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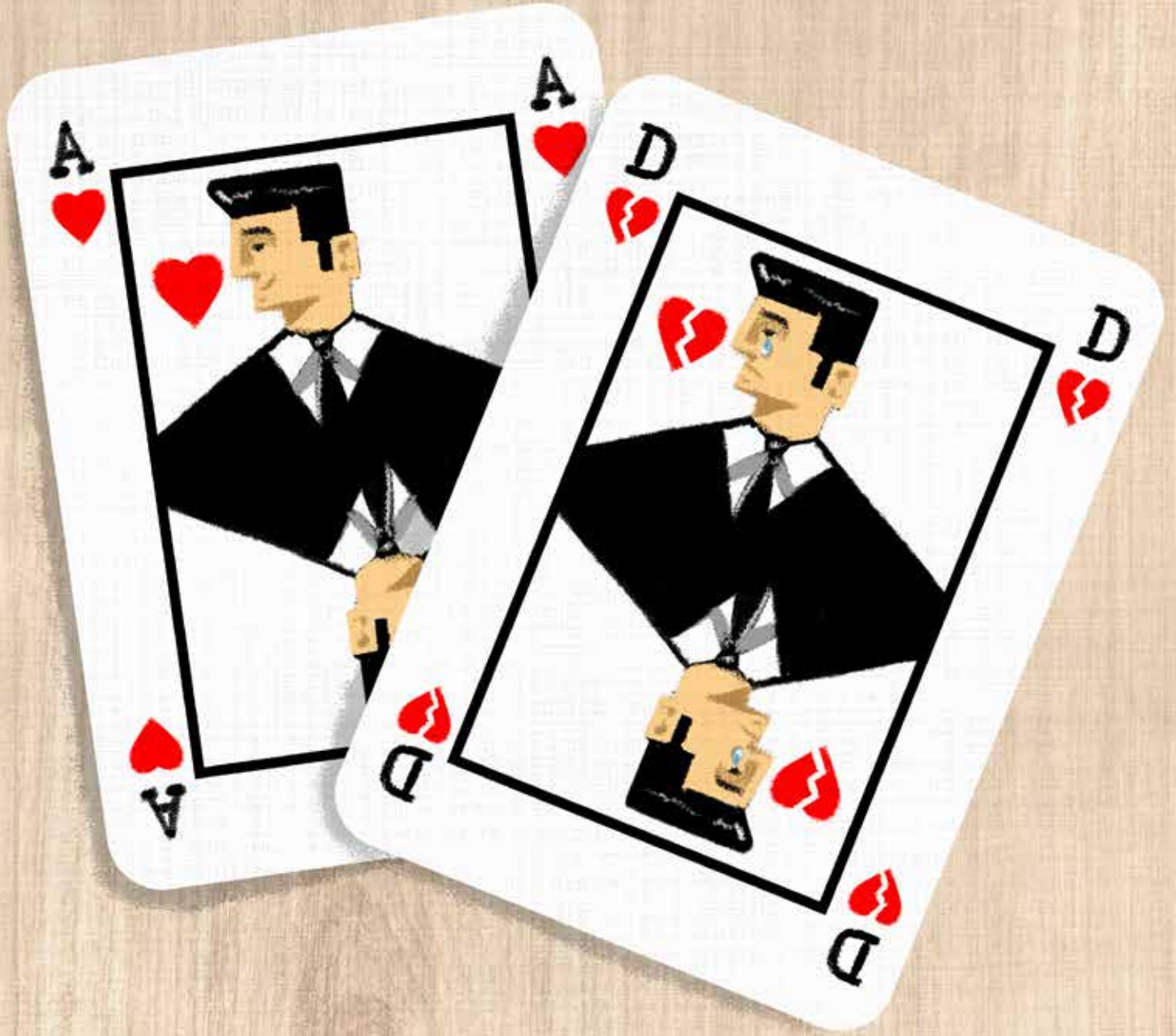
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The key to
workplace success



**ELEVATE. ENGAGE.
ENGINEER**

Uthas Pagay



No matter your role—senior leader, manager, or newcomer—your voice matters; so share your insights and spark change.

ORGANISATIONAL
CULTURE

♦ RAJEEV KUMAR MEHAJAN PHD, TIET INDIA

A balancing act

The inspiration to write this article came from a recent interaction with the top leader of an organisation—that has always drawn my attention towards its core values and employee friendly environment. The conversation, though a bit discouraging, shed light on the stark realities of organisational dynamics and decision-making. It left me pondering the deep-rooted patterns of denial and avoidance that often obstruct progress. This reflection drives the insights, for the organisations to not only have a vision for laying down the requisite plans, programmes and processes, but fostering a culture of acceptance and agility to adapt in organisational ecosystem.

Acceptance versus denial

As leaders, we have all encountered challenges that test our resolve and decision-making. But what happens when the challenge isn't external, but deeply internal—a fundamental issue undermining the health of our organisation? Over the past 40 years, serving across a dozen organisations, I've seen a recurring pattern: Leadership often faces harsh realities but chooses denial over action. Warning signs are

ignored, severity is downplayed, and blame is shifted. There is a tendency to scapegoat the system itself, dismissing issues as 'organisational behaviour' and rationalising it with clichés like “यहां तो ऐसा ही चलता है”. (That's just how things are around here)

But here's the truth: Denial only delays the inevitable. Left unchecked, these issues fester and evolve into formidable roadblocks to growth. Acceptance, while difficult, is the cornerstone of transformation. Prof. Nair, Director, Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology, quotes, “An organisation cannot afford to do the same things repeatedly and expect different results.”

Ayn Rand, the legend and my enduring muse for “integrity” since college, captures powerfully: “You can ignore reality, but you cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.”

Call to mid-segment managers

While leaders at the top often set the tone for organisational culture, you are the bridge between vision and execution, and play a pivotal role in shaping the daily experiences of employees. Yet, often you mirror the denial culture by senior leadership, either out of fear or convenience.

Why focus on Gen Z managers?

This is particularly crucial for Gen Z, who are stepping into managerial roles with fresh energy and perspectives. As digital natives, you have the tools and insights to challenge traditional and advocate for transparency and innovation. Nevertheless, you also face the risk of inheriting outdated mind-sets that prioritise comfort over progress. Though, you have distinct advantages:

Eagerness for change: Generally, Gen Z is more open to innovation and disrupting the status quo, which aligns well with the article's emphasis on breaking cycles of denial.

Tech-savvy and data-driven: Adept at leveraging technology and data to identify inefficiencies and propose solutions, as natural champions of transparency and accountability.

Diverse perspectives: Having grown up in a more connected and inclusive world, tend to value meritocracy and diverse viewpoints over proximity bias or hierarchical traditions.

What is your leadership style?

Irrespective of your seniority, fundamentally, the need is to do an introspection and reflect: A. Are you the leader who steps up, grabs the metaphorical mic, and drops truth bombs that echo through boardrooms and beyond, igniting real conversations?

B. Or do you lean towards denial, prefer 'Yes Men' around your impressive executive table and let proximity bias promote mediocrity over merit in making choices?

If the latter resonates, it is time for a paradigm shift to break the cycle of denial.

Building a culture of acceptance

Here is how managers can contribute to the cultural shift for a healthy organisational behaviour-

Promote accountability: Own up mistakes and recognise the initiative to address issues.





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Value feedback: Dismiss the ‘Yes Man’ mentality and reward those who challenge ideas.

Model integrity: Be the example of the transparency you wish to see.

You must resist the temptation to play along, and instead, drive change from within by questioning inefficiencies and pushing for accountability. Embrace the power of vulnerability. Foster a culture where transparency, accountability, and open communication are the norm.

The balancing act

Before concluding, let me assert that leadership is rarely about extremes—being either a ‘truth bomb-dropper’ or ‘in denial’. As my colleague Dr Alberto Troccoli, Managing Director, World Energy and Meteorology Council, aptly states: “Leadership is like steering a boat through open seas under

changing weather conditions—it requires constant adjustments.”

Adaptability is the cornerstone of effective leadership. It is about knowing when to confront hard truths and when to recalibrate subtly. While assertiveness and acceptance should remain at the core, a balanced approach can add value. For instance, a ‘Yes Man’ may sometimes provide critical grapevine insights, while a well-timed ‘truth bomb’ can bring hidden issues to light. The key is to maintain balance without ever compromising integrity through denial.

A new resolve for 2025

Organisational behaviour comprises ‘people’, ‘structure’, ‘environment’, and ‘technology’, and describes how people interact with one another inside an organisation. These interactions in turn influence how the organisation itself performs. As we step into 2025, let us make a collective commitment to prioritise the health of our organisations through our system’s behaviour, creating an environment where truth is valued over denial, and progress over stagnation. Especially, in the Indian context of rich cultural tapestry, the ethos of ‘satyam’ (truth) has long been revered. Yet, phrases like “यहां तो ऐसा ही चलता है” reveal a lingering acceptance of mediocrity that stifles innovation. To unlock India’s true potential as a global leader, we must challenge this mind-set, inspire accountability, and foster a culture of adaptability.

Whether you are a senior leader, a mid-level manager, or just starting your journey, your voice matters. Let us spark a dialogue and share your thoughts, experiences, or insights. Your perspective could be the catalyst for change. Join hands to amplify this resolve! ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajeev Kumar Mehajan, PhD is distinguished Professor & Strategic Advisor, TIET India. Rajeev is also the Hon’ble President of India’s Visitor Nominee — IIT Kharagpur; UPSC Panel Member, Selection of IAS & Allied Services; and Expert Member- Technical Commissions, WMO, United Nations.