

Corporate Citizen

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INTERVIEW

Amitkumar Shrivastava,
Head of AI Unit, Fujitsu India

COVER STORY

Reverse Mentoring

A win-win all round



Corporate stalwarts discuss the multifaceted benefits of reverse mentoring that's trending in workplaces, for a more inclusive and sophisticated work culture



Lila Poonawalla,
industrialist and founder, LPF



Mahankali Srinivas
Rao, CEO, T-Hub



Girish Gadamsetty,
Dir. Bus. Ops, Adobe



Ninad Karpe,
partner, 100X.VC



Raj Kapoor, founder,
India Blockchain Alliance



Sajeev Nair, CEO,
CHRS and ASSET



S V Nathan, co-founder
and chairman, Visara



Ganesh Natarajan, chm.,
Honeywell Automation India



Rajiv Mitra,
CEO, Prabhat Dairy



Deepak Shikarpur,
Dir., Kinetic Communications



Ravi Krishnamachari,
CEO, Raas Intellisolutions LLP



Aman Rajabali,
CEO, Kabir Profile Solutions



Ankita Singh,
CPO, CIGNEX

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AI Evangelist

Having worked in the artificial intelligence industry for over 11 years, **Amitkumar Shrivastava**, Head - AI Unit, Fujitsu India, is a visionary, advisor, mentor and global distinguished engineer. With a forward-thinking approach, he can visualise how artificial intelligence can enhance human experience in a balanced, ethical and sustainable manner if used responsibly. In a one-on-one interview with *Corporate Citizen*, he shares what it means to leverage artificial intelligence for the greater good, his expertise on artificial intelligence education, flourishing artificial intelligence opportunities in India, its challenges and more

By Anushree Bhoware

Corporate Citizen: What sparked your interest in artificial intelligence? Take us through your career journey.

Amitkumar Shrivastava: Movies like Takedown (Kevin Mitnick's story) and watching the UNIX black screen in a lab while pursuing my bachelor's ignited my interest in technology. I got my first desktop around that time and installed the OpenBSD operating system (OS)—a complex OS to handle. I used to struggle to fix many things that required much analysis. However, gradually, I got inclined towards log/pattern analysis. So, from here, it all started for me, and then my love for playing chess inclined me towards game theory and decision-making—the fundamental concepts in AI. This is how, knowingly or unknowingly, I moved into a machine learning and AI mindset.

I started my career as a trainee/associate. My passion for making things easier and more productive led me to automate and analyse a lot of data. I built on that and currently leading the AI practice in Fujitsu, India, and providing my expertise to Fujitsu Global.

I also actively contribute as an advisor

to many world-class technology councils, computer societies, and National Industry Associations, including national programmes on AI skilling framework, and instrumental in developing GenAI standards, including National Occupational Standards (NOSs), micro-credentials, and qualifications and curriculum, tailored for AI for all, many and few, spanning from students and professionals to homemakers. Currently, I'm contributing to an All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) initiative—developing specialised post-10th diploma courses to enhance youth employability in the country. So, apart from my daily job, I am working for the people of the country. All these activities keep me charged to contribute even more to society.

CC: How do you stay updated on new things happening in AI?

I follow recent research papers and social media platforms by following the relevant pages (organisations, fellow experts, research communities, etc.). Also, as I visit conferences

and get chances to listen to others as well, I keep myself updated, not only from a technology point of view but also with diverse views and opinions. I also hear discussions and debates online, including podcasts, not on any specific channel but based on the invited speaker and the topics. Also, I keep myself updated on domain knowledge and learn technology from online courses.

CC: How do you bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world applications in your mentoring programmes?

Both theory and practice are important to learn from and apply the knowledge. A balance of both is essential, as well as to whom I am mentoring—one-on-one mentoring or for a group to create plan and strategy for them. As a mentor, I find it is not enough to teach mentees, the theoretical aspects of a subject or a skill. They must also learn how to apply their knowledge to real-world situations and problems. That is why I do the following things in my mentoring programmes but not limited to:

- I provide hands-on projects or assignments

requiring mentees to apply the concepts and skills they learned from theory to solve real problems or create products. For example, after discussing data preprocessing, I ask them to find and clean messy data.

- I encourage mentees to participate in competitions, hackathons, or other events that challenge them to use their theoretical knowledge in innovative and practical ways. For example, I recommend them to join a Kaggle competition or a data hackathon.
- I share relevant case studies, examples, or stories illustrating how theory can be used or adapted in different contexts and domains. For example, I am teaching them about machine learning. In that case, I show them how it can be applied to various fields such as healthcare, education or finance.
- I ask them to connect with experts or practitioners who can share their insights and experiences on using theory in their work or research. For example, in entrepreneurship, I link them with entrepreneurs or investors for real-world advice.
- I provide feedback, guidance or support to mentees on how they can improve their application of theory or overcome any difficulties or obstacles they face. For example, in software engineering, I review their code, suggest improvements, etc.
- I encourage experimentation, exploration and learning by doing. Mentees are encouraged to try out different approaches, test their assumptions, and learn from their failures and successes. For example, I am teaching them about design thinking. In that case, I encourage them to prototype, iterate, and validate their ideas with real users.

My mentoring sessions focus on empowering mentees to ask questions and discover answers, using a personalised approach based on their diverse backgrounds.

CC: How do you see the future of AI skilling and education in India?

I see a lot of potential and opportunity for AI skilling and education in India, as the country has a large and young population, a growing digital infrastructure, and a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. Artificial intelligence can be leveraged to solve many social and economic challenges India faces, such as improving healthcare, education, agriculture and governance. However,



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to realise this potential, India needs to invest in developing a skilled and diverse AI talent pool and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration among various stakeholders, including academia, industry, government and civil society.

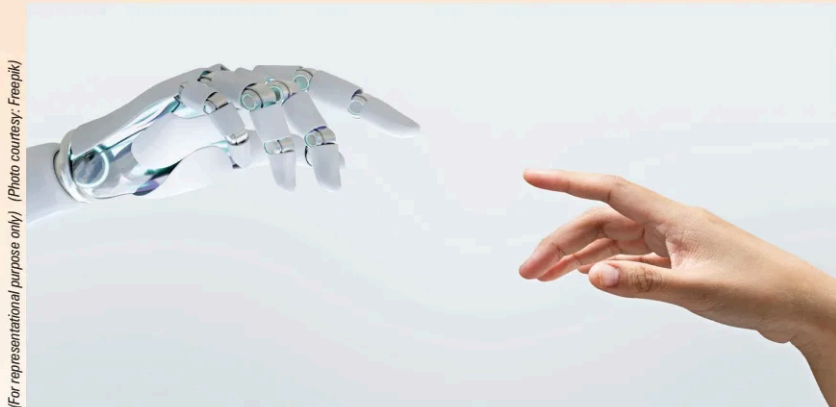
My vision for AI skilling and education in India is to create a learning ecosystem that is accessible, inclusive and relevant for all. This means providing opportunities for learners of different ages, backgrounds and interests to acquire AI skills and knowledge, whether they are students, professionals, entrepreneurs or enthusiasts. It also means designing curricula and pedagogies aligned with the needs and aspirations of the learners, as well as the demands and opportunities of the market. In fact, I am also doing so. I am part of the National Programme on AI Skilling Framework and have contributed in this direction. Moreover, due to local meets, conferences, etc., learners can connect, collaborate and co-create with each other and with mentors, experts and peers from across the world.

The current landscape offers many upskilling opportunities through certifications, diploma courses, and specialised degrees. Additionally, a growing pool of experts is emerging to mentor and coach AI aspirants, providing them invaluable guidance, feedback and resources. In addition, AI awareness, innovation, and social impact are being supported by organising hackathons, competitions and events that encourage cooperation among different communities. I envision that AI will be applied for more customised learning and integrated into the curriculum, even for non-technical degrees.

The commitment and proactive approach of the Indian government and Prime Minister are instrumental in encouraging young minds to explore career paths in AI. This collective effort holds immense promise for India's future as a global AI powerhouse.

CC: What are the main challenges and opportunities in the AI industry today, and how do you tackle them?

Artificial intelligence is a technology that can enhance our lives in ways previously unimaginable. With AI we are pushing the limits of what's possible across sectors. The promise of AI also brings a responsibility to address the ethical, societal and environmental hurdles that lie ahead. We need to balance our enthusiasm for what AI



(For representational purpose only) (Photo courtesy: Freepik)

“ The rise of advanced AI also brings us face-to-face with profound philosophical questions about intelligence, consciousness, and the future of human-AI coexistence. These technical challenges and existential inquiries define the contours of our shared future

can do, with mindfulness about how it's done.

The ethical challenges are significant. We need to ensure AI's fairness, transparency, and accountability. Concerns exist regarding potential exploitation by powerful corporations or the dominance of a few AI players in the market. International collaboration and regulations ensure responsible AI development that benefits all.

Moreover, with the rise of technologies like deepfakes, we're facing a new frontier in misinformation. This challenge underscores digital literacy importance. Deepfakes can create convincingly false narratives, impacting everything from personal reputation to the democratic process. Equipping society to evaluate digital content critically is essential in today's world where

seeing doesn't always mean believing.

Also, a forward-thinking approach involves harnessing data ethically and sustainably. Here, the concept of data incentivisation comes into play, presenting a model where data owners are rewarded for sharing their data. This could revolutionise data accessibility for AI research and development, ensuring that the benefits of AI advancements are more equitably distributed.

Imagine a future where individuals retain control over their data and are compensated for its use in training AI systems. Such an approach respects individual privacy and agency, and opens up new avenues for economic opportunity and innovation. By promoting a fair and transparent data economy, we can encourage wider participation in AI development, enrich the datasets that fuel AI innovation, and ensure that AI technologies reflect the diversity of human experiences.

The conversation around AI and employment also has various angles. Yes, AI will transform the job market, but it also opens possibilities for new kinds of employment. The key is preparing for change through retraining, upskilling, and focusing on the human qualities that AI can't replicate. It's an opportunity for growth, innovation and collaboration across sectors to ensure no one is left behind in the shift towards an AI-integrated economy.

The development of AI isn't free of environmental impacts, notably its significant energy consumption. The AI community is actively seeking solutions, from optimising algorithms to be more energy-efficient hardware, to leveraging renewable energy sources.

The rise of advanced AI also brings us face-to-face with profound philosophical questions

about intelligence, consciousness, and the future of human-AI coexistence. These technical challenges and existential inquiries define the contours of our shared future. We must approach AI with optimism and a critical eye to navigate its complexities to ensure a future that aligns with our deepest values and aspirations.

CC: Why is innovation important for a company's success, and how do you encourage new ideas in your workplace?

Innovation is the lifeblood of any company's success. It allows us to create new products, services, processes, or business models that meet the ever-evolving needs and expectations of our customers, stakeholders and society. Innovation gives Fujitsu a competitive edge, enhances our brand reputation, increases efficiency and productivity, and generates new revenue streams.

At Fujitsu, we cultivate a curiosity, openness and collaboration culture. We encourage everyone to ask questions, share their perspectives, and learn from each other. We actively promote cross-functional and cross-cultural communication and interaction. Fujitsu provides ample internal and external learning opportunities, including training programmes, conferences, and connections with external experts. Also, we encourage colleagues to write papers, and it's a way to promote learning and innovation, allowing them to explore specific areas, share their knowledge, and spark new ideas. We also actively encourage discussion and debate around ideas. This allows us to refine them and identify the most promising ones for implementation. We support calculated risk-taking and experimentation, where people can test their assumptions and challenge the status quo without fear of judgement. All these bring fresh perspectives, new skills, and access to additional resources, all crucial for innovation efforts.

Recognition and celebration are also key motivators. We acknowledge and celebrate innovation achievements, providing a platform for people to showcase their outcomes and inspire others. This creates a sense of pride and encourages continuous innovation. In short, we create and promote an environment for creativity and innovation.

CC: Share some advice that changed your perspectives about life and career.

While staying focused on your tasks is important, pay attention to the valuable opportunities your



Pic: Amandeep Jadhav

surroundings offer. Look for opportunities to learn new skills, network with colleagues, try new things, and contribute and share ideas. These connections and experiences can push your career forward and are far more valuable than fleeting gossip.

CC: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I like music and meaningful songs. Also, I enjoy going to supermarkets and purchasing new groceries. I'm unsure how, but I have started enjoying it in the last three years. Every time I go to any such supermarket, I get amused by seeing new stuff. It may be because I used to purchase from *Kirana* shops, and now here, I see many things accessible that I was not even aware of. Here, I can pick and check even if purchasing that is not required sometimes, but I enjoy picking things to try. Also, I like to visit mountainous places during holidays, which is at least my first preference, making me super relaxed and fresh.

CC: How do you respond to failure or setbacks in your professional life?

Setbacks are growth opportunities. I actively analyse my mistakes to identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to avoid them in the future. While professional development is crucial, I also find value in the wisdom and support of my loved ones. My parents' guidance and my wife's unwavering encouragement provide a strong foundation for me to navigate challenges. In addition to personal reflection, I also seek constructive feedback from colleagues. Their insights can offer valuable perspectives on approaching similar difficulties in the future. While results aren't always in our control, I

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strive to maintain a healthy perspective on setbacks. I acknowledge them, learn from them, and move forward with renewed determination. I keep myself composed and hardly get attached to success or failure.

I value the recognition that is provided to me, but after receiving any certificates or trophies, I only see them at the time I receive them. Because, these symbols do not keep me in charge, I see them as some past achievements and then focus on my present efforts with the past detachment. Letting go of past achievements allows me to stay motivated and embrace new growth opportunities. Also, I do not get too happy or disheartened, which helps me a lot and comes naturally.

CC: What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs based on your experiences in the corporate world?

It is like the churning of the '*Samudra Manthan*' in ancient Indian mythology. It equips you with valuable skills. But, true entrepreneurial success comes from following your *Swadharma*—your purpose. Identify a problem you're passionate about solving, validate the need and build a strong team. Embrace challenges with the spirit of Arjun from the *Bhagavad Gita*, focused on action. Remember, a burning desire to make a positive impact can be your most valuable asset.

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