

Why ‘attention’ is the most underrated skill of our time

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Globally, organisations are facing an unspoken crisis where ‘distraction’ has become institutionalised and ‘attention’ is no longer protected as a strategic resource. These enterprises risk becoming like a treadmill where enormous effort is made to move forward without any real movement



As co-authors and leading professionals with over fifty combined years of experience in dealing with Indian and global organisations over the past three decades, we understand attention not just as an abstract concept, but as a billable and instantly perishable resource.

Where you place your attention determines who you become. We live in an “attention economy” where every single business is competing to get the attention of its customers. And every single influencer wants every other human to listen to them.

In a world dominated by distractions, attention is the greatest skill organisations can cultivate to enable meaningful and productive work. There are so many distractors that we encounter on a daily basis that wire our brains to fragmented focus. Out of 16 waking hours in a day, an average human being spends at least 12–14 hours staying distracted, which means there is significant attention currently being placed at being distracted for most part of the day.

While individuals continue to suffer usual distractors such as phone, WhatsApp, social media and gossip at the workplace, the bigger distraction epidemic is at organisation level. In any typical office environment, a good portion of the day is consumed by activities masquerading as productivity. Internal meetings drag on with 'little' to 'no' output. Training programmes are designed and executed without alignment to actual capability gaps. Endless email loops offer the illusion of communication from the top management but deliver more confusion than clarity to the organisation. Senior executives, too often, find themselves reacting to the noise of the day, rather than steering the organisation toward its long-term north star. This slow decay of time and attention is among the most under-acknowledged threats to institutional effectiveness in India Inc.

In boardrooms and management corridors across the country, there is almost zero sense that the organisation's collective attention is scattered. That the bandwidth of thinking minds is being spent on the immediate, the trivial and the performative.

What gets rewarded is not focus but busyness.

What gets reviewed is not impact but compliance.

Amid the rituals of checklists, dashboards, and town halls, there is often a growing silence about the one question that matters the most—are we truly doing work that matters to our purpose of existence i.e. the customer?

This chronic loss of organisational attention cannot be solved by time management techniques or calendar hygiene alone. It requires rethinking the architecture of work itself. Attention is a finite resource. Unlike financial capital, it cannot be borrowed or printed. When an organisation does not protect the attention of its people, it risks becoming a place of passive activity rather than purposeful movement. Leaders must begin to think of attention as a strategic asset, no less valuable than brand or cash or stock price.

India Inc in particular is vulnerable to this distraction trap because of our deep-rooted societal and cultural norms. We are conditioned, from schoolyards to staff rooms, to value form over function, hierarchy over merit, presence over performance. The result is a work culture that can often over-celebrate alignment and under-appreciate autonomy. In many organisations, the pressure to appear in agreement is greater than the freedom to think differently. Meetings are often not discussions but performances. Instructions are passed down like mantras, not questioned for their usefulness. Processes, once created, rarely die. They simply multiply.

The distraction quotient of an organisation is also a reflection of its leadership priorities. When CEOs become overwhelmed by internal firefighting and operational churn, it signals to the rest of the system that the urgent always trumps the important. It is not uncommon to find chief executives spending more time managing internal escalations than engaging with customers or thinking about the future. This is not poor time management. It is poor role definition. Senior leadership must resist the temptation to

become the central node of every decision and instead become the conscience keepers of focus. Their job is not to solve every problem but to ensure the organisation is solving the problems of future even before they arise.

The antidote to distraction is not more control but more clarity. When employees at all levels understand what truly matters and why it matters, they naturally gravitate toward better judgement. Attention becomes a shared ethic, not an imposed rule. Organisations that build a culture of ruthless prioritisation—where every meeting has an actionable point, every training has a measurable output, every instruction has a sound logic—begin to operate with far greater velocity. They are able to move faster not because they are pushing people harder but because they are removing what does not serve the mission.

To build an organisation where attention is protected and distraction is actively designed out, leaders could adopt the F.O.C.U.S thinking—a deliberate shift in mindset, culture, and execution.

*** F – Filter what matters**

Separate signal from noise. Not everything demands a response. Leaders must set the tone by focusing only on what truly drives customer value and long-term outcomes.

*** O – Own your time**

Time is the most misused asset in modern organisations. Protect calendars from performative meetings and create permission structures for people to say no when needed.

*** C – Clarify priorities**

Confusion drains attention. Make sure every team and individual knows exactly what matters, why it matters, and how their work contributes to the whole.

*** U – Unclutter processes**

Legacy rituals and unnecessary bureaucracy kill momentum. Conduct “Attention Deficit Audit” to identify critical organisational areas that need attention and weed out distractors.

*** S – Simplify execution**

Complexity is the enemy of execution. Reduce layers, remove ambiguity, and enable faster, cleaner decisions that move the organisation forward without friction.

An organisation’s greatness is not defined by the volume of what it does, but by the clarity of what it chooses not to do. In the age of noise, attention is the rarest and most consequential form of discipline. And in an economy where attention defines advantage, it may well be the most critical redesign that India Inc needs to undertake, yesterday in fact.

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