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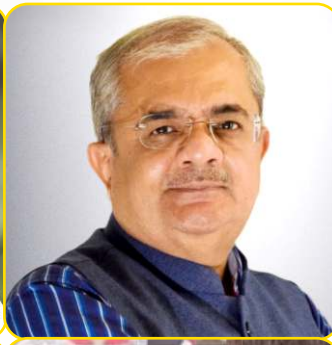


Punita Sharma Arora



Dr. Yogesh Misra

NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE



The Story Behind This Issue

Navigating the Unthinkable



There was a time when the unthinkable happened once in a generation, if then.

Today, uncertainty is endemic.

Wars erupt where peace prevailed. Political and economic landscapes shift overnight. Climate disasters are frequent. Technology transforms the way we live and work faster than we can absorb it. We are surrounded by disruption...

Management thinkers have tried to make sense of our changing world through frameworks such as VUCA, BANI and, more recently, PUMO. The terminology has evolved, but the human challenge remains the same: how do we navigate the unthinkable?

Sometimes I wonder whether we've become like the proverbial frog in slowly heating water - adapting so gradually that we no longer recognise just how extraordinary these times really are.

Yet history reminds us of another truth.

Human beings have an extraordinary capacity to adapt.

Not because we are fearless, but because somewhere within us lies a reserve of courage we often don't discover until life leaves us with no choice.

I learnt that lesson during the global financial crisis of 2008. At the time, I was in a corporate role. One day I was holding purchase orders worth several crores. The next, the business had simply disappeared. Almost overnight, certainty gave way to anxiety. I spent months wondering what came next before finding the courage to leave.

Looking back, I realise I wasn't walking away from a career. I was walking towards something I couldn't yet see.



The idea that would become Fulki was still only a tiny seed. But once planted, it didn't take long to take root.

That experience taught me something I have never forgotten. When one door closes, another opens.

We celebrate success stories and remember victories. Far less often do we hear about the uncertainties that came before them. The sleepless nights and the impossible decisions, the courage it took to persevere, to walk away or begin again.

That is what makes this issue of *Fulki Unplugged* so special.

Our contributors have done something incredibly generous. They have opened the doors to some of the most vulnerable chapters of their lives, which isn't easy. We remember the choices that worked, but rarely revisit the fears and failures that shaped those choices.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

But that is what makes us human.

Akansha Arora reminds us that success means little if we lose sight of what truly deserves our time. **Falguni Gokhale** shows how resilience is built through reinvention, creativity and the courage to begin again, time after time. **Jai Singh Yadav** discovers that true adaptability is not about fitting in, but about allowing yourself to change.

Manjit Singh reflects on leading through personal loss and organisational crises, revealing that Sewa often becomes our greatest source of strength. **Pooja Marwah** explores how transitions across industries and roles become opportunities to rethink leadership itself. **Punita Sharma Arora** shares an extraordinary journey of conviction, proving that uncertainty can become the foundation for purpose, innovation and lasting impact.



Rashmi Govil reminds us that leadership reveals itself not when life is predictable, but when everything changes without warning.

Ruchi Mago reflects on the quiet disruptions that reshape us from within, teaching us to ask for help, let go of perfection and lead with greater consciousness. And **Dr. Yogesh Misra** takes us through one of life's deepest losses, showing us that resilience is not found before adversity arrives; it is built one difficult day at a time.

Each story is different. Yet together they reveal a powerful truth.

None of us can prepare for everything life will bring.

But all of us can strengthen the muscle that helps us navigate it.

Perhaps that is what courage really is... not control, and certainly not the absence of fear. It is the decision to keep moving forward, to trust ourselves, and to discover meaning even in life's most unexpected chapters.

To every contributor, thank you for trusting us with your stories, your honesty and your courage.

And to our readers... as you browse the stories, my hope is that somewhere within these pages, you find a story that feels familiar or a lesson that offers perspective.

The frog in the boiling water doesn't have much choice. But as humans, if we are conscious of what's happening around us, we can learn to develop a thicker skin, or jump out of the water!

Here's to finding courage in life's unexpected chapters.

Anuradha Sharma

Editor, Fulki Unplugged

Founder & CEO

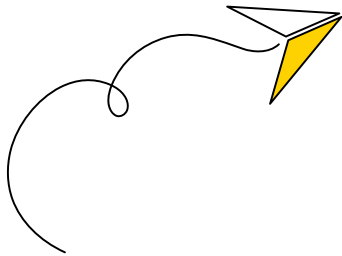
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The Last One There

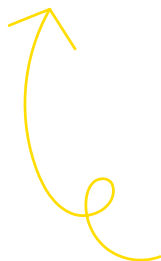
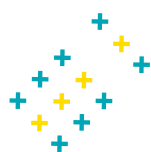
Akansha Arora

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The Air Force School, Subroto Park, had a way of making time matter. Not clock time, but the kind of time that accumulates inside an institution and becomes indistinguishable from its history and expectations.



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Jagriti House had not won the annual sports cup in thirteen years. I had been in that school since kindergarten. Jagriti's thirteen years and my entire school life were the same span of time, which meant the wait was mine too.

I was not a natural athlete. But I showed up. Every session, every rehearsal, without exception. I led the Jagriti contingent as captain that day, the house flag carried in my hands across every step of the march past. When the result was announced and it was ours, I stood there still holding it, not quite ready to move. Then the house master came running toward us and pulled us into a hug, his eyes misty.

I was fifteen, and I felt something move in me that I couldn't name: the particular sensation of having given your time to something that turned out to matter to people beyond yourself.

My father had understood it his whole life without needing to name it either. Time, for him, was the most honest thing a person could offer. If something was at eight, you left at seven-fifteen. Arriving late told people how much you thought they were worth.

I remember going to a wedding with him once. The card said 8 pm. We reached at 8:30 and were the first ones there. The hosts hadn't arrived. He said nothing on the drive back. The silence was the lesson.

These two teachers, the house master whose eyes went misty over a march past, and my father who arrived at weddings before the hosts, were teaching the same thing in different ways. I carried it into my working life as though it were a simple truth.

I joined Grow Talent in 2003. Over the next two decades, through consulting and leadership roles at Grow Talent, Right Management and Yum!, I gave organisations the same commitment I had once given Jagriti House. Fully present, over long hours and the same refusal to do anything by half. Building culture, capability and systems became work I deeply believed in.

It was during these years that a leadership programme offered feedback I wasn't ready for. A dear friend looked me in the eye and told me I didn't take time to celebrate my wins, that I moved on before anything had landed. Others nodded. I sat with it and felt not defensiveness but genuine confusion.

Move on to what, I kept thinking. There is always something next.

The answer arrived unexpectedly through Udayan Care. They came to Yum! one afternoon for a CSR event, and something in that encounter didn't close when the day did. I started volunteering, first occasionally and then more deeply, helping build their HR systems and culture.

What the Udayan Saturdays gave me was this: there was nothing coming back, no career return, no legacy being built in any legible sense. Just time, given because the children and the people who cared for them deserved it.

Long before life confronted me with the unexpected, Udayan had begun changing my understanding of success. I was learning, slowly, the difference between showing up and being present.

**I felt
something
move in me
that I couldn't
name:**

**the sensation of
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time to something
that turned out to
matter more to
other people.**



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

Around the same time, Yum! went through a significant restructuring. For nearly three years, I was deeply involved in navigating the human side of change. One conversation from that period has never left me.

A young man in Chennai, whose role was ending, sat across from me with remarkable composure. Near the end, almost apologetically, he mentioned that his six-month-old daughter needed heart surgery. He asked whether his insurance could be extended through the transition.

I went back into the system, through the policy and into the conversations that needed to happen. By the end of the day, there was a path, imperfect but real.

What stayed with me was not that I had found a solution, but how close I had come to not looking for one. What that conversation was asking was whether the most important thing in the room had been the system I was navigating or the person sitting across from me.

That question stayed with me. It eventually led me to INSEAD and the EMCCC programme, not as another qualification, but as a deeper encounter with change and with myself.

Then came Choti Diwali, 2019.

I was in a meeting when my father-in-law suffered a heart attack. I missed the first call. By the time I reached the hospital, everyone was already there. Extended family had gathered in that particular way outside hospital corridors, the solemn cluster that forms when something serious has happened and the initial shock has already passed through the room before you arrived.

My father-in-law recovered. My son, who had been with him, was shaken but fine. Both were okay.

And yet I stood in that corridor unable to move past a simple fact - I was the last one there.

Because I had been at work, and work had felt, as it always did, like something you could not step away from mid-task. Nobody said anything to me. Nobody needed to.

But as I stood there on that Diwali night, I realised I was not alone. The young father in Chennai. The Saturdays at Udayan. My father's lessons about time. They were all standing with me in that corridor.

And the question they were waiting to ask was something my father could never have prepared me for. 'Time is the most honest thing you can offer. But honest to whom, and for what?'

What followed is still unfolding. Consulting continued... Coaching, NGO work and advisory roles. Doctoral work studying the unconscious life of systems and why change so often fails where it most needs to succeed.

But I understand myself differently now. I am now moving towards something closer to being the human in the room: present, unhurried, giving time because the person across from me deserves it rather than because the engagement demands it. I now understand life given only to work, however meaningful the work, is a life that has been arriving late to everything else.

Navigating the unthinkable rarely begins with catastrophe. Sometimes it begins with a question we never imagined needing to ask.

Standing outside that hospital on Choti Diwali, last to arrive, fireworks in the distance, I finally understood that the hardest part is not simply showing up on time. It is knowing what deserves our time, and having the discipline to give ourselves fully to all of it: the work, the people and the life that holds everything else together.



**That's
not nothing.**

**That, I think,
is where it actually starts.**



Think Happens

Finding Steadiness, Clarity and Reinvention when the Unthinkable Happens

Falguni Gokhale

Director, Visual Communication
Design Directions Pvt. Ltd.,

If anyone had asked me in Class 8 or 9 what I wanted to become, I would have replied without hesitation: "I want to illustrate books for children." Because, if there was one thing I knew I could do, it was draw.

In those days, such an answer was hardly likely to reassure a traditional Gujarati family.



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NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

Art and design were viewed as uncertain choices, somewhere between indulgence and rebellion. But since I was already regarded as mildly rebellious, my parents did something that I now see as leadership in its gentlest form: they allowed me to find my own way. Sometimes what parents give us is not a plan, but the freedom to find our own way.

So I studied design at a time when very few people understood what design was, let alone what it could do for industry. At the design school, I met my husband. I studied visual communication, while he studied product design, and together we stepped into a future that neither of us nor the country fully knew.

At design school, I also discovered that I liked animation and wanted to do my final project in that area - but I was told I did not have the technical grounding for it. The easy path would have been to accept their verdict and stayed within the approved boundaries. But I begged them to let me do the final project in animation. The institute, to its credit, responded not by shutting the door, but by creating a six-month course especially for me.

That was my first important leadership lesson in action: institutions, like people, are at their best when they can respond to conviction with flexibility.

I went on to do my final project with Doordarshan in Delhi on a 13-episode children's programme using puppetry, animation and live action to teach concepts of literacy. It was imaginative, meaningful work, and I loved it. Then the unthinkable happened. Indian television changed dramatically as private and foreign channels entered the landscape. Our project was shelved and something that I had poured myself into, simply disappeared.



That experience taught me a lesson that would return many times over in my life: good work does not always survive changing systems and life is not only about creating. It is also about absorbing loss without becoming bitter and carrying forward the learning even when the original dream does not reach its destination.

This experience also taught me that having trust in myself and my ideas could translate to success even when others could not see it. So, I returned to Pune and my husband left a stable job in an automobile company to start our studio, Design Directions Pvt. Ltd., with a combination of courage and uncertainty.

At that time, Pune was not the design-aware city it now is. Despite being home to many engineering companies, there was little understanding of product design, communication design, or the value either could bring to business. We often had to explain what design was, before we could begin discussing a project. We were not just looking for clients; we were helping create the market while seeking some meaningful and paying work.

That phase taught us that you do not always walk into opportunity. Sometimes you must educate people into seeing it.



At the same time, we were trying to start a family while keeping our young studio afloat. Work was uncertain in the beginning. My husband had very little work at first, and whatever came his way did not challenge him enough. What sustained us was the work I had. In Pune, communication design was still loosely grouped under “commercial art,” but it did bring in branding, packaging, and marketing brochure assignments. This helped keep the studio alive.

At that time, there were no computers. My husband would help me by preparing my artworks for print with astonishing precision, while cheerfully singing gloriously off-key. With a very small staff, a great deal of coordination, and a fair amount of off-tune background music, we somehow managed to stay afloat.

When our child was born, it would break my heart that I had to travel to Delhi regularly for four or five days at a stretch, leaving behind my baby and a fledgling business.

When I think back on those years, I realise being resilient was not anything grand. It was in managing the practical mess, the emotional strain, and the constant teamwork needed to keep everything going. Resilience was built day by day, in simply showing up and doing what had to be done. Not to mention coping with the off-tune singing!



The 1990s brought economic liberalisation, and with it, a major disruption in India’s business environment. Markets opened up, competition increased, foreign brands entered, and Indian companies could no longer afford to ignore design, quality and branding. What had once seemed like a niche capability suddenly became strategically important.

While this disruption unsettled many, it created an opening for those who could adapt.

That was our turning point.

We rose to that moment. We worked with engineering companies and consumer businesses. We designed everything from a logo to a knife to machine cladding to a weir dam. We worked on many and varied projects in those days, which taught me that leadership in design is not about sticking to a single style. It is about adapting and applying what we know across very different contexts. We get to work broadly without losing clarity, purpose, or focus on the needs of the end consumer.

The market churn did push us to think differently. It forced us out of comfortable categories. It demanded innovation rooted not in novelty for its own sake. Some of that work was recognised with design awards, but more importantly, it established our studio as a place that could think beyond the obvious.

Then, just as we had become comfortable in one era, the next disruption arrived: the digital boom.

Suddenly the world shifted from physical products and electro-mechanical products to screens, interfaces, and digital systems. We had to learn how people interacted with such products, processes and information when so much of it moved inside a screen. We had to become students again.

This is one of the hardest learnings - not holding on to expertise as identity but rather letting expertise evolve. Reinvention asks us to give up the comfort of mastery and enter the discomfort of learning again.



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That willingness helped us move into new sectors, including healthcare. We designed an innovative inhaler for a leading pharmaceutical company. The product itself did not go to market because the molecule carrying the medicine was not effective. On paper, that might be called failure. In reality, it became the beginning of a long relationship. The company saw our ability to think differently and trusted us with future work.

We have learnt that not every project must succeed for trust to deepen. Sometimes the quality of thought matters more than the outcome. People remember sincerity, originality, and integrity.

Over time, our work expanded into unusual and demanding areas. One project for the control room of a refinery in Jamnagar required us to represent the situational awareness of the vast and complex refinery plant. Another, a water filter using silver nanoparticles and no electricity. Both went on to win national awards and an international award.

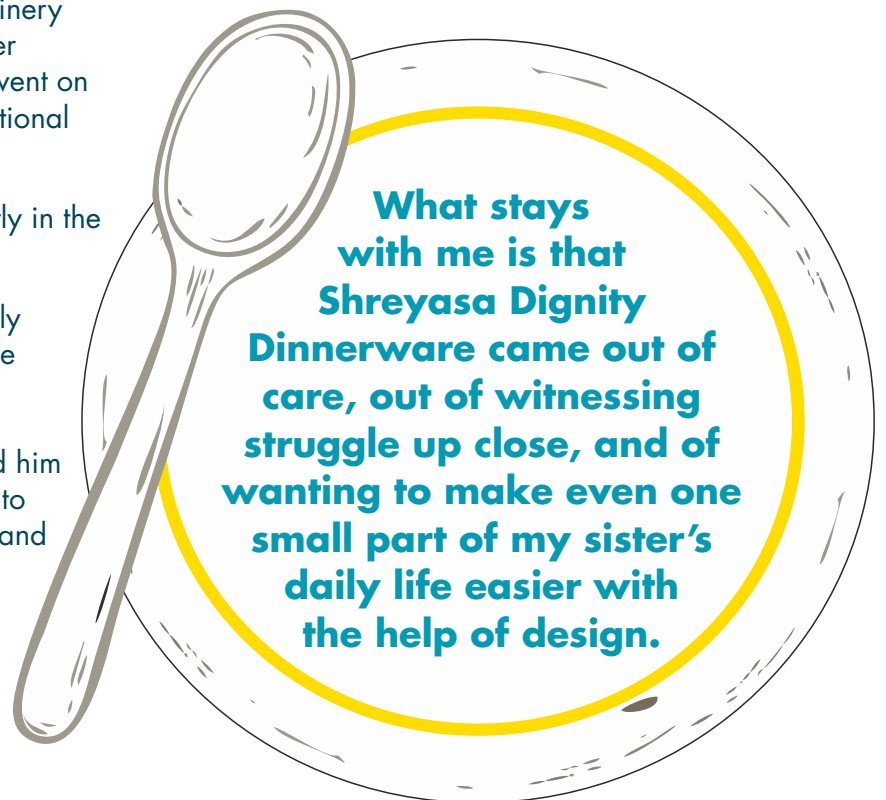
But disruption in life does not stay neatly in the professional lane.

After Class 10, our only son was deeply unsure about what he wanted to do. He was bright enough to choose almost anything, which can sometimes make choosing even harder. We encouraged him to take a gap year. At fifteen, he went to Hong Kong on an exchange program and lived with a host family for a year. We struggled internally, with the idea of letting our only baby spend a year away from us outside the formula for success everyone we knew had taken – staying in school.

For him, it was a leap into the unknown. For us, it was an exercise in letting go while imagining every disaster the mind can manufacture. But it transformed him. He returned with clarity and independence, certain that he wanted to become a molecular genetic scientist.

That experience taught me parenting is trusting growth enough, to allow discomfort.

A far more painful disruption came when my younger sister was diagnosed with ALS, a devastating neurodegenerative disease with no cure. She stayed with me for periods of time, and we did what we could. But ALS is relentless. Living through that experience gave us a close understanding of what loss of motor function does to dignity in everyday life. Out of this came Shreyasa Dignity Dinnerware, designed to help a person eat from a specially designed plate and a bowl with dignity and confidence. It went on to win a design award, but that is not what stays with me. What stays with me is that it came out of care, out of witnessing struggle up close, and of wanting to make even one small part of her daily life easier with the help of design.



During COVID, I worked extensively on communication for a leading Pune hospital and realised how meaningful I found it. It was direct, human and needed. At the same time, I was also caring for my ageing parents and my mother-in-law, and I had to show up for them. Perhaps that was also why the work felt so deeply personal. Today, I continue on retainer with the hospital and with a few other companies.

And alongside all this, I found my way back to my first love. I have now written, illustrated and published at least fifteen children's books.

Our studio continues to do remarkable work under my husband's leadership, and I remain involved where needed, but I have also

stepped away to wear my own smaller (but zany!) hat and take on only the work that truly interests me.

That, too, requires courage. Letting go of a long-held role is never easy. Financial anxieties whisper, and identity does not loosen its grip so readily. However, sometimes you simply know it is time to step into a different place, not out of defeat, but because it feels true. It surprised me, as it did many of my family, friends, and some clients, because everyone had always known me as a workaholic who genuinely loved her work and the extraordinary diversity it brought. This was most unthinkable.

So what did all this THUNK help me learn?

- Disruption is inevitable, but paralysis due to it is optional
- Persist and persevere with rational conviction
- Relearn when the world changes shape
- Steadiness to support loved ones
- Turn suffering into something useful
- Reinvent or return to yourself without apology



Projects will collapse. Industries will change. Children will leave. Illness will arrive. Roles will shift. Plans will fail.

And when disruption comes, we do not need to know everything. We only need to keep responding with courage, curiosity and care.

So for me resilience is adaptability.

That is how we endure.

And maybe, that is how we become more fully ourselves.

**When disruption comes,
we do not need to know
everything. We only
need to keep responding
with courage, curiosity
and care.**

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The Wanderer's Compass

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x x x
x x x
x x x

Finding Certainty in Times of Disruption

Jai Singh Yadav

Director, Growth & Innovation - HGS
MBA, University of Michigan

I looked around and thought, what was I doing here. Why had I done this to myself? Over 10,000 kilometers from home, in a place where I had no family and knew no one.

As I sat in the University of Michigan auditorium for my MBA's opening ceremony, I expected to feel joy, excitement and wonder. Instead, those feelings were buried under fear, apprehension and nostalgia.



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The Wanderer

I had always thought of myself as a wanderer. I was born in the northern mountains of India, moved around the country in my early years, and then to Singapore, where I spent my formative years. I understood its culture, its people and its norms. Ironically, I learnt about my own homeland from afar, through occasional visits.

When I moved back to India in my teens, I went straight into boarding school. It was a closed environment, but one that shaped me deeply. The friendships I built there were intense and lasting; they became more like brotherhoods.

From there, I moved to Mumbai for undergrad, and then to Gurgaon, where I spent the next 6–7 years, working. Over time, I grew into myself. I had to learn how to be social, how to make friends, how to communicate, how to build relationships. None of this came naturally to me. But by the time I reached Gurgaon, I had figured it out. I was confident, settled and comfortable in my environment. I had a career, a strong group of friends, a relationship, and I lived close to my family.

Life felt structured. Predictable. Controlled.

And because of my early experiences, I believed I was adaptable. I had moved countries, adjusted to new environments and cultures, traveled, studied abroad. I had done this before.

But in reality, I hadn't truly tested that belief in over a decade.

The desire to move never really left. A part of me still wanted to flex those wandering muscles again. So when the opportunity to pursue an MBA in the US came along, the decision felt logical.

The ROI made sense. The upside was clear. Better opportunities, exposure, and a different way of life. It wasn't an emotional decision. It was a calculated one. At least, that's what I told myself. In hindsight, parts of it were just the musings of a child dressed up as logic.

The Change

That certainty began to crack the moment I stepped into the airport.

As I looked back at my family, my girlfriend, and the life I was leaving behind, something shifted. The question was no longer whether I would succeed here, but whether I had made the right decision at all.

Real adaptability requires actually changing.

Be open to unlearning and reshaping parts of yourself to fit into a new environment.

For the first time, I wasn't thinking about outcomes. I was thinking about whether I would even be able to adapt.

I had always taken pride in being someone who could adjust to new environments. But the truth was, that the version of me that had adapted easily no longer existed in the same way. I had spent too long in systems I understood, in environments where I knew how to operate. And I had mistaken that familiarity for adaptability.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

Disruption

The first few weeks made that painfully clear.

Everything felt harder than expected. Making friends wasn't easy. Conversations felt different. The social cues I was used to didn't always apply. I had assumed that interacting with people from different backgrounds would come naturally to me. It didn't.



That's when I started to see the gap in my thinking. I had always believed adaptability meant being able to make people believe you fit in. Showing up confidently, saying the right things, navigating conversations well enough to appear comfortable.

But here, that didn't work.

Real adaptability required something else entirely. It required actually changing. Being open to unlearning and reshaping parts of yourself to fit into a new environment. Years ago, I hadn't faked my way through change, I had actually changed. Somewhere along the way, I had convinced myself that I could just perform my way through it again.

That illusion didn't hold up for long.

At home, things were no simpler. In India, most things were taken care of. Here, I had to do everything myself. Cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, managing a household. I knew this in theory, but the reality of it was very different. My initial instinct was to avoid it. Eat out, ignore the mess, deal with it later. But those small problems piled up quickly.



Then came the professional side.

I expected recruiting to be challenging, but I didn't expect it to feel so opaque. Opportunities depended heavily on networking, and the nuances of those conversations were difficult to grasp. Coming from a sales background, I assumed I would have an advantage. But nothing seemed to work.

I was putting in the effort, having conversations, reaching out constantly, and yet seeing little progress. It was frustrating because I couldn't tell what I was doing wrong.

That was perhaps the most unsettling part. Not failure, but not understanding why.



Adapting

Over time, things began to shift, but not in the way I expected.

Friendships took longer to form, but I started to understand why. Relationships here were built differently. They began more gradually, with clearer boundaries. Once I accepted that, I found myself appreciating it in ways I hadn't before.

In the beginning, I gravitated toward people who felt familiar, especially other Indians. At first, I saw that as a failure. I had come here to immerse myself in something new, and instead I found myself recreating a version of what I already knew.

But soon I realised that wasn't a step backward. It gave me a base, a sense of stability in an otherwise unfamiliar environment. From there, I could then push myself back into discomfort, into new conversations, new relationships, and new ways of thinking.

Soon after, I hit a breaking point with my health. Repeated allergic reactions from eating out forced me to take control of what I was eating. Cooking wasn't optional anymore. It was necessary. What started as a frustrating adjustment went terribly at first (and I'm sure we all remember the first time we almost burnt our kitchens down), but eventually something clicked. I realized this wasn't as hard as it seemed, and before I knew it, I was cooking most of my meals. My economies of scale started kicking in. (I'm sorry, but I'm still an MBA grad.)

Professionally, I had to confront my own assumptions. I reached out to seniors and alumni, something I should have done much earlier. I had gone in overconfident, believing I understood how to navigate people and conversations. That assumption didn't hold up.

The real shift came during one of my networking conversations. It wasn't going well. And in that moment, I realised that neither of us actually wanted to be there. It wasn't a meaningful interaction, just a forced one. That realisation changed how I approached everything after that. I became clearer about the roles I pursued and the conversations I had.

Earlier, I had approached networking almost like a numbers game. More interactions, more outreach, more effort. Once I started having discussions I actually cared about, with people I really wanted to learn from, my conversations started to feel easier and more genuine. And that, more than anything else, made the difference.

A Change in Mindset

Looking back, the biggest change was internal.

The way I communicate, the way I think about time, relationships, productivity, and even what I consider meaningful has shifted. Earlier, a lot of my decisions were driven by what I felt I needed to do. Now, they are more aligned with what I actually want to do.

My confidence took a hit in the beginning, but rebuilding it in a completely new environment made it more grounded.

At the same time, the outcome hasn't been as straightforward as I had once imagined. From a purely career and ROI perspective, the decision hasn't played out the way I expected. The job market and the unpredictability of the system mean that there is still a level of uncertainty I continue to live with.

But in a way, that's also the point.

I came here for a clear, measurable return. What I got instead was something far less predictable. A shift in how I see myself and the world around me.



I've experienced things I wouldn't have otherwise, from traveling across the country to exploring new parts of the world, from living in multiple cities to finding moments of stillness I hadn't actively sought before.

Three years ago, I thought I was at peace. Today, I realise that my definition of peace has changed. And maybe that understanding is still evolving. If I had to make the decision again, knowing everything I know now, I would. Definitely.

I didn't get exactly what I came for, but I also got something I didn't know I needed. And maybe that's what navigating uncertainty really looks like. Not always getting the outcomes you planned for, but becoming someone who can find meaning in the ones you didn't.

**Once I started having discussions
I actually cared about, with people
I really wanted to learn from, my
conversations started to feel easier
and more genuine. And that, more
than anything else, made the
difference.**





The Strategic Taan

Striking the Right Note in Times of Crisis

Manjit Singh

Chief People Officer,
SKH Group

Disruption doesn't knock politely—it crashes through like a sudden taan in Raag Maaru, that classical Indian raga I hold dear for its raw emotional pivot from tension to triumph.

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NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

In my 30+ years in HR, from my rookie days at ABB India—a global manufacturing giant—to my foray into BPO, pharma/medical devices, and chemicals, and now steering SKH Group's people strategy amid industrial turbulence, I've faced the unthinkable multiple times.

These weren't abstract VUCA scenarios; they were visceral, testing my character both personally and professionally. Yet, each forged resilience, reinvented my path, and deepened my commitment to Sewa—selfless service as the philosophy defining my professional purpose and personal existence.

At SKH, Sewa is not my pet phrase—it is the cultural heartbeat that defines my existence. It echoes the SKH Group Vice Chairman's vision of serving stakeholders selflessly, transforming duty into devotion.

Here's my story—moments that changed direction, key decisions, hard lessons, and advice for navigating chaos.

Moment 1

The Global Shutdown – Leading SKH Through COVID-19 Abyss

Professionally, the unthinkable hit in March 2020. SKH Group, a ₹3,000+ crore powerhouse in auto components, ground to a halt. Factories shuttered, supply chains snapped, and 5,000+ employees faced existential fears—job losses loomed as our customers' operations suspended. As Chief People Officer, I was thrust into leading our

response, aligning with SKH Vision's pillars of Innovation and Passion for People.

Guided by Sewa, I saw crisis as a call to serve without expectation. An early morning call from our Group Vice Chairman reinforced it:

"Manjit, keep our people safe and united no matter what." I chose reinvention through service. We launched a 360-degree safety program blending SOPs, mental health webinars, and wage guarantees for 90 days. Digitally, we accelerated our dependency on SKHEmerge.com to digitize employee lifecycle processes—specifically, touchless attendance via geotagging, onboarding, 1-2-1s and skip-level meetings via MS Teams, and live addresses by the Group Vice Chairman to all colleagues, along with workflow-based approvals impacting all staff.

Key Decision: Decentralize leadership with a Sewa lens. Along with my colleague, the Head of Industrial Relations at SKH, we empowered 15+ Plant HR/IR Managers to co-create localized resilience plans, fostering psychological safety. We tracked metrics via dashboards through thrice-a-week video calls: engagement scores rose 25, and attrition fell 15 percentage points during that period.

Lessons: Sewa transforms disruption—serving others dissolves self-doubt. Like Raag Maaru's slow build to ecstasy, selfless action creates harmony. Data showed 70% felt "psychologically safe," a Carkhuff coaching win (a model I was trained in at ABB India). Personally, it reaffirmed Sewa as my existence's anchor.



Moment 2

The Personal Storm – Reinventing After Loss

Personally, the unthinkable unfolded in **mid-January 2025**. My father, my lifelong mentor, my loudest cheerleader and a civil engineering veteran par excellence, passed suddenly. At 52, I had never experienced grief hitherto—it derailed me. Sleepless nights blurred into boardroom fog; a major project I was running faltered. This was BANI: Brittle health, Anxious family dynamics, Non-linear emotions, Incomprehensible loss.

Sewa became my lifeline—serving family and legacy pulled me through. Grief screamed “stay safe”; Sewa whispered “serve boldly.”

Key Decision: By November 2025, channelling loss into selfless impact. I embedded “wellness weaves” into SKH’s fabric—stress management via mindfulness (inspired by classical rhythm), and adaptive leadership training aligned to deliver on **Servant Leadership**. Our safety culture focus cut accidents and boosted retention via KPI-linked incentives.

Lessons: In personal storms, Sewa reorients us. I learned to “dance with ambiguity,” pausing to serve from the heart. Metrics validated it: Employee Engagement hit 79%. Father’s unspoken Sewa—his relentless work ethic (“Work is Worship”) and quiet sacrifices—lives on in my work.

Moment 3

Organisational Restructuring Amid Economic Uncertainty

When COVID-19 struck, SKH faced an unthinkable reality: 100 roles across 15+ plants had to be rationalised to ensure the group’s survival. As CPO, I stood at the epicentre of a polarised landscape - balancing boardroom imperatives with the human cost of every decision.

Navigating the Unthinkable: I facilitated intense, high-stakes sessions with SKH’s Top Leaders, anchoring every discussion in performance and behaviour data—but never losing sight of the person behind the metric. Each transition out of SKH was deliberated not as a cost-cut, but as a dignified passage, guided by Sewa’s service-first ethos. We ensured fair severance, outplacement support wherever possible, and transparent communication - because even in exit, dignity is non-negotiable.

That period tested not just our strategy, but our soul. And Sewa became the compass that kept us humane when the easy path would have been purely transactional.

Lessons: Reinvention demands Sewa-driven co-creation. Frameworks like VUCA diagnose, but service executes. One quote that anchored me: “In the orchestra of change, the conductor serves harmony, not applause.”

**Sewa is the
cultural heartbeat
that defines my
existence.**

**Disruption does not knock
politely—it crashes through
without warning.**



Wisdom Carried Forward: Three Pillars for Uncertain Times

These disruptions, illuminated by Sewa, shaped my leadership DNA. Here's advice rooted in selfless service:

- **Pause with Sewa (The Raag Reset):** Before reacting, attune to service—like Raag Maaru's mood. Ask: How can I serve here? Use dashboards for clarity (e.g., engagement KPIs).
- **Empower Through Service:** Leadership is selfless enabling. Build psychological safety via coaching and decentralization. At SKH, Sewa turned 5,000 individuals into a resilient force.
- **Measure, Metamorphose, Serve:** Track indicators—wellness scores, upskilling completion. Celebrate micro-wins; they ripple. Progress spirals upward when fuelled by Sewa.

In the orchestra of change, the conductor serves harmony, not applause.



Navigating Transitions

My Lessons from Uncertainty

Pooja Marwah

Global Head of Talent Management,
Bata Group

There are moments in a career when the journey stops following a neat, linear path, and what once felt familiar begins to feel uncertain.



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NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

The environment changes, the rules shift, and the leadership muscle that once felt steady is tested in entirely new ways. Looking back, I realise that my most defining growth did not come from periods of comfort, but from moments when I had to step into unfamiliar territory and learn how to lead without a ready-made playbook.

For me, disruption has not been defined by a single moment, but by a series of deliberate transitions across industries. Over the course of my career, I have moved from retail to FMCG, into PR, and then back into retail — each shift bringing with it a distinct context, pace, and way of operating. One of the most defining of these transitions was in 2021, when I moved into the retail space at Bata, which required me to rethink how I approached my role.

One of the first realisations I had was that expertise does not automatically translate across contexts. What drives effectiveness in one industry may not be sufficient in another. Moving into a new environment required me to navigate context differently, interpret nuance more carefully, and adapt my approach to a different culture and pace. It was a humbling experience, and at times unsettling, because I could no longer rely on what had worked before in the same way.

There is also a very real anxiety that comes with change, especially when the outcomes you are working toward take time to become visible. You do not step in and see impact within a few weeks or even a quarter. Instead, progress is gradual — built through small wins, consistent actions, and the ability to demonstrate steady intent even when the context around you is still evolving.

That, for me, was one of the most difficult parts: learning to be patient while continuing to stay visible, relevant, and effective.

One of the first actions I took was to immerse myself in understanding the business context. While I had earlier experience in retail, returning to it after time in PR and FMCG meant stepping into it with very different expectations from my role and how I was required to contribute. Returning to a familiar industry does not always mean returning to a familiar context. What had worked in FMCG, where HR operates within well-defined cycles, structured processes, and a more predictable way of working, did not translate directly. Retail operated with a different rhythm, more immediate, more consumer-driven, and far more dynamic in how decisions played out on the ground.

I had to engage more closely with stakeholders, understand how decisions were made in real time, and align talent priorities more tightly with business needs. This meant moving away from relying purely on established frameworks and instead working with a combination of context, data, and on-ground insight.

One of my most defining of these transitions was in 2021... that's when I realised that expertise does not automatically translate across contexts. What drives effectiveness in one industry may not be sufficient in another.



One of the realities I had to navigate was the lag between effort and tangible outcomes. In areas like talent management, impact does not surface immediately. To manage this, I broke down larger priorities into smaller, clearly defined milestones, ensuring that progress could be tracked and momentum sustained. This helped maintain confidence across the organisation while keeping teams engaged and aligned through the transition.

What added complexity was that this transition was not happening in isolation. Alongside adapting to a new industry, I was leading a team, contributing to broader business priorities, and managing the expectations that come with a global role. This required sharper prioritisation — deciding where to intervene directly, where to enable others, and where to step back.

During this time, my role also evolved. It became less about having all the answers and more about enabling direction for others. This meant being transparent about what was evolving, encouraging input, and building a shared understanding of priorities. In uncertain environments, clarity of intent becomes a critical anchor. What stayed constant for me was the need to remain authentic. I could change my style, but I could not compromise my values. My ethos had to remain intact. That became one of my anchor points through the uncertainty: I may not control every external change, but I can control how I show up, how I treat people, and how consistently I hold myself to quality.

My most defining growth came from moments when I had to step into unfamiliar territory and learn how to lead without a ready-made playbook.

This experience also reinforced a broader shift we are seeing across organisations today. The nature of work is changing rapidly, driven by evolving business models, workforce expectations, and the growing influence of technology, including AI. Roles are becoming less defined, career paths less linear, and the expectations from talent far more dynamic than before. Organisations are no longer operating in stable, predictable cycles — they are constantly adapting.

In this context, traditional approaches to talent management are being re-evaluated. The focus is shifting from static role definitions to building adaptable capabilities, from linear career progression to more fluid career pathways, and from standardised processes to more responsive, context-driven interventions. Whether it is how we assess potential, design leadership pipelines, or enable career movement, there is a clear need to be more agile and intentional in how talent is managed and developed.

For HR, this requires a more integrated and strategic approach. It is no longer sufficient to operate within defined frameworks; the focus has to be on aligning talent closely with business priorities, enabling smarter decision-making, and creating systems that can evolve with the organisation. This includes rethinking how we approach leadership development, how we design policies that are both structured and flexible, and how we shape culture in a way that supports performance in uncertain environments.

For HR, this evolution also brings a sharper focus on building organisational capability at scale. It is no longer just about designing processes, but about enabling leaders to navigate ambiguity, strengthening decision-making at different levels, and embedding agility into how teams operate. This includes investing in skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability, while also leveraging technology to create more responsive and insight-driven talent systems.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

In this environment, transitions are no longer exceptions — they are becoming a natural part of how careers evolve. The ability to move across contexts, build understanding quickly, and create alignment becomes increasingly important. From my experience, actively building context is critical — taking the time to understand the business, asking the right questions, and engaging with diverse perspectives before driving outcomes. Speed matters, but alignment is what sustains impact.

In an environment that continues to evolve, the ability to continuously recalibrate — both at an individual and organisational level — will become increasingly important. As roles evolve and boundaries become more fluid, success will depend not just on expertise, but on how effectively individuals and organisations can learn, adapt, and realign in real time.

Looking back, I do not see this period as one of disruption alone. I see it as a phase that strengthened how I operate. It expanded my ability to navigate complexity, reinforced the importance of alignment and execution, and reshaped how I approach change. In an environment where uncertainty is constant and organisations continue to evolve, the ability to adapt, stay grounded, and move forward with intent becomes one of the most critical capabilities. As Peter Drucker once said, “The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday’s logic.” That, more than anything else, is what these transitions have reinforced for me.





Building Through Uncertainty

**A Journey of
Conviction,
Courage,
and Purpose**

Punita Sharma Arora

Managing Partner Transluma
Therapeutics

Certain moments possess the power to irrevocably shift the trajectory of our lives. For me, one such turning point became the bedrock for everything that followed.



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After years of devoted service at a leading American multinational, I found myself increasingly at odds with its leadership. What began as professional disagreements gradually turned into a deeper conflict of values. Eventually, I was faced with a difficult but necessary choice — to walk away from an organisation that had shaped a significant part of my career.

Walking away was not just a professional decision; it was deeply personal. I was not leaving for better prospects or a bigger opportunity. I was leaving because there was no other option left that aligned with who I was becoming. In many ways, I was stepping out of a familiar story and into a blank page. And a blank page is frightening — until you realise it is also freedom.

Freedom to dream. To plan. To act. To fail. To rebuild.

The timing could not have been more challenging. I was expecting my first child, and the pregnancy was high-risk, requiring strict medical supervision and extended bed rest. The body that had once kept pace with demanding schedules was suddenly forced into stillness. The mind that thrived on planning was asked to surrender control.

The emotional toll of leaving a stable career, combined with physical vulnerability and uncertainty, created a period of intense upheaval. Those around me could see the stress and exhaustion. What they could not see was the quiet resolve taking shape within me.

Financial independence and professional purpose had never been optional in my life — they were values I had pursued with conviction from the very beginning. Choosing the easier path was never truly an option. I knew that giving up on my aspirations would cost me far more than a career — it would mean compromising the very values I hoped to pass on to my child.

I had always imagined motherhood arriving alongside stability — a predictable routine, a structured career, a life I could carefully manage. I wanted to give my child not just love, but presence — the kind that comes from certainty.



I was stepping out of a familiar story and into a blank page. And a blank page is frightening — until you realise it is also freedom.

And yet, life had other plans.

During my years in the corporate world, two realities had quietly taken root in my mind.

The first was the stark inequity in access to healthcare in India. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, before widespread government health coverage, millions of Indians, especially those below the poverty line, had little to no financial protection for life-saving treatments. Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure dominated the system, often pushing families into debt or forcing them to sell their most valued possessions. I had seen it firsthand — families parting with land, jewellery, and security, all in the hope of survival.

The second was the perception of India's manufacturing capabilities in high-end medical technology. There was a deeply ingrained belief that Class III medical devices — critical products like cardiac implants — could only be developed and trusted if they came from developed nations and large multinational As a result, Indian patients were often paying three to four times more for imported devices.



These were not just observations. They stayed with me — persistent, unresolved, and deeply personal. Over time, they evolved into a quiet but powerful aspiration: to contribute towards building high-quality, affordable medical technology in India and to help place the country firmly on the global map.

When I stepped away from my corporate role, those thoughts grew louder. What had once been a distant concern now felt like a calling.

Years later, that dream came full circle when, after building India into the German firm's strongest market, we acquired our long-standing parent company, Translumina, in 2019 — an extraordinary reversal that symbolised the emergence of Indian innovation on the world stage. It reinforced our belief that life-saving technologies of the highest quality could be manufactured in India at an economical cost, bringing it within the reach of every patient.

Entrepreneurship is not a gentle transition. It demands your full attention, your energy, and often your comfort. And I found myself confronting a difficult question: what would it mean to raise a child while also raising a dream?

I stood at a crossroads — between the safety of what I knew and the uncertainty of what I believed in.

Like many do in moments of doubt, I turned to logic. I made pro-con lists repeatedly, searching for clarity. On one side was stability — a steady income, medical security, and predictability. On the other was uncertainty — a future I would have to build from the ground up.

But the real questions were harder to write down.

What if my health worsened? What if I failed — publicly? What if I succeeded, but lost moments I could never get back? Would anyone trust me after I had walked away from a respected organisation?

No list could answer those questions.

In that phase of uncertainty, I returned to what had always grounded me — my values. I had been raised to believe in integrity, independence, and the dignity of self-belief. I had never seen my gender as a limitation, and I refused to accept that motherhood should become one.

Rebuilding my career was not just about professional ambition — it was about refusing to disappear from my own life.

In this journey, I was not alone. My husband, Deepak Arora, became my anchor — offering quiet strength, unwavering belief, and stability when I needed it the most. My parents, who had instilled in me the very values I leaned on, stood beside me once again — supporting not just me, but stepping in to share responsibilities at home so I could continue forward. Even my children, in their own way, became a source of strength, offering understanding beyond their years.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

I was also fortunate to have my best friend as a partner in this vision — my co-founder, Gurmit Singh Chugh — who believed in the idea and in me, sometimes even more than I did myself. His honesty, support, and shared commitment played a pivotal role in shaping what followed.

I chose to begin again.

The journey that followed demanded resilience, relentless effort, and the willingness to move forward despite uncertainty. But it also gave me purpose—the satisfaction of building something that truly aligned with my beliefs.

We started small—two rooms and a team of four. In the early days, we focused on distribution, using that phase to learn, absorb, and understand the complexities of high-end medical device manufacturing.

In 2009, we took a defining leap—establishing our own manufacturing capabilities and developing our first drug-eluting stent. We undertook rigorous randomised clinical trials, benchmarking our products against leading multinational devices. Conducted across a large patient base, these studies demonstrated clinical equivalence and, on certain parameters, superiority.

That phase tested us in every possible way. It took nearly three years of relentless effort, and we committed everything we had—our savings, and even loans secured by mortgaging our home.

I still remember signing those papers, knowing that this decision was no longer just professional, it was deeply personal. There was no safety net left, only belief.

With scientific evidence, consistency, and conviction, we began expanding—entering new markets, strengthening our portfolio, and building capabilities that could stand global scrutiny. Over time, we also grew through strategic acquisitions in Germany, the Netherlands, and Singapore.

Today, Translumina Therapeutics and Integris MedTech stand as respected Indian innovators in coronary intervention devices, serving both domestic and international markets. We are among the leading domestic stent manufacturers in India and one of the country's significant exporters in this segment. More importantly, we have contributed to building clinical confidence in Indian-made medical devices, demonstrating that quality and innovation are not bound by geography.

From a four-member team, we have grown into an organisation with over 1,700 people, multiple manufacturing facilities, and a portfolio of more than 2,000 SKUs.

And today, as we move forward on the path toward becoming a publicly listed company, we are steadily positioning ourselves among the leading medtech organisations to emerge from India.

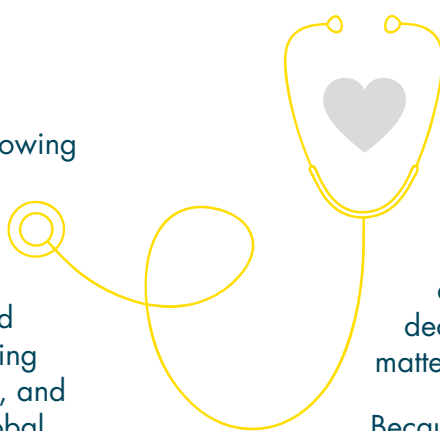
Looking back, the journey was never one defining leap. It was a series of small, determined steps taken despite fear.

If you find yourself at a crossroads — starting over, rebuilding, or questioning your path—know that it is okay to want more. It is okay to choose a path that aligns with your values, even if it is uncertain.

Courage is not always loud. Sometimes, it is simply the decision to keep moving forward.

I did not wait for certainty. I built despite uncertainty. And in doing so, I discovered that courage is not the absence of fear — it is the decision that something else matters more.

Because in the end, the woman who once lay on bed rest, uncertain of the future, is the same woman who learned to build it—one step at a time.





When the Unthinkable Happens



Leadership, Resilience & Reinvention in Times of Disruption

Rashmi Govil

Director (HR)
Indian Oil Corporation Limited

There are moments in life that arrive without warning; uninvited, unanticipated, and often unwelcome. They do not knock; they crash through the carefully constructed doors of certainty, leaving behind questions where there once were answers. It is in these moments, when the unthinkable becomes reality, leadership is not just tested, it is revealed.



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I have long believed that life, in its essence, is designed to challenge us. It is almost as if an unseen game master has laid out a vast, intricate board; one where the rules evolve, the terrain shifts, and the stakes are deeply personal. We are all players in this game, navigating uncertainty with limited control over circumstances but complete command over our response. Winning, then, is not about avoiding disruption; it is about enduring it, adapting through it, and emerging stronger because of it.

The Paradox of Detached Attachment

Over time, I came to embrace what I call a “detached-attached” approach to life. At first glance, it sounds contradictory. How can one be both deeply involved and yet detached? But in practice, it is one of the most rational and liberating ways to navigate complexity.

To be “attached” is to give your full self. To care deeply about your work, your relationships, your responsibilities.



This philosophy is not new. When Charles Darwin spoke of the “survival of the fittest,” he did not refer to physical strength alone, but to the capacity to adapt. It is this very spirit that echoes in the familiar refrain: when the going gets tough, the tough get going. These are not mere words of encouragement, they are a blueprint for resilience.

It is about showing up with commitment, passion, and integrity. But to be “detached” is to release the need to control outcomes. It is to accept that while effort is within our control, results are not always so.

This duality creates a powerful equilibrium. It allows one to strive for excellence without being shattered by failure. It enables action without anxiety, commitment without burnout.



The Early Seeds of Resilience

My own journey into understanding resilience began long before I entered the professional world. I was, quite literally, raised on stories. Stories of courage, sacrifice, and moral conviction. The colourful pages of Amar Chitra Katha comics were my early companions, bringing to life tales of valour and wisdom. But even more influential were the stories passed down by my grandparents, both decorated freedom fighters. Their lives were living testaments to endurance. From them, I imbibed a simple yet powerful belief; patience, persistence, and the willingness to evolve are the true engines of achievement.

These early influences laid the foundation for a mindset that would later become central to my approach to both life and leadership.

Some may mistake this for a lack of emotion or diminished passion.

I see it differently. It is not the absence of feeling. It is the mastery of it. I remain deeply invested in what I do and the people I care about, but I do not allow outcomes to dictate my sense of self or well-being.

This philosophy finds resonance in the timeless wisdom of Lord Krishna: “Karma karo, aur phal ki chinta mat karo” (Focus on your actions, not on the fruits of those actions). It is a principle that has guided me through both triumphs and trials.

When Crisis Becomes a Crucible

The real test of any philosophy, however, lies in its application during moments of crisis. For me, that moment came early in life.



As a young girl, just on the cusp of completing my education, my family was struck by a devastating personal catastrophe. A crisis that had the potential to dismantle everything we knew. It was the kind of event that could easily lead to despair, to a sense of irreparable loss. And yet, strangely, the thought that “we are finished” never crossed my mind. As the eldest child, I found myself stepping into a role I had not consciously chosen. My instinct was not to succumb, but to stabilize. To do whatever was necessary to keep the family from sinking. In hindsight, I realize that this was my first real experience of leadership.

Not leadership defined by titles or authority, but leadership defined by responsibility, resilience, and resolve. There is a quote by tennis legend Arthur Ashe when he was asked, “Why did God give him AIDS?”. His response has stayed with me over the years: “When I was holding the cup in my hand, I never asked God, ‘Why me?’ So now that I’m in pain, how can I ask, ‘Why me?’” It is a profound reminder of acceptance, of embracing both success and suffering with equal grace.

That period of my life, though painful, became a crucible. It shaped my instincts, sharpened my resilience, and instilled in me a quiet confidence. A belief that no matter how severe the storm, it can be weathered.

Leadership Forged in Uncertainty

As I moved into my professional journey, I encountered a different set of challenges. The energy sector, where I spent a significant part of my career, was undergoing rapid transformation. It still is. There were highly tense industrial relations situations. The dismantling of the Administered Price Mechanism for petrol and diesel marked a significant shift in the industry’s dynamics.

It is in the moments when the unthinkable becomes reality, that leadership is not just tested, it is revealed.

The entry of major players such as Reliance, Essar, and Mittal transformed the landscape from a relatively stable oligopoly into a fiercely competitive arena.

And then there were the disruptions that came from beyond the corporate world; events that no strategy document can fully anticipate. The Kargil War, large-scale operations like Operation Sindoor, global upheaval caused by COVID-19, and the ongoing Gulf crises. Each of these moments demanded a response, not just from the organisation, but from its leadership.

Rethinking Disruption

In recent years, management discourse has been dominated by terms like VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) and BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible). These frameworks attempt to define the nature of modern disruption and offer models for navigating it.

While they provide useful lenses, my own understanding of disruption is far more personal and perhaps more fundamental. I do not see disruption as an exception to normalcy. I see it as a way of life. Disruptions are not isolated events; they are continuous, evolving forces that shape our behaviours, decisions, and ultimately, our leadership style. They exist not only in large, dramatic crises but also in the small, everyday inconveniences that test our patience and adaptability.

A traffic jam that derails your schedule. A cancelled flight that forces you to rethink plans. A demanding boss who challenges your mental resilience. Even life events such as marriage or



the birth of a child, these too are disruptions, albeit positive ones. It is in responding to these seemingly minor disruptions that we build the muscles required to handle the major ones. Resilience, agility, foresight are not developed overnight. They are cultivated over time, through repeated exposure to change and uncertainty.

The Discipline of Response

Over the years, I have developed a simple yet powerful approach to dealing with disruption. one that applies equally to small setbacks and large crises.

I begin with acceptance: this is the situation before me. There is no value in denial, blame, or excessive rumination. Energy spent on “why did this happen?” is often energy wasted. The more productive question is: “what next?”

From there, the focus shifts to action:

- What can be done immediately to minimize impact?
- What systems need to be created, modified, or abandoned?
- How can we move forward, even if the path is unclear?

This mindset transforms disruption from becoming a source of paralysis into a catalyst for action.

From Personal Crisis to Organisational Response

One incident that illustrates this approach occurred during my time at a remote location with limited medical facilities. A family member met with a severe accident and was badly injured. In such moments, panic is a natural response. But instinctively, my mind moved to action.

Even before the injured member reached the small local clinic, I was already arranging travel to a metropolitan city, identifying the best surgeons, and coordinating hospital admission. The focus was not on the shock of the event, but on the sequence of actions required to address it.

Years later, the same instinct guided my response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the lockdown was officially announced, my team began working on a series of policy modifications. The objective was clear - to ensure that we were prepared to support our workforce during an unprecedented crisis, especially those operating in 24x7 process plants where continuity was critical.

We did not have all the answers, but we had a direction. And often, in times of uncertainty, direction matters more than certainty.



The Quiet Power of Moving Forward

I have found great value in focusing on the next step. This does not mean ignoring mistakes or avoiding accountability. It means learning quickly, adapting swiftly, and moving forward decisively.

This approach has helped me navigate failed negotiations, tense industrial relations situations, significant professional setbacks, and even difficult interpersonal dynamics.

Playing the Hand You Are Dealt

At its core, leadership in times of disruption is about perspective. We do not control the hand that life deals us. The cards may be unexpected, unfavourable, or even unfair. But we do control how we play that hand.

Leadership, after all, is not about having all the answers. It is about having the courage to move forward despite not having them.

The Enduring Mantra

As I reflect on my journey, from the formative stories of my childhood to the Board of a Fortune 500 company, one mantra stands out above all:

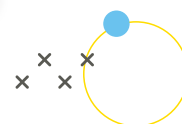
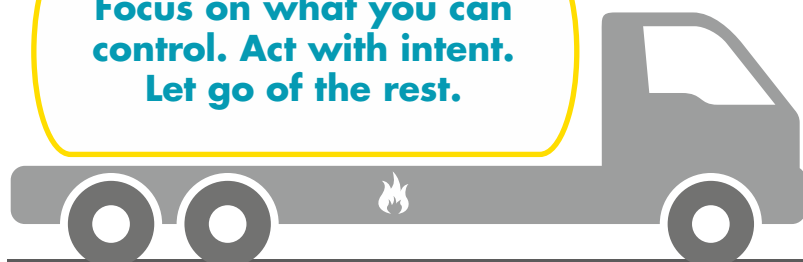
Focus on what you can control. Act with intent. Let go of the rest.

Because when the unthinkable happens and it inevitably will, it is the strength of our response that will define us.

And in that response lies the true essence of leadership.



**Focus on what you can
control. Act with intent.
Let go of the rest.**





What Changed When Nothing Did

Ruchi Mago

Head HR and Employee Experience
Orange Business India

Life's quiet disruptions reshaped the way I lead, live, and let go.

Nothing in my life changed overnight. And yet, something within me shifted so deeply that I couldn't go back to being who I was before.

Not through a single defining moment, but through a series of disruptions - small, unexpected, sometimes overwhelming - that asked me to rethink who I was and how I showed up. At the time, they didn't feel like turning points. They felt like things not going as planned. But in hindsight, they were doing something far more profound - they were shaping me.



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The First Time I Felt Out of Place

There was a time early in my career when I knew exactly where I stood. I was comfortable with numbers. Finance gave me clarity, structure, confidence. Even when I moved into HR, I stayed close to that identity through Total Rewards.

And then, I stepped into a space that didn't come naturally to me. A role that had less to do with numbers and more to do with people - culture, behavior, leadership dynamics.

I still remember sitting in a room full of leaders, listening carefully, trying to make sense of conversations that didn't fit into the frameworks I was used to. For the first time, I wasn't the one with answers.

I walked out of that room quieter than usual, carrying a question I hadn't faced before: *Have I stretched too far?*

It would have been easier to step back—to return to what I knew, where I felt confident. But I didn't. I stayed, even when it felt uncomfortable. And slowly, I learned to rebuild—not from expertise, but from curiosity.

Growth doesn't happen when you are in your comfort zone. When you break free from it, you enter uncharted territory and that's where true learning and transformation happen.



I may not control every external change, but I can control how I show up, how I treat people, and how consistently I hold myself to quality.

Asking for Help

Years later, the challenge looked very different.

Work was demanding. Expectations were high. And at home, I was navigating motherhood - wanting to be present, involved, and somehow, perfect.

Without realising it, I had set an impossible standard for myself: Be fully available at work. Be fully present at home. Miss nothing. Drop nothing.

And slowly, that expectation turned into pressure. There were days that flew by in a blur - calls, responsibilities, transitions - and somewhere in between, a quiet, constant voice: "You're not doing enough."

If I was at work, I felt I should be at home. If I was at home, I felt I should be doing more at work. It's a loop many of us enter, but rarely speak about.

The turning point wasn't when things became easier, it was when I stopped pretending I could do it all alone. I began to ask for help - from family, in-laws, caregivers, friends, not hesitantly, but consciously.

I built an ecosystem instead of trying to carry everything myself. And I let go of something even harder - the need to do everything perfectly. Because there is no perfect balance.

What I was really learning was work-life integration; not separating roles, but learning how to move between them with awareness.

Some days you lean into work. Some days into home. And some days, you simply do what you can—and accept that it is enough.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

For a long time, I thought strength meant holding everything together. It took me time to realise that sometimes, strength is choosing what not to hold.

The Times of Disruption: When Everything Converged.

And then, life tested me in a way nothing else had. In 2022, just as the world was beginning to recover from COVID, my father who had ILD caught the virus and fell seriously ill. We had protected him through the entire pandemic. And yet, towards the end, it found him.

I remember one evening in the hospital: the steady sound of machines in the background, the stillness of the room, and his hand in mine, weaker than I had ever known it to be. This was the same hand that had always steadied me. The one I instinctively reached for whenever I was unsure. The one that never let me feel alone, no matter how difficult things got.

He had been more than a father: he was my sounding board, my quiet strength, the person who believed in me even before I fully believed in myself. And in that moment, something shifted. For the first time, I wasn't drawing strength from him. I was trying to be strong for him. And that was perhaps the hardest shift of all.

At the same time, life didn't pause. Work was at a critical peak. My children needed me, especially my teenage daughter, finding her own way. We were in the middle of shifting homes. My husband was traveling extensively.

Everything seemed to demand my presence at once. There were days I moved from hospital corridors to work calls, trying to stay composed in both worlds, and feeling like I was falling short in each.

And then there were quieter moments. Sitting in the car for a few extra minutes before stepping out. Not because I was tired, but because I didn't know which version of me I needed to be next. A leader? A mother? A daughter? Or simply... someone trying to hold it all together.



The Loss That Changed Me

Losing my father was the most painful chapter of my life. It didn't just break me - it changed the way I see time, presence, and what truly matters.

In that stillness, something shifted. I began to see how often we postpone ourselves. How easily we say, "I don't have time."

But the truth is, time is not something we find. It is something we choose. That phase forced me to confront something I had ignored for too long: If I don't take care of myself, I cannot show up for anything, or anyone, fully.

Self-care stopped being a concept. It became a necessity! Not indulgence. Not luxury. But responsibility!





What I See Now

Looking back, I see how each disruption, big or small, was shaping and teaching me:

- To let go of certainty
- To ask for help
- To accept that control is limited
- To redefine what strength really looks like
- To be more mindful and conscious

And each time, the answer wasn't in doing more. It was in doing what truly mattered with clarity and honesty.

Embrace the unthinkable. Welcome chaos and disruption as opportunities for growth.

Leadership isn't about avoiding storms; it's about learning to dance in the rain - with courage, vulnerability, and a conscious heart.

When you do, you'll discover that even in the darkest moments, there is a quiet, powerful light guiding you toward a resilient, authentic self. A conscious self that is unfiltered, aware of the power of pause, and understands that life isn't about control but about learning from every experience.

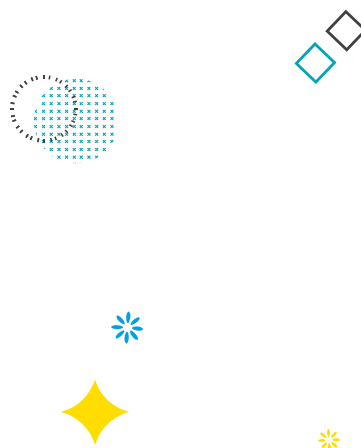
The Power of Conscious Choices

In the wake of loss, I made a quiet but firm decision: I would no longer wait for life to force me to pause, I will choose it.

I began to see life differently, not as separate compartments to manage, but as realities to integrate. Because life doesn't arrive in neat categories or watertight compartments - career, family, self. It comes all at once, fluid and volatile.

And leadership is not just about how you show up when things are structured and predictable. It's about conscious leadership where we don't lead with chaos and confusion but lead with consciousness, clarity, and calmness.

It is in the unplanned moments - when life doesn't ask what's convenient - that you discover not just what you can handle, but who you truly are.





Making Sense of the Unthinkable

Dr. Yogesh Misra

Chief Executive Officer
Thomas Assessments Pvt Limited
(A CIEL HR Group company)

It was October 2012. My wife
had just turned 35.

Life could not have been better.



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Earlier that year, we had taken our sons, aged five and two to Greece. My wife had presented a research paper there and won the best paper award.

I was travelling nearly 200 days a year across countries on consulting assignments, business was growing, and we were looking forward to Diwali.

A few days before Diwali, she flew to Mumbai to present another research paper. She messaged me from there that she had won again. I was to pick her up from the airport.

She landed happy, animated, already describing the conference proceedings. I listened. And then I told her that her mother had collapsed and passed away while she was in the air.

We drove straight to her parents' house. It was a gloomy Diwali. My sons could not understand why we were not celebrating the way we had planned. I could not explain it to them. Some things have no explanation.

The following month, in December she found a lump. On New Year's Day, we saw a doctor. A few days later, the diagnosis was confirmed. *Aggressive cancer. She was 35.*



**Patience
stops being a virtue.
It becomes a way
of living.**

**Resilience is built
inside difficulty,
one day at a time.**

In management, we reach for frameworks when the world stops making sense.

VUCA — Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous, was one such attempt. Then came BANI — Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible. More recently, PUMO — Polarised, Unthinkable, Metamorphic, Overheated tries to capture something even harder to hold.

My whole life, I had used frameworks like these in workshops and strategy conversations with clients.

I believed in them intellectually. Then the diagnosis arrived, and I began to understand them from the inside.

What I was living was not Volatility. It was rupture. Not Uncertainty but it was the complete absence of answers.

Not Complexity, it was shock, grief and responsibility operating simultaneously, every day, with no pause available.

Not Ambiguity, it was the inability to make sense of what was unfolding in real time and why.

Frameworks did not provide solutions. But they did something else. They helped me recognise that not everything can be controlled, predicted, or understood as it happens. Leadership, in its truest form, is not about clarity. It is about continuity.

The next two months were unlike anything I had known. I had only ever been to a hospital for joyous occasions like the birth of my children. Now I was there every three weeks for chemotherapy, reading, researching, learning a language, medicine, oncology, and treatment protocols that I had never imagined needing.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

Fortunately, the early scans showed significant regression. That lifted us. We went through the remaining chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. Within six months, she was back on her feet and teaching again.

Just as we were beginning to settle, the next report arrived. It had metastasised to the brain. The prognosis was serious. We pursued the most aggressive therapy available. There was remission after radiotherapy. She bounced back, and that phrase, used casually elsewhere, means something entirely different when you have watched it happen.

We had five relapses over eight and a half years. Major surgeries. Craniotomies, multiple lines of treatment. We lived scan to scan. Through it all, her workplace and mine were deeply supportive. We had excellent doctors. My parents stepped in. Life reorganised itself around what mattered.

And I reorganised myself too, though I did not fully realise it as it was happening.

I had been travelling nearly 200 days a year. That stopped. The priority shifted entirely to family. We began playing golf together, all four of us, when we could. We travelled with the boys whenever possible. I started teaching occasionally at a business school. She encouraged me to pursue a PhD. I completed it during those years, commitment shaped as much by her belief as by my own. A joint research paper is testimony to that.

In 2016, three years into her illness and in the middle of treatment, she won a golf tournament. I have a photograph of her that day, smiling, cap on, trophy raised, mid-battle. She did not play despite her circumstances. She played through them, and she won. I learned something from watching that, though I could not have articulated it then.

In 2017, she became a full Professor, a goal she had quietly set for herself. She achieved it while fighting for her life.

Every morning, after sending the boys to school, we would sit together on the swing in the lawn with our tea. That ritual, unhurried, ordinary and OURS became one of the most important moments in my life.

What those years made of me did not arrive as a single instance of clarity. It accumulated slowly, under sustained pressure.

The first thing they taught me was patience, real patience, not the managed kind. When you cannot speed up or resolve what is happening, when the situation simply requires that you show up again tomorrow, regardless of how yesterday went, patience stops being a virtue and becomes a way of living.

My sons taught me this more than anything else. They needed consistency, routine, presence, and predictability from a father who had no certainty to offer beyond the fact of being there. I learned to provide what I could and release what I could not control.



That lesson travelled into how I worked with people professionally. I began to see colleagues not simply as roles to be managed but as individuals carrying weight that was not always visible. I became slower to judge. More willing to trust. More interested in creating conditions for people to find their own way than in directing every step.

The questions I asked myself also changed.

I had always operated with a primary question: 'What can be achieved?' I still ask it.

But the question that now precedes it is different: 'What is worth achieving?'

Before committing to something significant, I began applying a filter. 'Will this matter in a week? In a year? If I don't do this, will I genuinely regret it?'

These are simple questions. But applied consistently, they are powerful, because they force a distinction between what is genuinely important and what merely feels urgent.

I also changed how I made decisions.

I had always been someone who gathered information and reasoned carefully before acting. That discipline served me.

But I began allowing space for something that analysis alone cannot reach, for choices guided by something that had been pressure-tested over years until it became instinct.

Thinking from the heart, I found, does not weaken judgment. It completes it.

COVID brought its own complications. We spent time in the ICU and out. During the lockdown, everyone was home and in that particular hardship, there was also something precious about being together.

She passed away in 2021, just about a month before her 44th birthday.

There is no graceful way to write that sentence.



What followed was practical, because it had to be. Children at critical stages of their education. Professional responsibilities that did not pause. Financial matters requiring attention. Investments to stabilise. Decisions to be taken without the luxury of deliberation. Life did not slow down to accommodate grief. It simply demanded continuation.

In the weeks and months that followed, routines became anchors. School schedules, work commitments, and small daily rituals created structure when everything else felt uncertain. Grief did not recede, but it found its place alongside responsibility. Over time, the two stopped competing and began to coexist.

In the time that followed, her work was recognised with a posthumous honour by the University of Delhi.

It felt less like an award, and more like an acknowledgement of a life already defined.



NAVIGATING THE UNTHINKABLE

Grief does not resolve into acceptance on a schedule. It becomes part of how you move through the world, shaping what you value and what you are willing to let go. Over time, milestones that once felt central began to feel different.

Sab maya hai.

Not as resignation. Not as an excuse to stop building or striving. But as a genuine reckoning with what is lasting and what is not. The titles, the recognitions, the accumulations, they are useful. But they are not the point.

Money solves problems. It creates options. But if something can be solved by money, it was never the real problem. The real challenges demand presence, patience, and the willingness to stay when there are no good answers.

The relationships are the point. The moments that do not return are the point. Because things can be rebuilt. Relationships rarely can.

There is a photograph of me putting on a golf course in fog so thick that the fairway has completely disappeared. The flag is barely visible. I am still putting. I did not plan that image. But I could not have planned one more accurate.

In golf, the instinct when conditions turn against you is to grip tighter, to force control back into the swing. But the tighter you hold, the more the rhythm breaks.

The best shots happen when you trust what you have built through practice, loosen your grip, and let the motion complete itself. Some stretches of life are no different.

If you are in the middle of something that feels unthinkable, I want to offer what I have actually learned, not a polished version, but the true one.

The frameworks will help you name what is happening. They will not save you. What will carry you is more ordinary: the decision to show up again tomorrow. The willingness to be patient when patience feels impossible. The courage to trust people rather than trying to manage everything alone. The discipline to ask not just what can be achieved, but what is actually worth it.

Resilience is not something you discover before difficulty arrives. It is built inside the difficulty, slowly, through the accumulation of days in which you continued when continuing was the only option.

The flag may barely be visible
but 'Putt' anyway.



FulkiTM

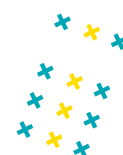
Sparks the
Magic Connect
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Team Fulki (L-R)
Hendary Massey, Deepak Kashyap, Anuradha Sharma
Shivani Madan, Ashish Sood, Tabarak Khan





Sparking the Magic Connect — between People, Purpose, and Possibility

Every spark has the potential to become a steady light — and the question that sparked Fulki was: what if communication could touch hearts, not just minds?

Founded by Anuradha Sharma, Fulki has grown into a vibrant, versatile, and future-ready creative force, shaping how organisations attract, engage and transform their people. From a small team with a big dream, Fulki has evolved into a strategic partner for over fifty organisations, building cultures that radiate trust, pride, and purpose.

Anuradha's early association with the Great Place to Work® Institute, guided by mentors Anil Sachdev and Prasenjit Bhattacharya, shaped her understanding of culture-driven communication. Her campaigns have supported over ten organisations on their journey to becoming Great Places to Work.

Fulki has become synonymous with building employer brands that resonate. Their expertise in internal communication and culture-building has evolved into EVP articulation, cascade and behaviour-based storytelling for organisations such as Mahindra & Mahindra, PepsiCo, and SKH Group.

At Fulki, stories don't just tell - they transform. They translate complex HR Processes, Values, and Competency Behaviours into simple narratives that help people see themselves in the organisation's story. Through business-based graphic and video stories, coffee-table

books, leadership journals, and immersive campaigns, Fulki helps organisations cascade culture, amplify behaviours, engage employees, and spark change at scale. The engaging, experiential physical spaces they create are employee-centric, collaborative, and fun, turning workplaces into living expressions of culture and brand identity.

Innovative and agile, Fulki leverages gamification, digital learning, social media and storytelling to create communication that adapts seamlessly to the evolving needs of both businesses and employees. Their approach amplifies and maximises brand recall through 360-degree communication.

Fulki has crafted fast-paced, face-to-face games that made learning fun and created sticky learning experiences for GAP, PepsiCo, and Bharat Financial Inclusion, then quickly pivoted to digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They transformed complex compliance topics such as POSH, Code of Conduct, and Diversity & Inclusion into engaging, accelerated modules for Hindalco, Grasim Chemicals, and IndusInd Bank, multiplying the impact. Gamification has become Fulki's bridge between learning and engagement, proving that communication can be dynamic, memorable, and transformative.

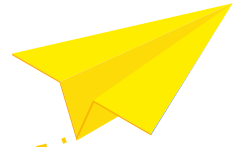
Versatile. Vibrant. Visionary.

Fulki continues to illuminate the path for organisations ready to lead with heart and communicate with purpose.



PIVOTAL MILESTONES

from Spark to Scale



2022-Till date

Bata



Conceptualised and designed the identity and an integrated intranet communication strategy for Bata e-University, that enhanced engagement and inspired continuous learning.

Fulki's strategic redesign of the portal led to an 80% increase in adoption and course completion, making it one of Bata's most successful global learning initiatives.

2024-Till date



A Krishna Maruti Group Company



Defined and cascaded the Vision, Values, Culture and other business initiatives as part of a large scale change program, aligning 20,000+ employees across geographies and newly merged entities.

Fulki's leadership in architecting culture frameworks has driven engagement, ownership, and transformation at scale.

2020

Fulki 2.0



COVID-19 gave birth to a stronger, more resilient Fulki 2.0. The team pivoted to virtual offerings, designing experiential e-learning modules for global leaders and creating one of Fulki's most enduring offerings.

The team turned disruption into innovation — adapting swiftly, collaborating virtually, and re-imagining how communication could inspire and connect.

2016-2024



my vistara

Shaped Vistara's employer brand, since its inception. Most notably during its historic merger with Air India, the team created communication campaigns that guided employees through the change with clarity and cultural coherence.

Played a key role in uniting people and purpose during one of India's most significant corporate integrations.

2019-2020



Conceptualised, branded, and seamlessly managed a 3-week residential program with 51 Election Commissioners and 200+ delegates, from across the globe.

Strengthened Fulki's reputation for delivering large-scale, high-impact experiences with precision, creativity, and purpose.

2010-2022



Designed the Skill India Mission logo, working closely with the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who also unveiled Fulki-designed publications at the national launch.

Marked Fulki's early contribution to one of India's most powerful movements for empowerment and skill development.



Skill India
कौशल भारत - कुशल भारत





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