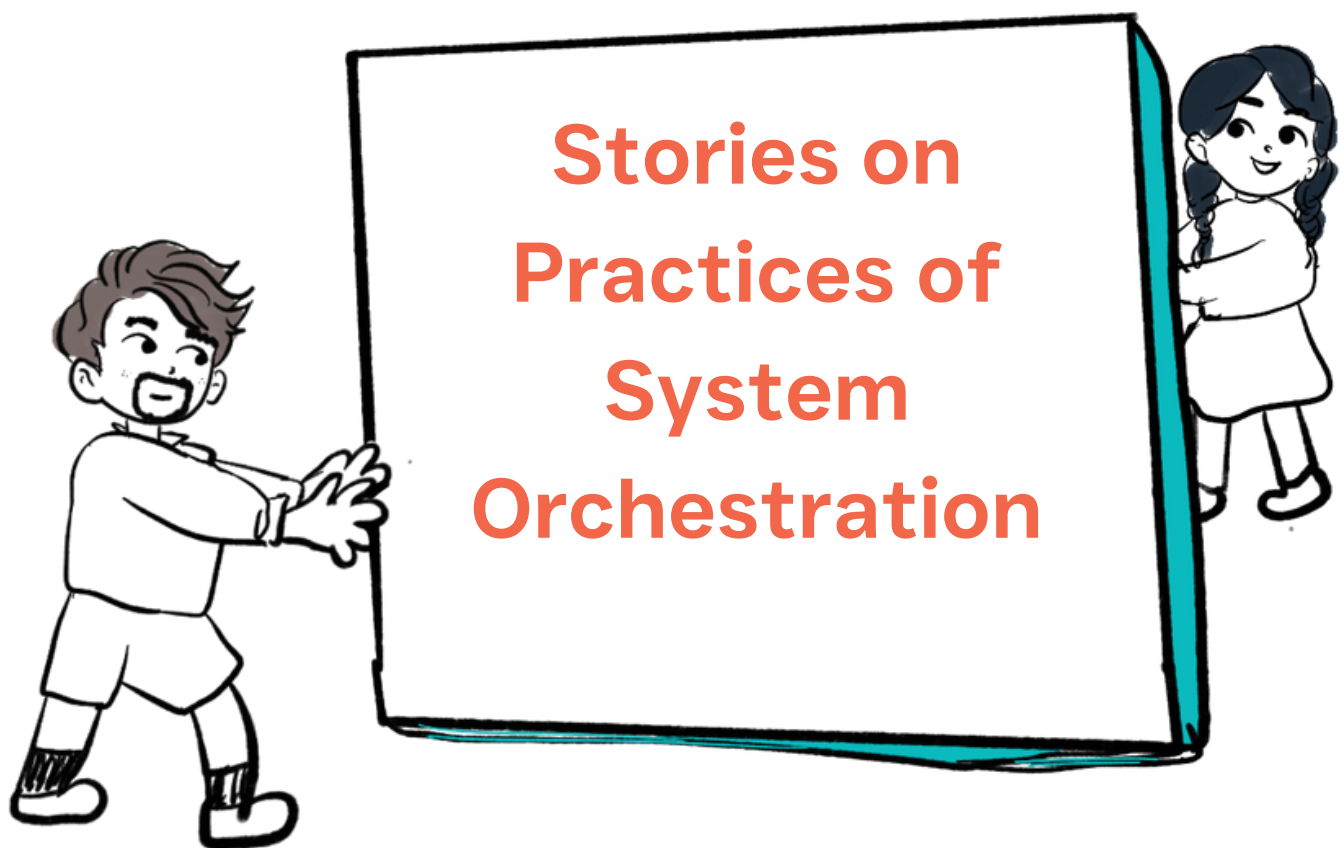






Prelude: Stories on Practices of System Orchestration

Over the past eight years, we have had the privilege of walking alongside some truly remarkable leaders from across the globe. These are individuals who have dedicated themselves to tackling complex social challenges, that often bring moments of doubt, uncertainty, and immense pressure. As we listened to their stories, we noticed something compelling – while many were making progress on the issues they cared about, they weren't always achieving the scale they envisioned. This led us to a fundamental question: What enables some to shape and shift systems at scale, while others encounter persistent barriers?

We saw that some leaders struggled with the same chasms, such as the question of resources: “I have this amazing plan, but how do I make it sustainable?” Others found it difficult to think beyond what already existed, to reimagine solutions that could drive real change at scale: “How do I think beyond the frameworks I've known?” And for many, the challenge wasn't just about taking action – it was the gap in knowledge: “I know I can't continue doing what I was doing, but I don't yet see the path forward.”

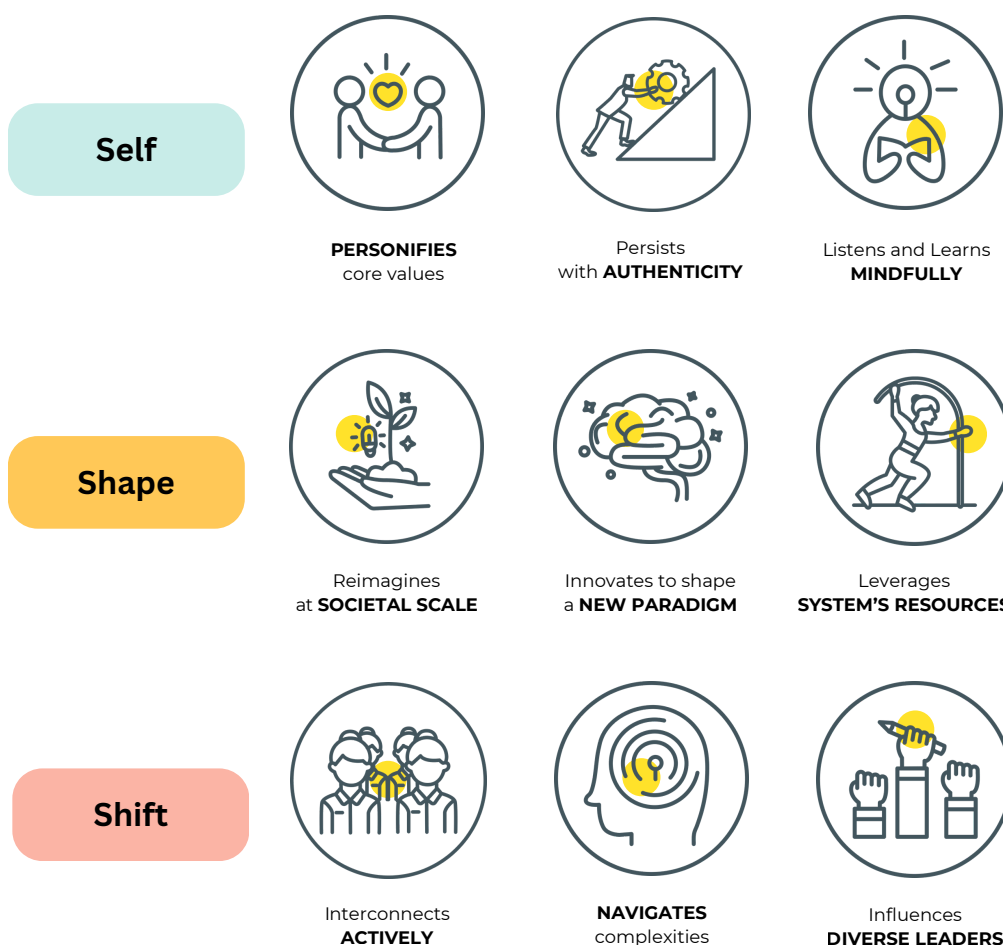
But what stood out the most was something even deeper – the internal journey of self-efficacy. Leading at scale can often feel like walking a lonely path. The doubts are real. Am I ready? Am I enough? Can I pull this off? What we noticed was that the leaders who overcame those doubts cultivated a strong sense of self – a foundation that kept them grounded even in the toughest moments. They didn't just lead with their heads; they led with their hearts, their values, and a clear purpose.

We asked ourselves a simple question: What if we could create a space for leaders – those working to make change at scale – to come together, reflect, and grow with each other? A place where they could share their struggles, celebrate their wins, and support one another along the journey? Hence, Leader's Lab Network (LLN) emerged as a space where leaders practicing system orchestration could step back, reflect, recharge, and grow in the company of peers. Here, leaders don't walk this path alone; they walk together, sharing their struggles and discoveries while shaping the future.

Through these deep conversations with over 30 leaders, we uncovered nine practices of system orchestration that enabled these leaders to succeed. These weren't static traits. They were evolving forces, each shaping how a leader moved through the world. Some leaders practiced them more than others, and in different ways, but together, these practices form the essence of system orchestration – the work of driving exponential change.



Rather than just naming these practices in the abstract, we wanted to show them in action. And that's where the nine stories come in – **real, inspiring stories of people who live and breathe these practices every day.** Each story gives you a closer look at what it really means to practice system orchestration, not as an idea, but in the messy, dynamic reality of driving change at scale.



As you read through these stories, we encourage you to think about your own leadership journey. Which parts of these stories do you connect with? Which ones inspire you? And how might these show up in your own path as you move forward?

Welcome to the journey of shaping change at scale together.

Antaraa's journey in the social impact space began at a young age, fueled by a deep curiosity about the evolving dynamics of governance and democracy. She started by volunteering for political campaigns and working with organizations like Asia Society and democracyOS, where she gained firsthand insight into the gaps between policy-making and public accessibility. These early experiences shaped her leadership approach, one grounded in the belief that societal transformation lies in empowering others and creating space for collective action.

This mindset led to the founding of **Civis**, a platform bridging the gap between citizens and governments. Her core philosophy is simple yet radical: "You can't be the custodian of anything." She often says, "The moment you hold custodianship to yourself, the ability for others to innovate is completely obliterated."

These values are deeply embedded in her work at Civis. She envisioned the platform as an open-source space where citizens and governments could co-create laws before they were finalized. Under her leadership, Civis enabled people to directly shape the policies that affected their lives, shifting the power dynamics between governments and the people they served. It wasn't just about creating laws; it was about creating an ecosystem where ideas were freely exchanged, improved, and ultimately made more impactful by collective action.



Antaraa's leadership is grounded in one simple truth: it's not about her, it's about the people she empowers. She doesn't seek ownership of ideas or solutions; instead, she creates spaces where diverse voices can drive transformative change. Whether through open-source platforms or collaborative networks, her focus is on ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

Antaraa believes that real change comes from the strength of many voices, not one. Through her work, she shows that practicing system orchestration means acting collectively by enabling an environment where others can build upon ideas for the greater good

How can you create spaces that empower choice, uphold dignity, and restore agency, enabling others to own their futures?

Personifies Core Values



Rohini Nilekani's story begins not with grand declarations or immediate triumphs, but with a quiet determination rooted in a deep belief that change, though difficult, is always possible. Her journey, from co-founding **Pratham Books** to scaling it into a global platform with StoryWeaver, demonstrates how deeply she believes in possibility and transformation.

Her vision of “A book in every child’s hand” was far more than just a slogan—it was a mission to transform an entire ecosystem and make books accessible to millions of children across India. What began as a simple idea to make reading available to every child soon grew into a much larger platform that would touch lives far and wide. But the journey was not without its challenges. Rohini took a radical stand, prioritizing accessibility over profitability. This led to the creation of StoryWeaver, a free, digital platform that made stories accessible to children, even in the most remote corners of the world.



Through the overwhelming challenges, what kept her going was her deep sense of purpose—knowing that too many children were being left behind by systems that should be serving them. She also understood that societal transformation is rarely straightforward; it’s often messy, with setbacks, and the way forward can be unclear. Yet, she never retreated. She pushed forward, knowing that change at scale takes patience and sustained effort—sometimes over decades.

From her work with **Pratham Books** and **Arghyam** to the **Ekstep Foundation**, her journey has always centered on collaboration and collective impact. She’s never believed that systemic change can come from the actions of one alone. It’s about working together. She faces challenges head-on, knowing that progress comes from learning, evolving, and, above all, remaining open to co-creating with others who share her passion.

Rohini’s journey shows what persisting with authenticity looks like in practice. It’s not an easy path—staying true to one’s mission, especially when working toward impact at scale, takes relentless commitment and the ability to adapt, collaborate, and co-create despite uncertainty. But this has been at the heart of her work, and it’s what has kept her moving forward, no matter how unclear or challenging the road might seem.

What inspires you to seek impact at scale, even when the path ahead seems uncertain?

Persists with Authenticity



In a world that moves quickly, the art of mindful listening often feels like a relic of the past. Yet for those leading societal transformation, it's a superpower—a path to deeper understanding.

One leader reflected on how they discovered humility, not through grand accomplishments, but in moments that challenged their certainty. For them, true leadership wasn't about having all the answers but about listening with intention. By staying open to new perspectives, they learned to adapt, evolve, and even change their mind when confronted with deeper truths. Another change leader, who spent years immersed in community work, shared how their greatest lessons didn't come from strategy sessions but from sitting quietly and absorbing the stories of others. They described listening as a bridge—not just a means of gathering information but a way of truly connecting, of seeing the world through someone else's eyes and letting that insight shape their own understanding.

Others find wisdom in the stillness of reflection. One leader described feedback as a gift, not an obligation. They deliberately carve out time to pause, look inward, and let new insights inform their values and decisions. For them, mindful listening includes not only hearing others but also listening to the quiet voice within, allowing it to guide their path. There are those who find growth in discomfort, too. One mentor shared how the cycles of learning, unlearning, and relearning shape their perspective. They spoke of the courage it takes to step into the unknown, embrace change, and let go of assumptions that no longer serve. Listening, in their view, is an act of courage—a willingness to let new ideas disrupt the old and lead to growth.



Visionaries see listening as the foundation for co-creation. Collaboration begins with empathy, and the best solutions come when people listen deeply, learn together, and create with shared purpose. Time and again, these stories reveal a profound truth: mindful listening isn't passive. It's a deliberate act of presence and humility, a practice that transforms not just conversations but entire ways of thinking.

When was the last time you listened—not to reply, but to truly understand and how did it change you?

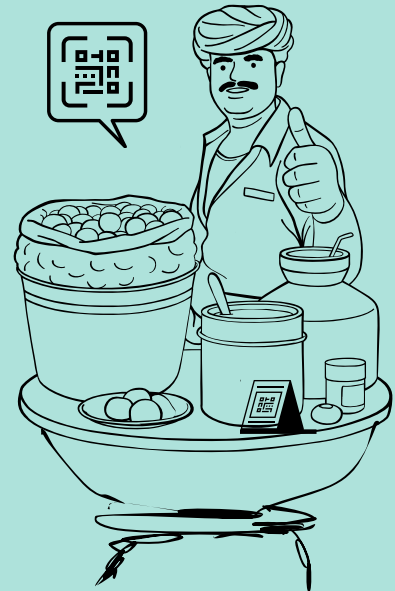
Listens & Learns Mindfully



Picture a small market in rural India, buzzing with life. A shopkeeper smiles as he receives payment through a digital app and a young student excitedly receives her first government scholarship directly into her bank account. These simple yet profound moments weren't always part of the everyday fabric—they're the result of one leader's bold vision to reimagine systems that touch billions.

Nandan Nilekani didn't just dream of change; he asked the kind of questions that seemed impossible at the time. What if every person had a unique identity to access their rights? What if technology didn't exclude but included the most marginalized? These questions led to Aadhaar, a biometric identity system now used by over 1.4 billion people.

But the real magic wasn't just in the system—it was in how it came to life. Nandan brought together government officials, technologists, and civil society leaders, each with different priorities and doubts. Instead of imposing his vision, he invited them into it, creating a shared sense of purpose. This wasn't a solo act; it was a symphony of collaboration, trust-building, and persistence.



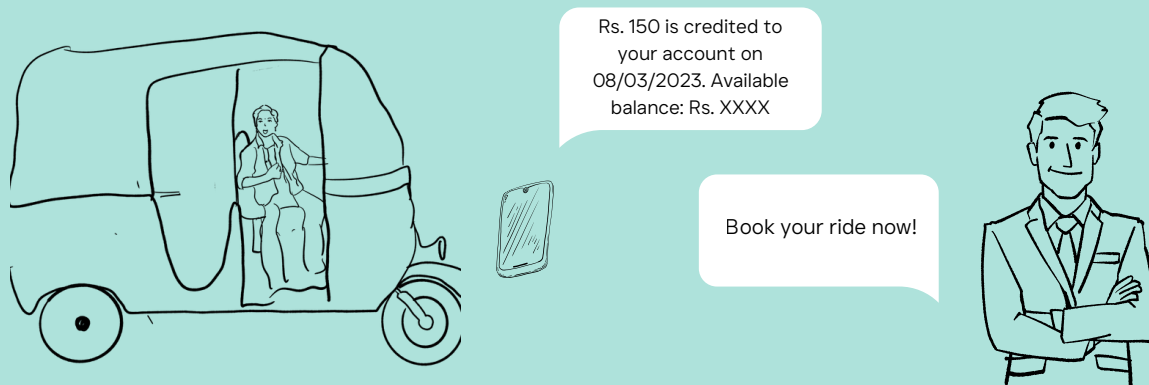
Nandan didn't stop there. With initiatives like **UPI**, he showed the power of scale again, making something as simple as sending money a game-changer for millions. His story reminds us that orchestrating systems isn't about fixing one piece of the puzzle—it's about reimagining the entire picture and ensuring everyone can see themselves in it.

What's the one big "What if?" you're ready to take on and who do you need beside you to turn it into a reality?

Reimagines at Societal Scale



Imagine navigating through a bustling city—rickshaws, buses, cabs, and bikes weaving together in a chaotic dance. Now imagine if all of it—every mode of transport, every service—worked seamlessly, connected by a system that wasn't owned by one company but enabled by everyone. That's the vision **Sujith** wanted to bring to life when he co-created Beckn, a protocol designed not to compete, but to empower.



But here's the twist: Sujith didn't build the solutions himself. Instead, he focused on defining a framework, a set of open rules and guidelines that others could adopt, adapt, and innovate with. At first, it felt like a difficult decision. How do you make an impact without owning the solution? But this leap of faith turned out to be exactly what was needed to unlock creativity across an entire ecosystem.

At the heart of scaling lies the act of letting go — allowing others to take ownership and drive innovation. **Beckn** became a cornerstone of **ONDC**, reimagining how retail players in India connect digitally. It also found its way into healthcare, where **UHI** is turning universal access from a dream into a tangible reality. By staying open source, Beckn handed the reins to the community, fostering innovation not as a lone venture but as a shared movement.

And then came the question Sujith could not stop asking: if an open protocol could transform how a city moves and how small sellers reach buyers without gatekeepers, could the same idea transform how the world exchanges value of any kind? That question led him to cofound **Networks for Humanity**, a global initiative building an internet of value, where people and businesses can discover, exchange, and move value as freely as information flows online today. Sujith's journey reminds us that solving big problems is not always about being the hero. Sometimes, it is about stepping back, building the conditions for others to thrive, and trusting the collective to shape the future.

What's one way you can shift from owning to empowering?
How can you innovate not just for the few, but for the many?
Innovates to Shape a New Paradigm



A school in a remote village where teachers have gathered in a small room for a leadership workshop, exchanging ideas and dreams for their students. Meanwhile, in another part of the country, a fledgling grassroots organization is designing an innovative curriculum. These moments, though seemingly separate, are threads in a larger tapestry—one woven by leaders like **Khushboo**.

Khushboo's purpose finds its roots in her upbringing. Growing up, she often watched her mother, a schoolteacher, pour her heart into her work, teaching far beyond the curriculum and into the very lives of her students. Her mother's dedication to creating spaces of growth and belonging became Khushboo's compass, guiding her to see education as more than just a system—it was a lifeline to opportunity and dignity. This early influence ignited her calling to create spaces where every child, regardless of circumstances, can dream bigger and achieve more.



This journey has culminated in **Shikshalokam**, the organization she founded to transform how educators engage with their work and their communities. She believes the system is not as broken as it may seem—it is full of untapped potential. Through initiatives which focus on micro-improvements, Khushboo empowers educators to make small, consistent changes that can shift the system over time. Whether it's building partnerships or amplifying the voices of teachers, she sees these relationships as the very resources of the system, skillfully working with them to create something extraordinary. But it takes more than strategy to leverage resources—it takes the kind of co-creation Khushboo champions: grounded in humility, openness, and patience. “In the act of co-creation,” she often says, “we need to think of time as the secret sauce that makes the magic happen. With time, trust builds up, and shared ownership too. We may feel restless during the process because it feels like we are moving slow. But it's like they say, to go fast, sometimes you need to go slow—and believe me, the wait is all worth it.” Khushboo's journey shows what it looks like to turn limitations into opportunities and scarcity into innovation through trust and collaboration.

That same spirit of open building has drawn **BRAC International** to collaborate with Shikshalokam, bringing **Elevate** (Shikshalokam's platform for leadership development) into their **Ultra Poor Graduation program** a livelihood solution that equips coaches to help families build sustainable incomes and lasting economic independence.

What untapped resources can drive your mission forward? And who might you invite to co-create something extraordinary?

Leverages System's Resources



Imagine a bustling city center during the height of the pandemic. Citizens queue up for vaccination certificates, urban local bodies coordinate logistics, and markets scramble to provide essential services. Behind the scenes, a digital framework silently connects it all, ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and citizens can access what they need. This is the invisible yet powerful work of leaders like Viraj, who embody the art of interconnecting Samaj (Civil Society), Sarkaar(Government), and Bazaar(Market).

Viraj's journey began with personal frustrations—navigating public services in India often felt like an uphill battle. Later, experiencing seamless systems abroad, he asked himself, “Why not here?” That question became the foundation of his work at the **eGov Foundation**, an organization built to bridge divides and foster collaboration between governments, civil society, and markets.

Through initiatives like **DIGIT**, an open-source platform, eGov has transformed how information flows between societal actors. Today, it serves 250 million citizens across 14 Indian states and over 800 urban local bodies. During the pandemic, eGov's digital public goods facilitated the issuance of over 2 billion COVID-19 certificates across five countries—a testament to its global impact.



Viraj believes that collaboration must be rooted in shared goals. As he explains, “It’s about creating a shared narrative, building a shared picture of success, and aligning everyone toward it.” His leadership demonstrates that the magic of interconnection lies in recognizing each actor’s unique role while ensuring they all work toward a common purpose.

For Viraj, the practice of system orchestration is about enabling systems that are prepared for the future— systems that anticipate and adapt to the cares and concerns of its diverse actors. It’s about generating momentum within latent systems and proving that when Samaj, Sarkaar, and Bazaar function collectively, the possibilities for societal transformation are limitless.

What new connections can you create or strengthen to bring about a shared vision of impact at scale in your work?

Interconnects Actively



Shankar's journey into the world of governance wasn't one he'd ever expected. Once a successful businessman, he was used to making quick decisions, leading teams, and pushing things forward with the ease that comes from knowing exactly what's at stake. But when he found himself waiting in long, quiet corridors of government offices, he came face to face with an entirely different kind of challenge—one that was far more complex than he had ever imagined.

It was here, in these unassuming moments, that Shankar realized the true meaning of scale. In business, scale was something you could measure. But in government, scale wasn't just about size—it was about the depth of the problem. It was about navigating a sea of interconnected systems, stakeholders, and priorities that seemed to constantly shift and evolve. He had to rethink everything he knew about complexity.

Shankar's time working on Aadhaar was a pivotal moment in his journey. What seemed like a straightforward task—building and scaling an identity system for 1.4 billion people—became far more complex. It wasn't just about technology; it was about navigating the layers of forces and decisions shaping the system's use

It wasn't just about knowing what worked, but understanding why it worked—or didn't. It was about adapting to a system that couldn't be controlled from the top down, and instead, needed to be nurtured from within. Shankar began to see that practice of system orchestration was about designing ecosystems where different stakeholders could thrive, and at moments of transformation, change could ripple outward to create lasting impact.



At **EkStep**, Shankar applied his understanding of complexity to education by leading the development of Sunbird, an open-source, modular digital platform. Instead of offering a one-size-fits-all solution, he focused on creating a foundation that empowered teachers and learners to innovate. Sunbird became a dynamic tool, evolving with time, much like the ecosystems he had come to understand.

Through these experiences, he realized that it is about enabling environments where others can find their own answers. It's less about having all the solutions and more about being comfortable with uncertainty, stepping back, and embracing new perspectives. Navigating complex systems taught him that leading well means understanding these complexities and empowering others to do the same.

How can shifting your perspective to view the world through the lens of the problem unlock new pathways for change, and what impact does that have?

Navigates Complexities



It was a bustling afternoon in a small city in India, and 20-year-old **Sachin** was sitting across from a group of bright-eyed teenagers. They were eager, full of dreams, and hopeful about their future, yet there was something more he saw in them—vast, untapped capabilities. At that moment, as he helped prepare these young minds for entrance exams to law schools, a realization quietly dawned on him. He wasn't just shaping their academic futures; he was witnessing the beginning of their journeys toward something far greater: their full potential.

As Sachin traveled across 60 cities in India, meeting thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds, he felt they were capable of more than just academic success. While many would get into top schools and secure prestigious jobs, he saw something deeper—these young people could become leaders and changemakers with a purpose that went beyond success. Though he couldn't put it into words at the time, the feeling that they had the power to impact the world stayed with him.

Fast forward a few years, and Sachin's journey had evolved. After launching Vahura, a startup in the legal industry that helped professionals reach their fullest potential, he realized that the most powerful force in the world wasn't technology, money, or systems—it was people. This insight led to the founding of **Agami**, a platform he co-founded with Supriya, designed to build a new kind of ecosystem where leaders in law, business, and society could collaborate and unlock the potential of others.

As they continued their work, Sachin and **Supriya** understood that true leadership wasn't about structures or systems; it was about creating the space and opportunity for individuals to thrive and step into roles where they could lead and influence. Agami also led to the creation of **OpenNyAI**, which develops AI-driven public goods to transform justice in India, alongside their work in **Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)** and **PUCAR**, aimed at revolutionizing dispute resolution for every Indian.



Through Agami, Sachin has become a quiet yet powerful force in empowering a new generation of leaders. His belief that anyone can step up and lead with the right guidance and support, has made him an exemplar of leadership in action. What he's learned over the years is simple: change doesn't start with a policy or a product. It starts with people—unlocking their potential, helping them find their voice, and inspiring them to take action.

Over the years, Sachin has learned that true leadership is not about personal achievement, but about empowering others to lead. He has come to understand that the greatest strength in any ecosystem is the agency of its people.

How can you enable others to unlock their potential, and how would that transform the world you're building?

Influences Diverse Leaders



