condition in which they arrive. That question became the foundation of HypnoBond Private and continues to guide our work.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation, and what did it teach you?

For a long time, I believed that being constantly busy was the path to success. Like many entrepreneurs, I measured progress by how much I was doing rather than by the quality of what I was creating.

Eventually, I realised that constant activity leaves very little space to think clearly or recognise what truly matters. The idea behind HypnoBond Private emerged only after I slowed down. It taught me that meaningful progress comes not from doing more, but from creating the conditions to think more intentionally.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation’s next phase of growth?

Our next phase is centred on implementation rather than expansion. I am working alongside private aviation operators, founders, and industry leaders to explore how HypnoBond Private can be integrated naturally into the travel experience. Rather than introducing another passenger service, our goal is to make transition quality part of the journey itself. Through collaboration, real-world testing, and continuous refinement, we aim to demonstrate how greater support cleaner transition into whatever comes next by reducing unnecessary mental carryover.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

One lesson I return to repeatedly is that improvement does not always come from adding more information, strategies, or effort.

Sometimes the greatest transformation comes from letting go of what no longer needs to be carried forward. As our lives become increasingly fast-paced and connected, I believe the ability to transition well will become one of the most valuable skills for leaders and organizations alike.

To know more visit www.hypnobondprivate.com

LEADING WITH PURPOSE: WHY EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING MUST BECOME A BUSINESS PRIORITY

For **Misha Sharma Gambhir, Founder of Heartspire Foundation,** leadership is not defined by authority or titles but by the ability to create meaningful impact. In this conversation, she shares her perspective on conscious leadership, workplace wellness, and the responsibility leaders have in shaping healthier and more compassionate communities.

As the founder of Heartspire Foundation, Misha Sharma Gambhir has dedicated her work to promoting emotional well-being, meditation, and conscious leadership. Her journey has been shaped by a deep belief that sustainable success is built on people, not just performance metrics. Through her work as a life coach, Heartfulness trainer, and community leader, she has witnessed firsthand how emotional resilience and self-awareness can transform both individuals and organizations. Her work has also been recognised by the Mastermind Global Awards in both 2025 and 2026. Her vision extends beyond organizational boundaries, encouraging leaders to create ecosystems where compassion, service, and meaningful impact become defining measures of success.

What core principles guide the way you lead today, and how have they evolved through your experiences?

I lead with empathy, authenticity, service, and continuous learning. Early in my career, I believed leadership was primarily about achieving results. Over time, through my work in mental well-being, coaching, and community service, I learned that lasting success comes from understanding people and helping them grow. My experiences have shown me that resilience, compassion, and trust are essential leadership strengths. Today, I focus on empowering individuals to discover their own potential while staying grounded in integrity and purpose.

"Leadership is not about authority. It is about creating positive and meaningful impact by helping people grow, thrive, and discover their own potential."

What is a shift or trend in your industry that you believe leaders are still underestimating?

One trend that many leaders continue to underestimate is the direct connection between emotional well-being and organizational performance. While mental health is receiving greater attention, it is often treated as a secondary initiative rather than a strategic priority.

Employees today seek purpose, balance, and psychological safety alongside professional growth. Organizations and leaders who recognize the importance of emotional wellness and human connection will be better positioned to build sustainable and successful organizations in an increasingly demanding and fast-changing world.

How do you see your role as a leader extending beyond your organization in shaping the broader business ecosystem?

I believe leadership extends far beyond organizational boundaries. Through Heartspire Foundation and my work as a Heartfulness trainer and meditation instructor, I strive to promote emotional well-being and conscious leadership within communities and workplaces. Heartfulness has its world headquarters at Kanha Shantivanam in Hyderabad, India, and its approach to meditation and relaxation has deeply shaped my belief in service. For meditation and relaxation techniques, I do not charge any fee, as I see this work as a way of giving back to the community.

I encourage individuals and organizations to prioritize people alongside performance. By sharing knowledge, mentoring others, and supporting community initiatives, I hope to contribute to a culture where success is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by positive social impact. Leaders have the ability to influence healthier, more compassionate ecosystems, and I see that as an important part of my responsibility.

Walk us through a pivotal moment in building your organization, a challenge that, in hindsight, proved to be the making of it.

One of the defining challenges in building Heartspire Foundation was encouraging people to recognize the importance of mental and emotional well-being. Initially, many viewed these programmes as optional rather than essential.

Instead of being discouraged, we remained committed to creating genuine value through accessible and meaningful initiatives. As people began experiencing positive changes in their lives, trust grew naturally. Looking back, that challenge strengthened our purpose and credibility. It taught us patience, perseverance, and the importance of staying committed to a mission even when its value is not immediately recognized by others.

As you look ahead, what is the ambition you are building towards and what would it take for your industry to get there alongside you?

My ambition is to make holistic well-being and meditation more accessible to people across communities, workplaces, and educational institutions. I envision a future where mental wellness practices are integrated into everyday living rather than used only during times of crisis. Achieving this will require collaboration among leaders, educators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers to create supportive systems that prioritize prevention, resilience, and overall well-being. My journey has reinforced my belief that leadership is ultimately about service, compassion, and creating opportunities for growth. Through the Heartspire Foundation, I remain committed to promoting mental well-being, emotional resilience, meditation, and compassionate leadership. For further guidance, I can be reached at Heartspirefoundation@gmail.com.

MONGOLIA'S BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY LIES IN ITS HERITAGE

Dr. Odonchimeg Batsukh-Lang, CEO of Freywille Jewellery, is proud of where she comes from, and she is building a business on it. She sees Mongolian identity as a global competitive advantage and believes heritage is not the past, it is the future.

Dr. Odonchimeg Batsukh-Lang traces her understanding of heritage to a specific memory: her father gathering his children around collections of Mongolian medals, stamps, and cultural souvenirs, explaining their history and significance. That early lesson, that culture, customs and traditions are living assets to be understood, preserved and continuously developed, has since become the foundation of her business philosophy. Today, as CEO of Freywille Jewellery and a doctoral graduate of Leopold Franzens University Innsbruck, Austria, she is building enterprises that connect Mongolian identity with global innovation, and making the case that heritage is not a constraint on competitiveness but the source of it.

What is your leadership philosophy and what has shaped it most significantly?

My leadership philosophy is centered on creating sustainable value through vision, trust, and long-term partnerships. I believe leadership is not about authority, but about bringing people and ideas together around a shared purpose. Having completed my doctoral studies in Austria and worked across business, culture, education, and international cooperation, I have learned that lasting success is built on credibility, consistency, and mutual respect.

My Mongolian heritage and international experience have shaped a leadership approach that integrates tradition with innovation. I believe effective leaders must preserve identity while continuously adapting to global change and technological advancement.

> *The future belongs to those who can transform heritage, identity, and tradition into innovation that creates value on a global scale*

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in the sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

I believe one of the most overlooked opportunities is transforming cultural heritage, customs, traditions, and Mongolian identity into globally relevant products and experiences through innovation. Today's consumers increasingly seek authenticity, purpose, and meaningful stories behind the products and services they choose. Mongolia possesses unique cultural assets that remain underrepresented in international markets.

By combining these strengths with scientific research, technology, modern manufacturing, and international partnerships, we can create innovative products that are deeply rooted in Mongolian identity while meeting global standards. Those who successfully connect heritage with innovation will create new categories of growth and long-term competitive advantage.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation, and what did it teach you?

The most defining decision I made was choosing to build international bridges rather than focusing solely on local opportunities. Over the years, I have prioritised partnerships across Europe and Asia in culture, healthcare, education, workforce development, and manufacturing. This approach required patience, discipline, and long-term commitment. It taught me that sustainable growth is driven not by transactions, but by trust-based relationships. Strong partnerships create opportunities that no organisation can achieve alone. I learned that organisations generate the greatest impact when they serve as platforms connecting people, industries, and countries around shared goals and mutual value creation.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our next phase of growth is defined by three priorities: international collaboration, innovation-driven manufacturing, and human capital development. We are exploring opportunities to offer wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle through strategic partnerships with leading organisations in Asia and Europe. At the same time, we continue expanding initiatives in culture, education, and workforce development. Investing in people remains a core priority because long-term competitiveness depends on talent and knowledge. We also dedicate a portion of our earnings to social impact initiatives in healthcare, education, culture, and the arts, reflecting our belief that business success should contribute to broader societal progress.

deep.

Conversations about life, work, and people.

LEADING WITH HEART, HERITAGE AND PURPOSE

Dr. Patricia Gonde, Founder and CEO of Girls Leading Our World, is empowering women and youth through education, Ubuntu-led leadership, and sustainable impact.

My leadership philosophy is anchored in heart-led, servant leadership, guided by the principles of Unhu or Ubuntu, the belief that "I am because we are."

Over my 35-year journey in education and global philanthropy, I have learned that true leadership is not about authority, but about empowering others to discover their own greatness. Witnessing the resilience of rural communities shaped this deeply. It taught me that sustainable impact begins with empathy, active listening, and creating bridges for the next generation of leaders, especially women and youth, to step into their own power.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

The greatest untapped opportunity lies at the intersection of technology and heritage-based education.

While many are adopting AI, STEM, and robotics, few are grounding innovation in local culture, identity, and indigenous knowledge systems. I believe Education 5.0 offers a powerful path forward by combining modern industrial innovation with community values. When global digital literacy is connected with local heritage and sustainable development goals, we can cultivate problem-solvers who are globally competitive and deeply committed to their communities.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation?

The most defining decision was shifting from short-term educational aid to building self-sustaining networks and long-term infrastructure.

Championing Early Childhood Development blocks in under-resourced rural areas, despite major funding challenges, was a leap of faith. It taught me that bold vision attracts alignment. When leadership is rooted in authentic and transparent intent, communities

> *"True legacy is not measured by the accolades we collect, but by the doors we open for others."*

respond. Real transformation requires moving beyond temporary fixes and building structures and mindsets that can outlast us.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our next phase focuses on institutional sustainability and expanding our global footprint.

We are transitioning grassroots initiatives into a formalised Private Voluntary Organization framework to strengthen compliance and partnerships. We are also accelerating cross-border experiential learning through international educational tours, while investing in digital infrastructure, green solar energy, and ICT hubs in schools. The goal is to create a replicable model where heritage-based values and future-ready technology empower marginalised youth and educators worldwide.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

No action is too small when it is driven by an authentic desire to uplift humanity.

True legacy is not measured by accolades, but by the doors we open for others. Whether leading a company, school, or community project, we must lead with courage and radical empathy.

Driving Emergency Care Where It Matters Most

Simphiwe Mamvura, Managing Director of Maponya 911, is transforming emergency healthcare accessibility by expanding critical medical services across South Africa.

My career began at Toyota South Africa as a graduate management trainee before I joined Maponya 911 in 2010 as an Accounts and HR Manager. Through perseverance, continuous learning, and a commitment to excellence, I progressed to Business Development Manager, General Manager, and eventually Managing Director.

One of the defining milestones has been leading the company's growth from 45 employees and six branches to more than 200 employees across 25 branches nationwide. Today, Maponya 911 ranks among South Africa's five largest ambulance services, and being part of that journey remains my greatest professional achievement.

Tell us about Maponya 911 and the purpose behind its establishment.

Maponya 911 was established to address the shortage of emergency medical services in Soweto and other underserved communities where access to ambulance transportation was extremely limited.

Today, we are the largest Black-owned emergency medical service in South Africa, operating across eight provinces. While ambulance services remain our core offering, we also provide occupational health consultancy, medical standby services, first aid training, medical equipment supply, project management, and policy development. Our mission has always been to ensure that patients receive timely, life-saving care during the critical "golden hour."

What has been the biggest leadership challenge you have faced, and how did you overcome it?

Coming from a commerce background rather than a medical one was initially my greatest challenge. Entering a highly specialised healthcare industry meant I had to work harder to understand

medical operations, industry regulations, and healthcare terminology while earning the confidence of colleagues and stakeholders.

I overcame this by investing in continuous learning and refusing to let my lack of a clinical background define my capabilities. Knowledge, combined with self-belief and determination, allowed me to grow both as a leader and as a business professional.

What keeps you motivated as a leader?

I have never been afraid of challenges. I believe the best approach is to face them head-on, learn from every experience, and continuously evaluate my own performance.

Regular self-reflection helps me identify opportunities for growth, both personally and professionally. Every challenge has strengthened my resilience and reinforced my belief that leadership is about remaining adaptable, decisive, and committed to serving both your team and the communities that rely on you.

> *"Leadership is about facing challenges head-on, continuously learning, and ensuring every decision creates a meaningful impact on the communities we serve."*

BUILDING BETTER LIVES THROUGH THOUGHTFUL DESIGN

For **Ar. Smita Das, Founder and CEO of Speaking Designs**, architecture is ultimately about people. Over a career spanning more than three decades, she has built a reputation for creating functional, affordable, and human-centric spaces that enhance everyday living.

Architecture often celebrates iconic structures and grand developments, but Ar. Smita Das has spent much of her career focusing on a different challenge, designing spaces that improve the daily lives of ordinary people. Through Speaking Designs, she has worked on thousands of homes across India, demonstrating that impactful design is not defined by scale, but by how effectively it serves those who use it.

What core principles guide the way you lead today?

My leadership philosophy is centred on empathy, humility, and relentless perseverance. Over the years, I have learned that genuine listening, to clients, teams, and even failures, creates stronger outcomes than simply directing from the top. I believe no technology can replace the human ability to understand emotions and translate them into meaningful spaces. Personal challenges and professional setbacks have taught me resilience and reinforced the importance of leading with calm confidence, accessibility, and a solutions-focused mindset.

What is a shift or opportunity in your industry that leaders are still underestimating?

One of the biggest untapped opportunities lies in designing thoughtful, affordable, and scalable solutions for middle-income and smaller homes. While much of the industry focuses on large projects, there is enormous demand for practical, climate-sensitive, and space-efficient housing. My experience has shown that even compact homes can become dignified and joyful spaces when functionality leads the design process.

Walk us through a pivotal moment in building your organisation.

One of the most defining decisions I made was choosing to rebuild and scale my practice after a period of personal, health, and professional challenges.

Rather than stepping back, I embraced larger initiatives, redesigned processes, adopted technology, and placed greater trust in my team. That experience taught me that resilience combined with clarity of purpose can transform adversity into opportunity. It also reaffirmed my commitment to making quality design accessible to more people.

As you look ahead, what is the ambition you are building towards?

My focus is on scaling Speaking Designs intelligently while preserving the values that define us. We are strengthening systems, embracing digital consultations, and expanding into redevelopment and sustainable, climate-responsive housing.

At the same time, I am committed to mentoring future leaders and ensuring that growth never comes at the expense of empathy, integrity, or design authenticity. The goal is to create a lasting impact through architecture that remains both accessible and meaningful.

> *Even the smallest space can become a dignified and joyful environment when design begins with people and their everyday needs.*

The Business of Language: How SonaJapan Turned Education Into a Global Career Pipeline

Sonal Shah, Founder and CEO of SonaJapan Japanese Language Academy, built an institution that turns language into careers. Over 5,000 learners later, her model is redefining what education can look like as a business.

Sonal Shah built SonaJapan Japanese Language Academy on a single conviction, that language education should open doors to careers, not just classrooms. Thirty-five years in Japan and over 5,000 learners later, that conviction has become an institution.

You have spent 35 years building in a country that was not your own. What has shaped the way you lead?

My leadership philosophy is built on purpose, people, and perseverance. I believe leadership is not about authority but about creating opportunities for others to grow and succeed. Having lived in Japan for over 35 years while maintaining strong roots in India, I have been deeply influenced by Japanese values of discipline, commitment, and continuous improvement. These principles helped me build SonaJapan from a vision into an institution that has empowered over 5,000 learners. Every challenge I faced as a woman entrepreneur in a foreign country strengthened my belief that true leadership is measured not by personal achievements, but by the positive impact we create in the lives of others.

Where is language education leaving its biggest opportunity on the table?

The greatest untapped opportunity is the integration of education, employability, and global mobility. Many institutions still focus primarily on academic delivery, while industries are seeking professionals with practical skills, cultural adaptability, and international exposure. Language education should serve as a gateway to global careers rather than simply a classroom subject. Institutions that successfully bridge skill development, cultural intelligence, and career readiness will shape the future workforce and create lasting value for both learners and employers.

What was the decision that defined SonaJapan?

The most defining decision I made was to prioritise student success and educational quality over rapid commercial expansion. From the very beginning, my goal was to make high-quality Japanese language education accessible and affordable while maintaining personalised support for every learner. This required patience, consistency, and long-term thinking. Over the years, thousands of students have gone on to build successful careers in Japan and around the world, validating that decision. It taught me that trust is the strongest foundation of any organisation. Sustainable growth comes not from chasing numbers, but from consistently delivering value and earning the confidence of the people you serve.

> *Success is not measured by how far we rise ourselves, but by how many lives we empower to rise with us*

What does SonaJapan's next chapter look like?

Our next phase of growth will focus on digital innovation, global partnerships, and workforce readiness. We are expanding our online learning ecosystem, strengthening corporate training solutions, and developing programmes that align with evolving international career opportunities. Artificial intelligence is transforming education, and we aim to leverage technology to enhance learning while preserving personalised mentorship. Our vision is to become a global bridge connecting talent, language, culture, and professional opportunities between India, Japan, and the wider international community.

What do you want aspiring entrepreneurs to take from your journey?

Beyond business, I strongly believe that success carries a responsibility to give back to society. I encourage aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women, to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Dreams do not have geographical boundaries, and perseverance can overcome even the most difficult obstacles. When purpose, passion, and service come together, leadership becomes a force for lasting positive change.

Transforming Leadership from the Inside Out

For **Dr. Sreemanti Mangesh Gijare**, leadership begins with self-awareness. As a Clinical Hypnotherapist, Regression Therapist, Marriage Counselor, TEDx Speaker, Author, and the Founder of HealingWithSree, she has dedicated her career to helping individuals identify and overcome the subconscious patterns that shape their decisions, relationships, and success.

My leadership philosophy is rooted in clarity, compassion, and conscious accountability. I believe leadership is not about directing people but about creating an environment where they feel seen, supported, and capable of reaching their highest potential.

My work in clinical hypnotherapy and regression therapy has shaped this perspective. Over the years, I have seen how unaddressed emotional patterns can limit both individuals and organizations. That experience taught me that effective leadership is built on emotional intelligence, alignment, and the courage to make decisions that prioritise long-term integrity over short-term comfort.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

One of the biggest missed opportunities is the integration of subconscious transformation into professional development and leadership training.

Most organizations focus heavily on skills, systems, and performance metrics while overlooking the emotional and psychological patterns that drive behaviour. When leaders address limiting beliefs, fears, conditioning, and identity-level challenges, they unlock greater creativity, resilience, and productivity within their teams.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation?

The most defining decision was choosing to focus on deep, root-cause healing rather than offering quick-fix solutions. While this approach initially slowed growth, it allowed me to build a foundation based on trust, credibility, and meaningful transformation. It taught me that alignment is more powerful than acceleration. When I embraced the depth of my work instead of trying to fit into conventional wellness models, the right clients, partnerships, and opportunities followed naturally. It reinforced my belief that authenticity and clarity of purpose are powerful drivers of long-term success.

What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our next phase of growth is focused on making deep transformation more accessible while maintaining the quality and precision of our work.

We are evolving from primarily one-to-one engagements to scalable programmes that integrate Numerology, Karma (subconscious healing), Dasha (natal chart timing), and Disha (Vastu-based alignment) into a holistic framework. Alongside digital expansion and strategic collaborations, our goal is to create structured, measurable pathways that help individuals achieve meaningful personal and professional transformation on a larger scale.

> *Your subconscious is not an obstacle to success, it is your greatest ally when understood, aligned, and empowered.*

Building Opportunity Through Purpose

For **Stephanie Grace Bernal Pagal, Founder and CEO of VirtuallyPH**, leadership is about creating opportunities that empower people to succeed. Having built the company from the ground up, she has navigated financial challenges, rapid growth, and the evolving outsourcing landscape while staying committed to a people-first approach.

My leadership philosophy is rooted in servant leadership, accountability, and growth through people. I believe organizations scale when individuals feel empowered, supported, and trusted to lead within their own roles.

Building VirtuallyPH from the ground up taught me resilience through financial challenges, rapid expansion, and the changing dynamics of the outsourcing industry. Over time, I learned that leadership is not about controlling every outcome. It is about creating systems, culture, and opportunities that allow others to thrive.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalizing on?

Many leaders in the outsourcing and virtual staffing industry still underestimate the power of strategic partnerships over transactional support.

Virtual assistants today can contribute far beyond administrative functions. With the right training, systems, and integration, they can become key drivers of growth across operations, marketing, customer management, and automation. The biggest opportunity lies in combining AI, automation, and highly skilled human talent to create scalable support ecosystems.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organization, and what did it teach you?

One of the most defining decisions I made was positioning VirtuallyPH as a premium, specialized agency rather than competing solely on price.

We focused on strengthening our systems, investing in training, and building expertise within the real estate sector. That decision taught me that sustainable growth comes from creating value, not from price competition. It also reinforced the importance of protecting company culture while scaling. Growth requires difficult decisions, continuous reinvention, and the willingness to evolve ahead of the market.

Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel is important for our readers to know?

This recognition reflects not only my journey, but also the dedication of the entire VirtuallyPH team. Entrepreneurship often appears glamorous, but behind every milestone are years of sacrifice, uncertainty, and persistence.

I believe leadership is not about perfection. It is about consistency, adaptability, and the courage to keep moving forward despite challenges. Success should not be measured solely by revenue growth, but by the opportunities we create and the lives we positively impact through meaningful work.

> *Leadership is not about controlling every outcome; it is about creating the systems, culture, and opportunities that allow others to succeed.*

BLENDING HOSPITALITY AND TECHNOLOGY FOR THE FUTURE

For **Wasan Al Malki**, entrepreneurship is about creating meaningful experiences that connect people, whether through hospitality, technology, or innovation. As the Founder of Thy Yard and a growing portfolio of AI-driven ventures under Al Brashdi & Al Malki Trading LLC, she has built her career on adaptability, vision, and a willingness to evolve.

My leadership philosophy is built on empathy, resilience, and vision. I believe in creating environments where people feel empowered to contribute, grow, and take ownership of their ideas while remaining adaptable to change. The biggest influence on my leadership journey has been my transition from hospitality into technology. That experience taught me that leadership is not about staying within one industry or comfort zone. It is about having the courage to evolve, embrace new opportunities, and continuously redefine yourself while staying true to your values.

What is the one opportunity you believe leaders in your sector are not yet fully capitalising on?

One of the most significant opportunities lies in the fusion of lifestyle experiences and technology. Hospitality today can be much more than food, service, and physical spaces. Through AI-driven personalisation, digital engagement, and wellness-focused solutions, businesses can create deeper and more meaningful customer experiences. This intersection remains underutilised, yet it has the potential to transform customer loyalty, strengthen brand connections, and redefine how people interact with businesses in the future.

What has been the most defining decision you have made for your organisation?

One of the most defining decisions I made was expanding Thy Yard beyond a single concept through franchising while simultaneously investing in technology ventures. This decision taught me that growth requires balance. It is important to preserve the identity and essence of a brand while also being willing to innovate and evolve its business model. The experience reinforced that bold expansion must be accompanied by adaptability, strategic thinking, and the confidence to reinvent when necessary.

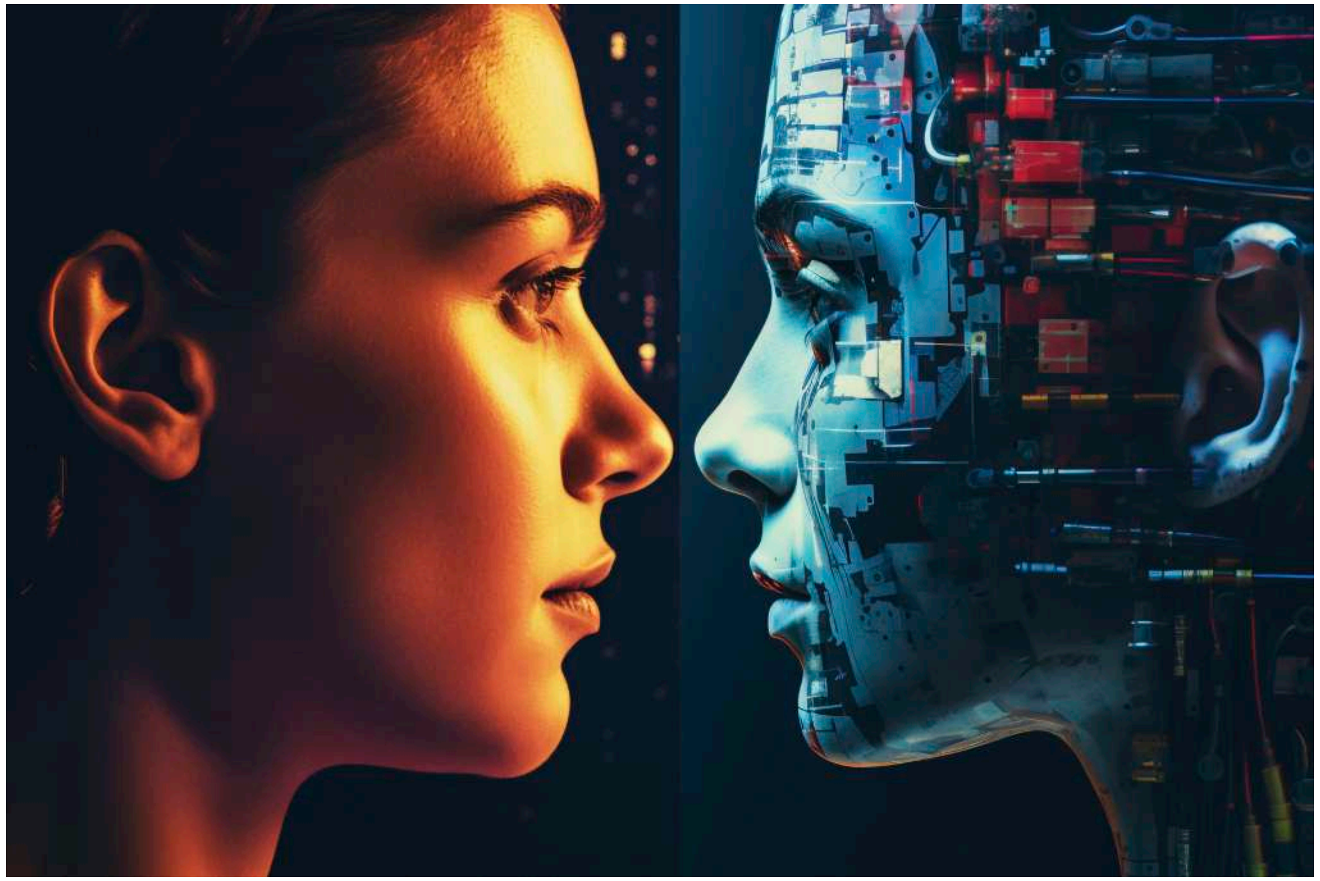
What key priorities or strategic shifts will define your organisation's next phase of growth?

Our next phase of growth will focus on two key priorities. The first is expanding Thy Yard through franchising, bringing its unique hospitality experience to new markets while maintaining the integrity of the brand. The second is scaling technology platforms with a focus on integrating AI into emotional wellness and lifestyle solutions. Together, these initiatives represent a growth strategy that combines physical experiences with digital innovation, creating future-ready businesses that can serve evolving consumer needs.

> *"The future belongs to businesses that combine human connection, meaningful experiences, and technology to create lasting impact.*

AI EXECUTION GAP PUTS $143 BILLION AT RISK

Thomson Reuters' 2026 Future of Professionals report finds a widening gap between AI ambition and execution in the legal, tax, audit, and risk professions, one now carrying real financial consequences in lost clients and departing talent.



Thomson Reuters has released its 2026 Future of Professionals report, warning of the financial cost of failing to effectively implement AI across the legal, tax, audit, and risk professions. The findings, based on a global survey of 1,800 professionals, reveal a widening gap between AI ambition and reality, one now carrying material consequences, with up to $143 billion in client revenue at risk in the US alone, and talent considering leaving.

"We're seeing a clear divide emerge," said Steve Hasker, President and CEO of Thomson Reuters. "Firms that are operationalizing AI are pulling ahead. Those that aren't are starting to take on real risk, across talent, clients, and financial performance. Closing that execution gap is now a business imperative for professional firms," he added.

Adoption is Outpacing Value

Adoption is not the issue. Seventy-four percent of professionals are already using AI tools every week, but organizations are struggling to translate that usage into real value. In fact, 91% of professionals believe their organizations are falling short of what AI can deliver, leading to unintended consequences, including a third of lawyers, accountants, and compliance professionals saying they turn to unsanctioned AI tools, creating invisible, unmanaged risk.

Where the AI Value Gap Is Hitting Hardest

Metric	Figure
Professionals using AI several times a week	74%
Professionals who believe their organization falls short of AI's potential	91%
Professionals using unsanctioned ("shadow") AI tools	34%
Considering leaving within 2 years (among those facing a value gap)	24%
Considering leaving within 12 months	13%
Would decline a role without professional-grade AI access	32%

Even where an AI strategy exists, execution is lagging: 35% say ambitions are not reflected in their day-to-day work, and nearly one in five say their organization still lacks a clear strategy altogether. That disconnect is beginning to show up in harder numbers, not just sentiment, and it is reshaping how firms retain both clients and talent.

A Gap With Financial Teeth

This gap is beginning to affect talent, with one in four professionals saying they would consider leaving within two years if they do not see the value they expect. Clients are reaching the same conclusion: 78% now see AI-enabled quality improvements as essential, yet just 6% believe most providers are delivering. As a result, nearly a third are preparing to reassess those provider relationships within the next 12 months, a shift that is quietly reshaping competitive positioning across the professional services landscape well before it shows up on any balance sheet.

These pressures are showing up across three interconnected areas: shadow AI, talent attrition, and client defection, each compounding the other if left unaddressed by leadership.

Shadow AI Creates Invisible Risk

Shadow AI is creating risk exposure that most firms cannot see, let alone govern. A third of lawyers, accountants, and compliance professionals are using AI their organization has not approved, rising to 41% among those who say their organization is moving too slowly to meet their expectations. This is not a fringe behavior; it is a rational response from professionals under pressure to deliver, operating in the absence of sanctioned tools that meet their needs.

The standards professionals expect are demanding, and for good reason. While 96% say their AI must safeguard confidential data, 94% require verified authoritative content, and 90% need outputs they can explain and defend to clients or regulators, 41% lack access to professional-grade tools that meet these standards. That gap between requirement and access is precisely where shadow AI usage takes root.

The Talent Clock is Already Ticking

Talent is leaving, and faster than many leaders realize. About 24% of professionals experiencing a gap between AI's capability and what their organization delivers are considering leaving within two years, and 13% within just 12 months. Yet almost half of senior leaders believe meaningful talent pressure is still at least three years away, a mismatch in timelines that could prove costly.

Access to the right tools is now a genuine hiring and retention lever. Sixty-two percent say access to professional-grade AI would be a factor in accepting a new role; among those already using it, nearly one in three would turn a role down without it. The table below summarizes where the pressure is most acute.

Clients Are Voting With Their Budgets

The report reveals that 78% of corporate clients now consider AI-enabled quality improvements very important or essential, yet just 6% say most of their providers deliver it. That 72-point gap between expectation and delivery is arguably the report's starkest number, and it is one with direct commercial consequences already unfolding across the industry.

Within 12 months, 32% of clients will be reconsidering provider relationships, with a third of those putting more than $1 million in annual work at risk. Combined, this amounts to approximately $143 billion in US legal and accounting revenue now under active reconsideration, a figure that transforms AI execution from an IT or innovation conversation into a boardroom-level commercial risk.

Fiduciary-Grade AI as the New Benchmark

"Not all AI is created equal. In professions where there is real liability, the standard has to be much higher," said Hasker. "When outputs shape legal judgments, regulatory filings, or client advice, 'almost right' isn't good enough. That's why we build what we call Fiduciary-Grade AI, technology professionals can verify, trust, and ultimately stand behind," he added.

Strategy Presence vs Outcomes

Condition	Professionals reporting AI meets/exceeds value expectations
Firm/department has a named AI strategy	66%
No active AI strategy in place	22%
Difference	44 points

That distinction, between general-purpose AI and AI built for fiduciary accountability, is emerging as the dividing line between firms pulling ahead and those falling behind. It is a distinction clients are increasingly able to detect, and one they are beginning to actively select for when choosing providers.

Closing the gap between AI ambition and execution will require more than deploying new tools; it demands structural change in how firms operate day to day.

From Strategy to Daily Practice

The report is clear that the biggest AI gap is organizational, not technical. Among professionals whose firm has a named AI strategy, 35% say daily practice does not match it, most commonly because tools are not yet in place, people are not trained to use them as intended, or there is no shared understanding of the plan across teams.

Firms that have named a clear strategy are already seeing the payoff: 66% of professionals in such organizations say AI is meeting or exceeding expectations for creating value, compared to just 22% where no active strategy exists. That 44-point gap underscores a simple truth: intent alone changes little, but a named, communicated, and resourced strategy changes outcomes measurably.

The Business Case for Acting Now

For leaders, the report frames this moment as a narrowing window rather than a distant concern. The financial exposure, client defection, talent attrition, and the quieter risk of ungoverned shadow AI, is compounding in real time, not building gradually over years as many senior leaders currently assume.

The report closes with a pointed observation: talent, not technology, remains the defining differentiator in professional services. AI can accelerate the volume and complexity of legal, tax, and advisory work, but judgment, client relationships, and accountability remain irreducibly human. Firms that recognize this, and invest accordingly in both tools and people, are the ones positioned to convert AI adoption into durable competitive advantage rather than reputational and financial liability.

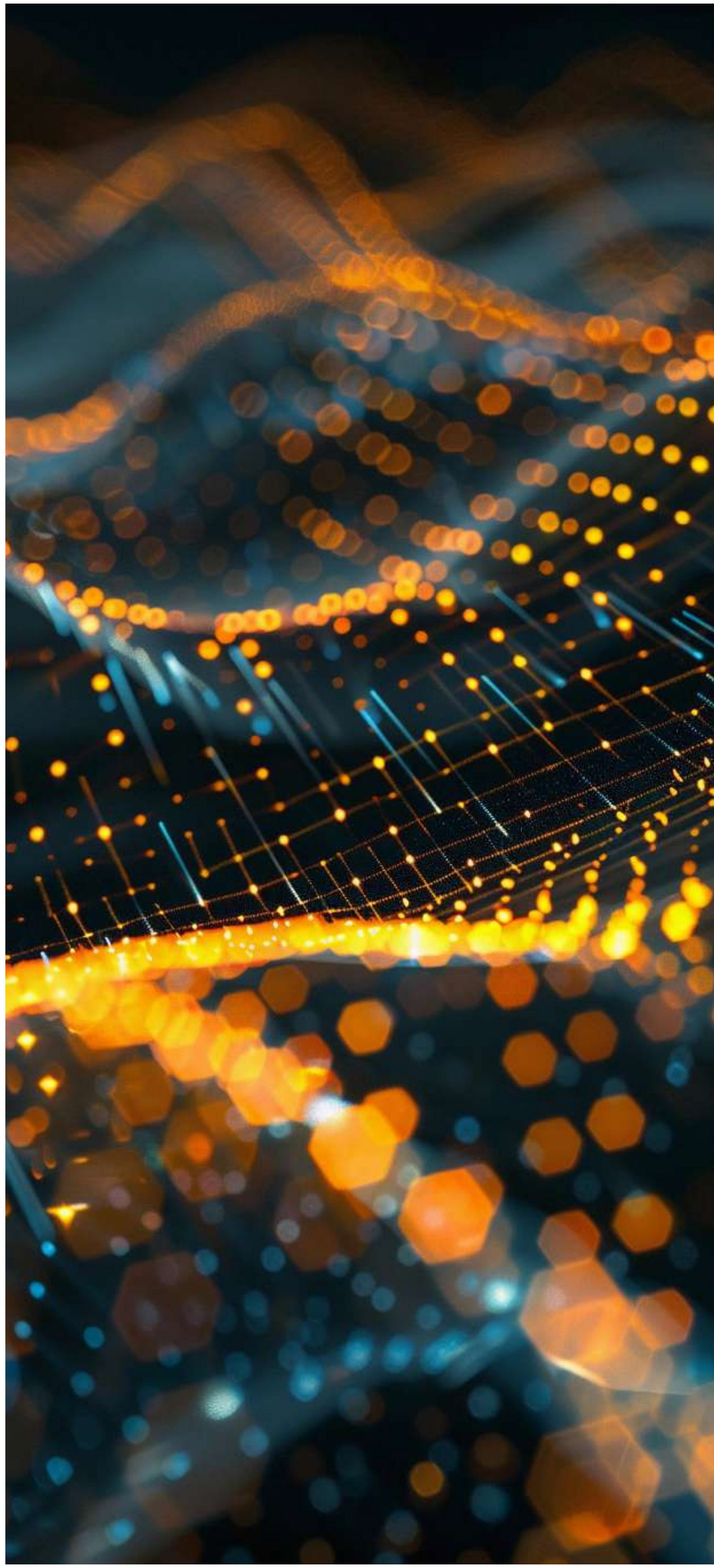
Three Paths, One Choice

The report frames the road ahead as three distinct paths firms and departments are already choosing between. In “AI to Elevate,” human expertise stays at the center, with AI handling groundwork so professionals can focus on judgment and client relationships, the path 52% of professionals say they personally prefer. “AI to Scale” treats AI as a capacity solution, letting firms absorb more volume without growing headcount, a route 31% favor. “AI to Reimagine” goes further still, using AI to rebuild business models and operating structures from the ground up, chosen by just 7%, but disproportionately by the most ambitious and mobile professionals.

The risk, the report notes, is not picking the wrong path but failing to pick one at all: 35% of professionals are working somewhere whose AI direction does not match their own preference, and those professionals are nearly twice as likely to be considering leaving within a year.

Before drawing its final conclusion, Thomson Reuters poses five questions it urges leaders to answer honestly: Is the AI strategy legible at the individual level? Where is shadow AI filling gaps the strategy hasn’t reached? What proportion of professionals have access to professional-grade tools, and how many actually use them? Are mid-career professionals, the most operationally critical and most mobile cohort, aligned with the chosen path? And what deliberate investment is being made in developing professional judgment as AI reshapes how that judgment is built?

Source: Thomson Reuters Future of Professionals Report 2026, conducted March–April 2026, is based on a global survey of 1,816 professionals across law, tax, audit, accounting, compliance, risk, and global trade in 62 countries.



THE NEUROSCIENCE OF LEADERSHIP: WHY THE BRAIN IS THE LAST FRONTIER OF BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Dr. Watceilia Varso, Founder and CEO, Practice Vision, The Art of Reengineering® has spent her career at the intersection of neuroscience, behavioural science, and leadership development. Her argument is as simple as it is disruptive: before leaders can change organisations, they must first change themselves.

> *Change is possible when we become conscious of the patterns driving our decisions*

Dr. Watceilia Varso did not arrive at neuroscience-led leadership through theory. She arrived through practice, working across industries and global markets, watching organisations invest heavily in systems and strategy while the human variable remained unaddressed. Through Practice Vision, she is now taking that conviction to leaders across APAC, the USA, Europe, and the Middle East.

What core principles guide the way you lead today, and how have they evolved?

My leadership philosophy is grounded in the belief that regenerative leadership begins with regulated self-leadership. Before leaders can influence teams, cultures, or systems, they must first develop the ability to regulate their own thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and responses under pressure. Throughout my career across multiple industries and global markets, I have learned that sustainable leadership is not built on constant output but on conscious awareness, resilience, and intentional action. Today, I lead through authenticity, courage, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to helping others rise sustainably.

What shift in your industry do you believe leaders are still underestimating?

I believe many leaders are underestimating the importance of neuroscience and behavioural science in shaping organisational performance. We are operating in an era where technology is advancing rapidly, yet human behaviour remains the greatest variable in success or failure. Many organisations invest heavily in systems, AI, and processes while overlooking the cognitive and emotional patterns driving decision-making, adaptability, and culture. The future of leadership is not simply about digital transformation; it is about human transformation. Leaders who understand how the brain influences behaviour, resilience, trust, and performance will have a significant advantage in navigating complexity and sustaining high-performing teams.

How do you see your role as a leader extending beyond your organisation?

I see leadership as a responsibility that extends far beyond the boundaries of an organisation. I believe organisations do not change because strategies change; they change because people change. By helping leaders develop greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, and conscious decision-making, I hope to contribute to stronger businesses, healthier workplaces, and more resilient communities.

Walk us through the moment that proved to be the making of Practice Vision.

One of the most defining moments was launching Practice Vision during a period when uncertainty was affecting organisations globally. Rather than retreat, I leaned into the challenge and refined my vision around neuroscience-led transformation. The experience forced me to become clearer about our purpose, value proposition, and long-term impact. It taught me that adversity often reveals what truly matters and that resilience is not about avoiding challenges but growing because of them.

How has your approach to talent and culture contributed to Practice Vision's resilience?

I believe people thrive when they are trusted, respected, and given opportunities to grow. My approach to culture focuses on creating psychological safety while maintaining accountability and high standards. By fostering a culture grounded in purpose, inclusion, and shared responsibility, we have built resilience through change and uncertainty. Strong cultures are not created during easy times; they are revealed during difficult times and strengthened through intentional leadership.

What is the ambition you are building towards?

My ambition is to advance a global movement towards regenerative leadership, a leadership that creates value not only for organisations but also for people, communities, and future generations. For our industry to move forward collectively, we must shift beyond traditional leadership models focused solely on productivity and outcomes.

We need to embrace leadership as a human capability that can be intentionally developed, measured, and sustained through neuroscience, behavioural science, and conscious leadership practices.

What is the one message you want Business Frontier readers to take from your work?

One message I consistently share is that people are rarely stuck; they are patterned. Many of the limitations we experience in leadership, business, and life are driven by learned behaviours, assumptions, and beliefs that can be challenged and rewired.

Leadership is not about perfection. It is about having the courage to choose differently, especially when the path is uncertain. After all, not making a choice is still a choice, and growth begins the moment we decide to step through a different door.

> **The future of leadership is not simply about digital transformation; it is about human transformation**

THE FINANCIAL ARCHITECT BEHIND ZIM LABORATORIES' GLOBAL GROWTH

For more than three decades, **Zulfiquar Kamal** has helped shape the financial and strategic foundation of ZIM Laboratories Limited. As Director of Finance and part of the company's founding leadership team, he has played a pivotal role in transforming ZIM from a regional pharmaceutical venture into a globally recognised research-driven organisation operating across more than 50 countries.

Few leaders understand the intersection of finance, innovation, and business transformation as deeply as Zulfiquar Kamal. A Chartered Accountant with over three decades of experience in corporate finance, treasury management, internal controls, and performance management, Kamal has been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of ZIM Laboratories since its formative years.

His fascination with finance began early. Growing up in a business-oriented family, he witnessed firsthand how sound financial decisions could determine the success of an enterprise. Inspired by those experiences, he pursued a career in chartered accountancy before joining the pharmaceutical sector, where he found an opportunity to combine commercial acumen with long-term value creation.

Today, his vision remains clear: to build a financially robust organization driven by operational efficiency, technological advancement, and uncompromising ethical standards.

Leading Innovation with Financial Discipline

As pharmaceutical companies face increasing pressure to innovate while maintaining profitability, Kamal believes sustainable growth begins with strong financial foundations.

At ZIM Laboratories, this philosophy has guided major investments in research and development, manufacturing infrastructure, and proprietary drug delivery technologies. Under his financial leadership, the company has expanded its portfolio of differentiated value-added generics while strengthening its global footprint across regulated and emerging markets. His approach combines disciplined financial management with a willingness to invest in innovation. Through strategic risk management, careful capital allocation, and extensive market analysis, he ensures that innovation is pursued without compromising long-term stability. "Financial excellence is not about controlling growth," he explains. "It is about creating the foundation that allows innovation to thrive responsibly."

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Throughout his career, one recurring challenge has been implementing strong financial governance within a rapidly evolving business environment.

Early on, Kamal recognized that compliance and structured financial processes were often viewed as obstacles rather than enablers of growth. Over time, he helped foster a culture where regulatory compliance, transparency, and accountability became integral to business success. His belief that regulations are designed to strengthen organizations rather than hinder them has shaped many of ZIM's transformation initiatives, from process improvements and integrated systems to international expansion strategies. That mindset proved especially valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. As supply chains faced unprecedented disruption and pharmaceutical demand surged, ZIM was tasked with ensuring uninterrupted access to essential medicines while protecting employee well-being. Despite challenges ranging from logistics disruptions to workforce constraints, the company maintained operational continuity through agility, collaboration, and proactive planning. For Kamal, the experience reinforced the importance of resilience, adaptability, and collective leadership during periods of uncertainty.

Building High-Performance Teams

Beyond finance, Kamal places significant emphasis on people and culture.

He believes leadership is ultimately about creating an environment where individuals can contribute their best work while remaining aligned with organizational goals.

His leadership philosophy centres on clear communication, empowerment, trust, and continuous learning.

By investing in employee development and encouraging collaboration across functions, he has helped cultivate a culture that balances accountability with innovation.

Equally important is maintaining work-life balance. Kamal views employee well-being as a strategic advantage, recognising that sustainable performance depends on people feeling supported, motivated, and engaged.

He also encourages emerging leaders to focus on emotional intelligence alongside technical expertise. In his view, understanding people is just as important as understanding numbers.

Looking Ahead

As the pharmaceutical industry continues to evolve, Kamal remains focused on preparing ZIM Laboratories for the future through innovation, technology adoption, and strategic expansion.

Whether through strengthening global partnerships, investing in advanced drug delivery systems, or building the next generation of finance leaders, his goal is to leave behind a legacy defined by financial stewardship, ethical governance, and sustainable growth.

For aspiring finance professionals, his advice is simple: remain agile, stay curious, and never lose sight of the bigger picture. Success, he believes, comes from balancing discipline with innovation, while ensuring that every decision creates long-term value for the organization and the people it serves.

BUSINESS FRONTIER

"Future leaders should focus on strengthening their emotional intelligence as much as their financial expertise. Great leadership is ultimately about enabling people to perform at their best."

WHY UAE CONSUMERS ARE NO LONGER CHOOSING BETWEEN EVS AND PETROL CARS

Mohamed Elzawawy, General Manager at Performance Plus Motors, has watched the UAE automotive market shift in real time, and what he is seeing challenges the assumption that electric and petrol vehicles are in competition at all.

For much of the past decade, the conversation around automotive electrification has been presented as a choice between two competing technologies: electric vehicles or traditional internal combustion engines. Today, however, the market is beginning to move beyond that debate.

Beyond the Power Source

Across the UAE, consumers are increasingly approaching mobility from a different perspective. Rather than focusing solely on what powers a vehicle, many buyers are asking a more practical question: how well does it fit their lifestyle? This shift reflects the growing maturity of the UAE automotive market. Consumers are becoming more informed, more research-driven, and more focused on the overall ownership experience. Sustainability remains an important consideration, but convenience, flexibility, long-distance capability, and confidence behind the wheel continue to play a significant role in purchasing decisions.

As electrified mobility becomes more mainstream in the UAE, the conversation is also evolving. The first wave of adoption was often driven by early adopters attracted to new technology and innovation. Today's buyers are increasingly looking beyond the technology itself and focusing on how it performs in everyday life. The country has made significant progress in supporting the transition towards electrified mobility, while also presenting a unique set of driving requirements. Inter-emirate travel is a routine part of daily life for many residents, while longer journeys across the wider GCC remain common for both business and leisure travellers. These realities shape how consumers think about vehicle ownership and influence the level of flexibility they expect from their vehicles.

Built for the Region's Driving Realities

At the same time, the UAE continues to accelerate its investment in sustainable transportation infrastructure. Public charging networks have expanded significantly in recent years, with approximately 2,000 charging points now available nationwide. Continued investment from government entities and private sector operators is further strengthening the charging ecosystem and supporting the country's broader sustainability ambitions and Net Zero 2050 objectives.

This progress is helping to build consumer confidence in electrified mobility. Yet, infrastructure growth alone does not fully explain the changing preferences we are seeing across the market. Increasingly, the discussion is shifting from whether consumers can adopt electrified mobility to how they want to experience it.

For many drivers, the decision is no longer simply about reducing emissions or adopting the latest technology. It is about finding a solution that delivers the environmental and performance benefits of electrification while maintaining the flexibility and confidence traditionally associated with conventional vehicles.

"For many drivers, the decision is no longer simply about reducing emissions or adopting the latest technology"

The Case for Extended Range

This is one of the key reasons why Extended Range Electric Vehicles (EREVs) are attracting growing attention globally and increasingly within markets such as the UAE.

EREVs offer a different approach to electrification. By using electric motors to drive the vehicle while incorporating a range-extending generator to recharge the battery when required, they provide an experience that delivers the characteristics of electric mobility while reducing concerns around charging availability and long-distance travel.

Rather than asking drivers to choose between electric mobility and everyday practicality, EREV technology brings both together. It provides a pathway towards electrification that aligns closely with the realities of how many consumers live, work, and travel today. This approach reflects a broader trend taking shape across the automotive industry. The future of mobility is unlikely to be defined by a single technology or a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it will be shaped by technologies that offer consumers greater choice, greater flexibility, and a smoother transition towards more sustainable transportation.

A Market Shaped by Choice, Not Compromise

The UAE has consistently positioned itself as a global leader in embracing innovation that delivers tangible everyday benefits. From renewable energy and smart infrastructure to digital government services, the country's success has often come from adopting technologies that improve the quality of life while supporting long-term economic and sustainability goals.

The next phase of automotive electrification is likely to follow a similar path. The future of mobility will not be defined by a single approach. Instead, it will be shaped by solutions that offer consumers greater choice, greater flexibility, and a smoother transition towards more sustainable transportation.

The growing interest in EREVs highlights an important reality: UAE consumers are no longer choosing between electric and petrol-powered vehicles. They are increasingly choosing solutions that combine the advantages of both, reflecting a broader shift towards practical, consumer-led innovation in the automotive sector.

As the market continues to evolve, the most successful mobility technologies will be those that align sustainability with everyday usability, making the transition to cleaner transportation not only possible but seamless.

The views expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of Business Frontier

HOW TIMES SQUARE CENTER TURNS SUSTAINABILITY INTO PROFIT

At Dubai's Times Square Center, General Manager **Nancy Nese Ozbek** explains how sustainability has evolved from a branding message into a measurable driver of tenant retention, footfall, and long-term commercial value.

> *To move from green PR to green profit, sustainability must be real, practical, and measurable*

Sustainability in retail is undergoing a major shift. What was once viewed as a branding message or corporate responsibility initiative is increasingly becoming a commercial necessity for malls, tenants, and consumers alike. At Times Square Center, Dubai, this transition has been years in the making. According to Nancy Nese Ozbek, General Manager, Sharaf Group Mall Division, the centre began placing sustainability, education, healthy lifestyle, and community at the heart of its strategy around 2019, long before these themes became dominant expectations in the regional retail landscape.

For Ozbek, the conversation has clearly moved beyond surface-level communication. "Sustainability has clearly moved beyond branding," says Ozbek, adding that "in the beginning, many people saw it mainly as marketing or corporate responsibility. At Times Square Center, we looked at it differently."

Sustainability as a Driver of Tenant Retention

Today, tenants are assessing green retail environments through a business lens. They are not only asking whether a mall has sustainability credentials, but whether the destination attracts the right visitors, supports their brand values, increases dwell time, reduces long-term operating pressure, and creates stronger customer loyalty. Ozbek believes this directly influences tenant retention.

"Today, tenants evaluate sustainability commercially. They ask whether the destination attracts the right visitors, increases dwell time, supports their brand values, reduces long-term operating pressure, and creates loyalty," she explains.

At Times Square Center, Picnic Square stands as a key example of this approach. The space achieved LEED Green Project certification and was designed with energy efficiency, natural materials, greenery, comfortable seating, biophilic elements, and organic waste collection from tenants. This waste is then recycled into plant food and hydration, reinforcing the centre's circular approach to operations.

For retail destinations, such initiatives create value by improving the visitor experience. When customers feel comfortable, they stay longer, dine more, meet friends, attend events, and return. This, in turn, supports tenant performance and long-term retention.

Purpose-Led Footfall and Conscious Consumers

Consumers today are more conscious about where they spend their money and which destinations reflect their values

Across the UAE and wider GCC, consumers are becoming more aware of ethical consumption and environmental impact. Ozbek says this shift is already influencing customer loyalty, footfall patterns, and spending behaviour within retail destinations. "Consumers today are more conscious about where they spend their money and which destinations reflect their values. They are not only asking what they are buying, but also who they are supporting and whether that place feels responsible, healthy, and authentic," she says.

Times Square Center has responded by building a tenant and partner ecosystem that reflects these values. ARTE brings handmade products and local artisans into the centre, while Ripe Market introduces community-focused merchants. Baby Bazaar supports pre-loved shopping, and House of Prose, a second-hand bookstore, reflects the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle in an accessible and well-loved format. The centre also highlights Thrift for Good, a charity thrift shop that rehomes preloved items to reduce waste while supporting children around the world.

According to Ozbek, these concepts generate purpose-led footfall. Visitors come for markets, books, workshops, family activities, and conscious shopping, then stay longer, dine, shop, and return.

Moving from Communication to Measurable Impact

In a competitive retail environment shaped by economic uncertainty and changing customer priorities, sustainability must be practical, visible, and measurable.

"To move from green PR to green profit, sustainability must be real, practical, and measurable. It cannot be only a poster, campaign or social media message. It must be visible in operations, design, tenant partnerships, waste management, energy efficiency, events, and customer experience," Ozbek says.

At Times Square Center, this means making sustainability hands-on. Recycling, for example, is not presented only as a collection exercise. Families and children are shown how plastic can be washed, turned into flakes, transformed into yarn, and used again for products such as bags, shoes, or sportswear. The centre also integrates upcycling, planting, repair activities, LED lighting, daylight, ergonomic seating, and sustainable materials into its wider operations and experiences.

For Ozbek, measurement is key to ensuring these initiatives deliver commercial value. Energy savings, dwell time, event participation, tenant satisfaction, renewals, and customer return visits all help position sustainability as a business strategy rather than a communication tool.

A New Landlord-Tenant Relationship

Ozbek has also seen growing demand from brands and retailers for environmentally responsible spaces, operations, and partnerships. Tenants increasingly understand that their own brand is connected to the destination they operate in. This has changed what tenants expect from retail operators. Recycling support, energy-conscious common areas, sustainable fit-out thinking, waste management, health and wellness events, family engagement, and meaningful community activations are becoming increasingly important. "It becomes a partnership based on shared values, trust, and long-term thinking," she says.

Defining the Future of GCC Retail

Looking ahead, Ozbek believes sustainability will become one of the defining differentiators for successful retail destinations across the GCC. "If sustainability can differentiate Times Square Center, then it can absolutely differentiate the wider retail market," she says.

Ozbek believes successful malls will no longer be judged only by size, location, or tenant mix. Instead, they will be evaluated by comfort, community, health, education, responsibility, authenticity, and the way they make people feel. As she concludes, she says, "Retention is not only about rent. It is about trust, shared values, stronger footfall, better customer experience, and the belief that the center is helping the tenant's business grow in a healthier and more future-ready way."

HOW GEOFFROY VAN RAEMDONCK STEERED SAKS GLOBAL THROUGH BANKRUPTCY

Six months after returning to lead Saks Global through a leadership crisis, **Geoffroy van Raemdonck** has taken the company through Chapter 11, cut its debt by nearly 75%, and re-emerged as Exemplar Luxury Group.

In January 2026, Saks Global underwent a significant leadership change. Richard Baker, who had led the company's $2.7 billion acquisition of Neiman Marcus Group, stepped down as Executive Chairman and CEO. Geoffroy van Raemdonck, the former CEO of Neiman Marcus Group, returned to the organisation to take on the role, a position he now holds as Chief Executive Officer of Exemplar Luxury Group. Six months on, the company has restructured through bankruptcy and re-emerged under a new name.

A Merger Under Financial Pressure

Saks Global was formed in 2024 when Baker led the acquisition of Neiman Marcus Group and Bergdorf Goodman, bringing the two luxury retail names together under one company. The combined business carried significant debt at a time when global luxury sales were slowing, which created pressure on vendor payments and inventory levels. By the quarter ended August 2025, revenue had declined 13 percent. Baker had taken the CEO title on January 2, 2026, succeeding Marc Metrick, who had led the company since its formation. Baker's tenure in the role lasted less than two weeks before van Raemdonck stepped in.

Van Raemdonck was a familiar figure to the board. He had served as CEO of Neiman Marcus Group from 2018 to 2024, leading the retailer through a pandemic-era Chapter 11 restructuring and returning it to profitability within four months, before departing following the Saks acquisition. He also brings experience from senior roles at Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren. Board member Paul Aronzon described the appointment as a step toward stability, citing his "proven track record driving transformative growth" and his ability to build "trusted relationships within these organizations and throughout the industry."

Bankruptcy, Financing, and a New Name

On the same day his appointment was announced, Saks Global filed for Chapter 11 protection in the US Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas, securing a $1.75 billion financing package, comprising $1.5 billion from senior secured bondholders and roughly $240 million in incremental liquidity from asset-based lenders. Van Raemdonck brought several former Neiman Marcus colleagues onto the leadership team, including Brandy Richardson as CFO, Darcy Penick as President and Chief Commercial Officer, and Lana Todorovich as Chief of Global Brand Partnerships.

A key early priority was rebuilding vendor relationships, several of whom had paused shipments amid delayed payments. Within weeks, van Raemdonck reported that more than 380 brands had resumed shipping, releasing approximately $1.2 billion in retail receipts, with inventory flow continuing to improve.

The restructuring concluded with strong creditor support for a plan that reduced debt by nearly 75 percent and transferred ownership to senior lenders Pentwater Capital Management and Bracebridge Capital. The company emerged from bankruptcy under a new name, Exemplar Luxury Group, with van Raemdonck joining a reconstituted seven-member board alongside independent directors Dave Kimbell, former CEO of Ulta Beauty, and Philippe Schaus, former global CEO of Moët Hennessy.

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