

Space for Attempting Question Paper

Book Cover:



Dedication

To the Gardener of Thoughtful Minds

Dr. Amit Gupta

For planting the seed of this reflection not merely as an assignment, but as an invitation to pause, look inward, and trace the quiet design of my own rise.

Your course, Designing Work Organizations, didn't just teach frameworks and structures but it asked us to feel the undercurrents of culture, to listen to the silences in systems, and to honour the human soul behind strategy.

This story grew because you dared us to tell it. And somewhere between org charts and personal chaos, I found myself not in a grand epiphany, but in small, grounded moments of work and becoming.

Thank you for giving us the space to turn our careers into meaning, and our structure into story.

Akriti Sharma

Author's Notes

I didn't set out to write a book.

This began as an assignment something academic, structured, and deadline-driven. But somewhere between the memories, the course readings, and the quiet, uncomfortable questions I had carried for years, it became something more.

It became a conversation with myself.

This story spans 16 years, three organizations, and multiple geographies. But beyond the logos and timelines, this is a story of adaptation, quiet leadership, and the deep human forces that shape the way we work. It is also a reflection of how structures influence our voices and how we learn to find them anyway.

It's about systems and hierarchies, yes. But also, about silence and courage. About feeling unseen in rooms that demanded volume. About navigating cultures, I didn't understand. About balancing motherhood, leadership, and ambition all while learning to trust my instincts and build influence without a mandate.

The Designing Work Organizations (DWO) course didn't just give me frameworks. It gave me language for things I had always sensed but couldn't explain. Why some teams clicked while others cracked. Why certain leaders moved people without needing hierarchy. Why structure isn't only about control it's also about care, trust, and alignment.

The title "Planting for the Future" wasn't chosen lightly. It reflects how my journey hasn't been meteoric but intentional. Each chapter shows a seed sometimes of resilience, sometimes of reinvention, sometimes of strategy. The blooms came later. Sometimes quietly. Sometimes all at once.

As a woman navigating leadership without always holding the title, as a mother balancing invisible labor with visible results, and as a lifelong learner now pursuing an Executive MBA, this reflection allowed me to connect the dots between my lived experience and the organizational systems we studied in DWO.

I am grateful to my husband, daughter, parents, mentors, and teams whose support formed the invisible network behind every visible success. Without them, this story wouldn't be possible. And without this course, I may never have paused to see its shape.

*This book isn't perfect. Neither is the journey it captures. But it's honest.
And if you've ever wondered whether your quiet story matters,
I hope this reminds you that it does.*

*Because growth isn't always about climbing.
Sometimes, it's about rooting.*

And this is mine.

*—Akriti Sharma
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Story Begins: (The visuals are just little markers that helped me find my way and maybe they'll guide you too. Each chapter ends with a short reflection to pause and take stock before the story moves on)

Chapter 1: Sowing My First Seeds – Structure, Silence & Specs at Steria

Where it all started with COBOL, confusion, and corporate cafeteria politics.

Steria India Ltd. | Mainframe Trainee | June 2007

Theme: Mechanistic Design, Early Role Entrapment, and the Invisible Currents of Culture

Boarding the First Train to Structure

My mother's eyes didn't let go of me. My father, trying to stay composed, handed me a small steel tiffin and said, "*Don't forget who you are just go see what you can become.*" I nodded, but my throat was tight. I had never left home alone before. No hostels, no overnight trips. Just the familiar streets of Bhopal, my college campus, and the safety of evening tea at home. Now I was boarding a train to Noida a city I had never seen, for a company I only knew from a placement day PowerPoint, and a job in something called COBOL. I didn't know what awaited me except a hard mattress in PG housing, corporate formals two sizes too loose, and a swirl of unfamiliar systems. I thought I was going to learn how to work.

But really, I was about to learn how organizations work you shape you, stretch you, sometimes shelve you.

This was not just my first job. It was my first encounter with structure, silence, and survival.

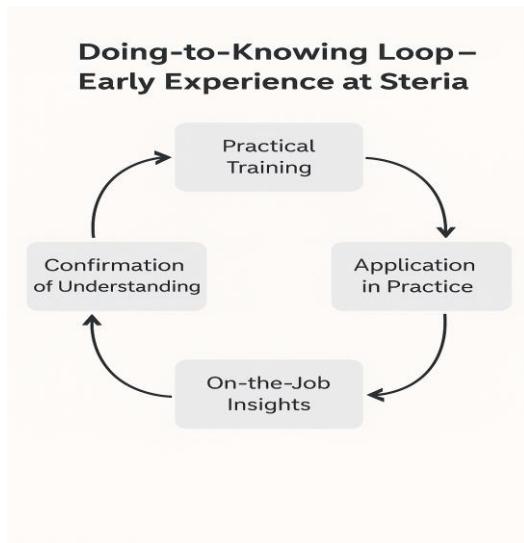
Steria India Ltd. had picked me during our final-year placements. The city of arrival? Noida. We batch of 10 people campus selected from GEC Bhopal were put up at the Radisson for 10 days of induction. It was surreal corporate training in a hotel where they folded napkins into lotus flowers. We learned HR policies, watched animated videos on ethics, and discussed confidentiality like spies in a movie.

This is where I met Nisha with eyeliner sharper than her COBOL logic and Rajiv, the class clown who masked anxiety with humour. These friendships became my *first informal network*, a space to ask "silly" questions, vent doubts, and make sense of the corporate fog.

Green Screens & Grey Zones

The honeymoon ended with mainframe training. COBOL, JCL, DB2. We were entering a world where the user interface looked like the 80s and the documentation never ended. It was mechanical, procedural, hierarchical.

Looking back, it was a classic mechanistic structure: high centralization, formal job roles, top-down control. We were expected to absorb, not question. It was alienating for someone who had always learned by exploring.



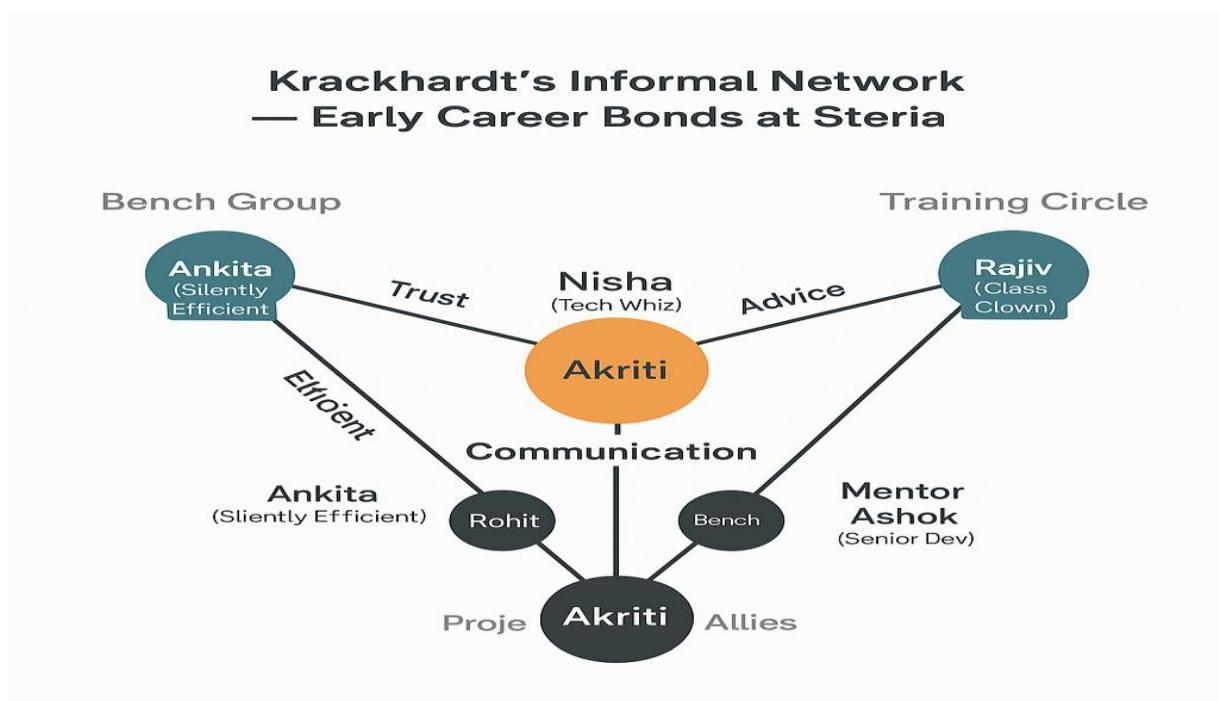
But even in this rigidity, we adapted. Rajiv quietly mastered logic while I started leaning into Nisha's notes. We helped each other decode what no instructor could explain clearly. Here, I began to understand that the real organization lives outside the org chart in whispers, gestures, and informal collaborations.

Our trainer, Mr. Ashok, made COBOL sound like Shakespeare. JCL was his punchline. I nodded a lot. I Googled more.

We were on the bench. Corporate purgatory. Everyone wanted to be staffed. No one admitted it. Nisha— my Advice Network. She whispered the name of a hiring lead.

Ankita – my Trust Network. Her samosa made me feel seen when my JOB abended for the third time.

Rajiv— my Communication Network. Our chai-time gossip was my real performance review. Krackhardt's networks? I was living them.



Bench Life: Time in Suspension

After training, I hit the **bench** the strange limbo between learning and deployment. The first few days were blissful cafeteria chai, laughter, aimless LinkedIn scrolling. But by week three, the anxiety crept in.

*Am I falling behind?
Am I forgotten?*

Each call from HR felt like judgement day. I'd sit by the 6th floor window, watching Noida Metro and traffic flow faster than my own career. This was my **first encounter with organizational silence** when nothing is said, but everything is felt.

Transfer: The HR Email That Changed My Map

Then it came. *"You have been allocated to the AXA Mainframe Project, Chennai."*

My chest tightened. I was North Indian. I didn't know Tamil. My mind spun with fear and rejection. I appealed. HR replied with polite templates. This was a moment when I truly felt the mechanistic nature of Steria: decisions flow from function, not feeling. The organization wasn't personal it was procedural. So I booked the ticket. And I left.



My First Root

I came in hesitant.

I left stronger.

Steria didn't celebrate me. But it didn't break me either.

It shaped me like rain shapes stone slowly, silently, and without asking permission. There were no awards. No mentors who called me brilliant. But I found grounding in small, quiet victories: a clean batch job running overnight without alerts, a client email returned without redlines, an architect saying *"good catch"* in a status call I wasn't even required to join.

There was no spotlight. But there was growth. In that silence, I planted my first professional seed. And without knowing it, I had taken my first step not just into the world of work, but into the quiet architecture of becoming.

DWO Reflection: What I Learned

- **Structure & Design:** Steria's environment embodied a **mechanistic structure** formalized, centralized, hierarchical. Training and deployment were rigid, impersonal, and efficient. It taught me how organizations function like machines but also where those machines break down for humans inside them.
- **Informal Networks:** Though I was introduced to formal hierarchy, **learning and support came through informal networks** peers, bench mates, even cafeteria connections. This reinforced the *Krackhardt model* of trust, advice, and communication networks being more influential than formal lines.
- **Culture:** I observed *Schein's Iceberg Model* in action. While observable structures were uniform, the deeper cultural values varied between Noida's informal camaraderie and Chennai's tight-knit, silent professionalism.
- **Emotional Underbelly of Structure:** The bench phase revealed the emotional cost of a highly structured system where ambiguity and invisibility lead to self-doubt. The system never failed but it didn't always care.

Chapter 2: Winds of Rigidity – Learning to Bend in Chennai’s Concrete Garden

Where language barriers slowed logic, and the real debugging began at lunch.

Infosys Chennai | AXA Project | Late 2007

Theme: Cultural Distance, Informal Power, and Adaptive Resilience

The Email That Uprooted Me

It was not an offer. It was an order:

“Please report to Project AXA, Chennai DC1 on Monday.”

No preferences, no negotiation. I had never been south of Nagpur. And now I was being transplanted into a soil where my roots didn’t belong. I called Nisha. “They’re sending me to Chennai.” She said, “Lucky you. At least you’re getting deployed.” I wasn’t lucky. I was alone, nervous, and unprepared. But I didn’t resist.

I packed my suitcase. Bought cotton dresses salwar to beat the coastal humidity. Downloaded COBOL reference notes I didn’t understand. I wasn’t choosing the system. I was complying with it. Looking back, that quiet acceptance would mark a deeper shift in me.

A lesson in power distance where authority wasn’t questioned, and preference wasn’t part of the process. Where deployment felt like destiny, and obedience was the unspoken onboarding ritual. I didn’t know it yet, but this moment my silent nod was the beginning of my education in how structure commands, and culture silences.

Key decision: I obeyed the system instead of asserting preference a moment that would later shape my understanding of power distance.

From Structure to Silence

My move to Chennai for the **AXA development project** felt like I had entered a parallel Infosys universe. Technically, nothing had changed. Same badge. Same email ID. Same waterfall processes. But culturally both personally and professionally everything was different.

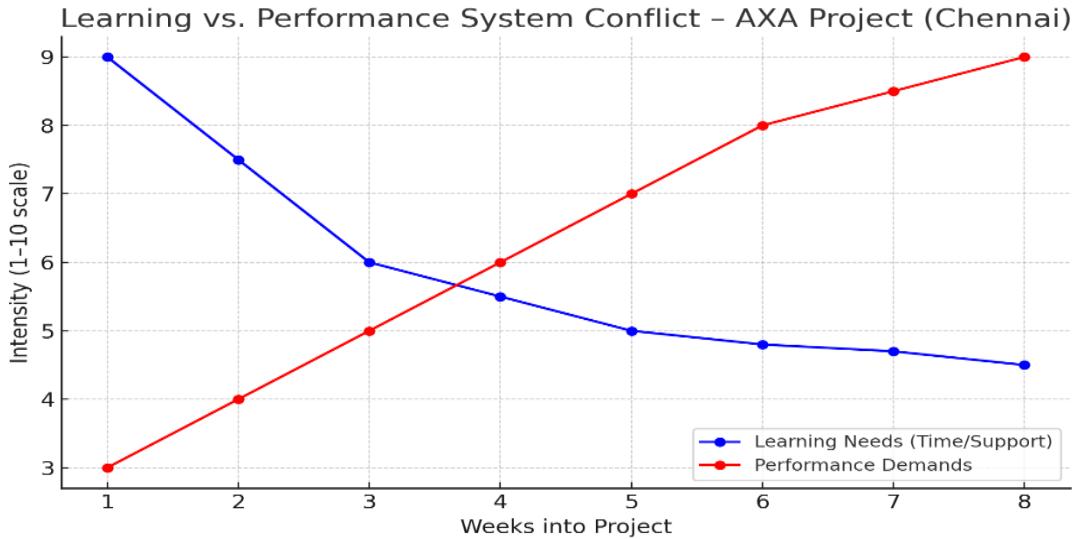
The transition started subtly. The team, mostly Chennai-based veterans, operated like a close-knit circle. Conversations flowed in Tamil. Jokes were exchanged without translation. And meetings... well, **the real meeting began only after the official one ended.**



On paper, we had a strong delivery structure: a module lead, a project manager, a clear escalation hierarchy. But in reality, decisions emerged from corridor conversations, coffee machine huddles, and long, informal chats that I was rarely invited to. I was an outsider not

because I was new, but because I didn't speak the language. Language, in this case, was more than words it was belonging. At AXA, I was given a module on policy logic integration. Full SDLC. Documented specs. Neatly outlined deadlines. But the code wasn't the hard part. **Tamil was.** Daily stand-ups floated between English and Tamil. I nodded through half of them.

Once, I spoke up during a client call. Nervous. Shaky.
The lead cut me off: "Let Arvind speak instead



Mistake, I let that one moment silence me for weeks. I equated visibility with perfection and chose invisibility.

Invisible Networks, Visible Exclusion

One of my early tasks was to develop a rule-based function. Sundar said we would review it together, but days passed without feedback. Eventually, I found that my code had been rewritten entirely.

When I asked him why, he said, "We thought of a different logic."

I wasn't part of that "we." It became clear that real decisions were not being made in meetings. They were happening informally in corridor chats, pantry conversations, and break-time huddles. And because I didn't speak Tamil and wasn't part of the cultural circle, I wasn't included in those conversations.

I wasn't failing in my task. I was simply invisible to the informal system.

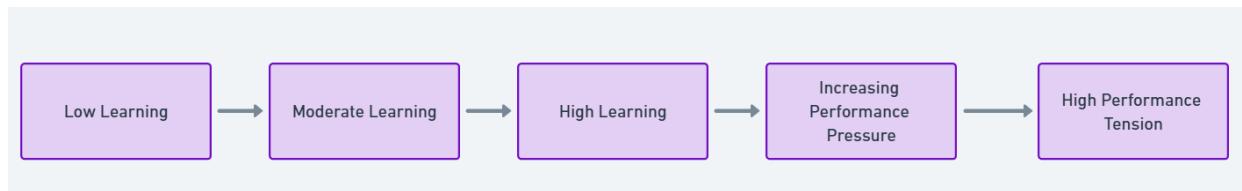
That's when I changed my strategy. Instead of waiting for inclusion, I began observing patterns, prepping proactively, and building quiet alliances.

- Ravi translated tech terms whispered in Tamil.
- Sneha shared templates for defect logs.
- Ashok, the messiest coder on the floor, once said:
- *"You're not slow. You're decoding two systems at once logic and language."*

Their help wasn't formal. It wasn't documented. But it saved me.

The Escalation That Almost Broke Me

During UAT, I missed a validation condition. It broke a critical downstream function. The manager didn't shout. He cc'd five senior stakeholders on a curt email. I cried in the restroom.



I had rushed the delivery without checking edge cases trying to prove speed instead of asking for support. But then I stayed late, fixed the bug, and created a validation script to prevent it in future modules. Two weeks later, that script became standard.

Turning point, I converted a failure into embedded process improvement not by defending, but by delivering better. Sundar reviewed my logic for a renewal flow. He didn't compliment it. He simply said: "We'll go with yours."

I didn't need a trophy. I had cracked the code Not just the one in the IDE. But the one that defines belonging, power, and quiet leadership.

North Indian with No Table

If language made me an outsider, food sealed the status. As a pure vegetarian, I struggled in the canteen. Most meals were drenched in sambhar, and every "vegetarian" label had a caveat: "cooked in shared oil," "may contain egg," or "prepared near meat." I skipped meals more often than I ate.

But more than hunger, I missed the conversations. Teams bonded over food. Decisions were softened, misunderstandings clarified, trust-built plate by plate. And I wasn't at the table.

I began to experience not just cultural exclusion, but professional friction. I wasn't being left out maliciously. I simply wasn't part of the shared rituals that defined working culture here.

Adapting to the Invisible

I realized I had two choices: resent the system or learn how it worked. So I began to adapt not by changing who I was, but by understanding how work happened outside the documented process.

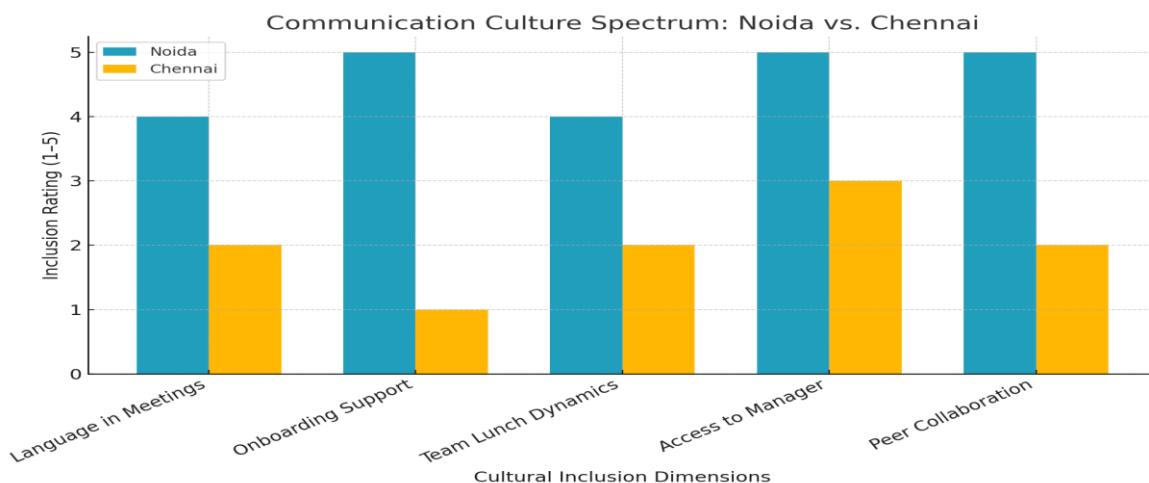
I started arriving early to meetings, preparing discussion points that preempted objections. I built one-on-one connections with key stakeholders not just through task updates, but by listening to their challenges. I asked for informal reviews, not formal approvals.

When Culture Becomes Structure

What struck me most wasn't the lack of structure it was the presence of a **different kind of structure**, one governed by cultural codes rather than documented roles. This was a live example of **power distance** and **informal organizational systems**. Seniority wasn't about hierarchy on paper it was about unspoken authority.

Decisions weren't made in sprint planning they were made in shared trust.

And yet, this environment worked. We delivered. Quality was high. Issues were resolved quickly just not through formal escalation paths. The system wasn't broken. It was simply designed around relationships, not roles.



The shift from Noida to Chennai wasn't just geographical it was cultural.

In Noida, I felt included language was shared, lunch tables were open, and managers were approachable. But Chennai was different. The language barrier, cliques during meals, and limited onboarding support created a sense of quiet exclusion. It taught me that culture isn't one-size-fits-all it's experienced, not declared.

DWO Reflection: Design Meets Identity

Looking back, Chennai was my first real lesson in **adaptive leadership**. I learned that:

- Culture is not a backdrop it's the *operating system* of an organization.
- Belonging doesn't come from alignment on tasks it comes from alignment on unspoken rituals.
- Influence doesn't always require authority but it always requires **access**.

AXA Chennai taught me how to navigate ambiguity, read between the lines, and design work not just around roles but around **real relationships**. It was there I first understood that successful organizations aren't just defined by what they write down but by what they practice.

Concept	My Lived Experience
Cultural Distance	I entered a system where language, food, and rituals shaped access. I had no tools for inclusion at first.
Power Distance	Seniority and influence weren't hierarchical. They were relational. Voice didn't equal authority.
Informal Networks	Real decisions happened in pantries, not dashboards. I learned to listen, join, and contribute quietly.
Structure vs Practice	While org charts promised fairness, actual delivery depended on unspoken norms and invisible mentorship.

Failure as Catalyst	My mistake in UAT became a defining pivot. It taught me resilience, improvement, and credibility.
Key Inflection Point	Choosing to stay, fix, and improve rather than retreat. That was the moment my career trajectory bent upward.

Chapter 3: Grafting Growth - The Capgemini Invention (2009-2012)

Where I learned that not all roots grow in the same soil but some thrive when grafted right.

Capgemini India | 2009–2012

Theme: Reinvention Post-Steria, Organic Structures Emerging, Early Growth Phase

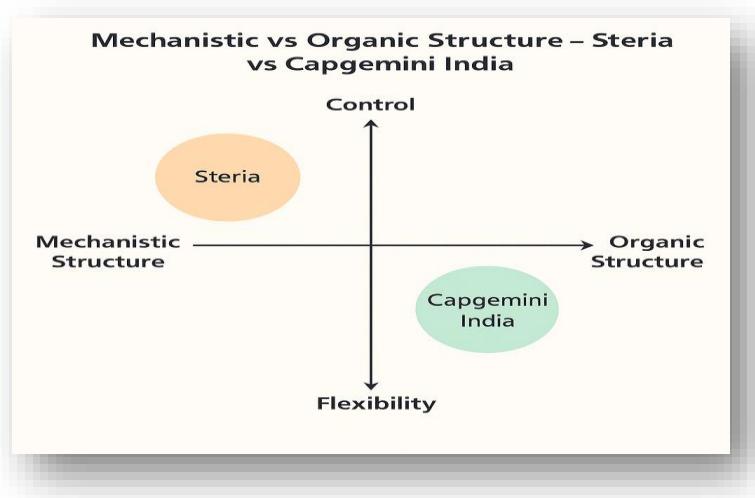
The Silent Shift After Steria

In 2009, a quiet transition took place Steria was acquired by Capgemini. It wasn't dramatic. No big announcement. Just an email subject line read: 'Allocation – Barclays Transition, Capgemini.' I hadn't even unpacked my Chennai bags, and now I was headed to a new city, a new office, and a new ecosystem. Pune this time.

Just a change in the email footer and a series of updated ID cards. But for me, it marked a deeper shift than I realized.

The company name changed, but for the first few weeks, the desks, the people, and even the project routines remained the same. Yet something intangible was beginning to evolve. Communication began to open up. Roles started to feel a little more fluid. Slowly, I started seeing beyond the code.

At Steria, I was a task-taker. At Capgemini, I was becoming a solution-shaper.



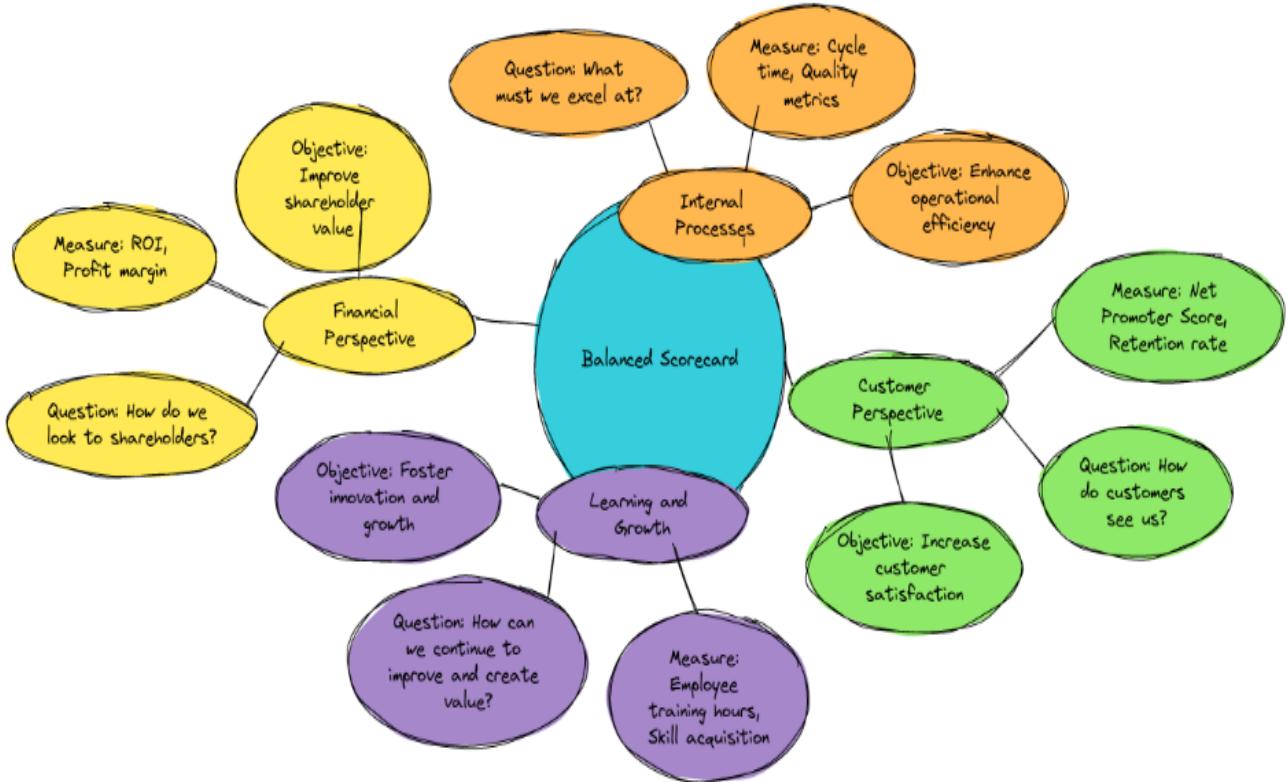
Moving Beyond Developer Identity

Soon after the transition, I was pulled into a proposal review for a new engagement. It wasn't part of my KRAs. But I volunteered. The delivery head, impressed by my clarity in simplifying technical specs, started tagging me for more pre-engagement work.

At first, I hesitated my comfort zone was mainframe logic and system testing. But this new

arena of client-facing decks, estimation models, and high-level effort breakdowns was exciting.

It gave me space to explore how delivery translates into business value

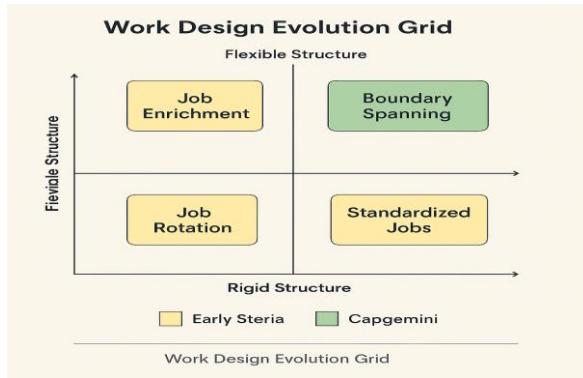


Balanced Scorecard Strategic Map – Aligning Delivery with Business Outcomes

Key Decision, I chose to step into ambiguity instead of staying limited to comfort. Capgemini's structure was unlike Steria's. It was a classic Matrix Organization – you had a functional lead, a delivery manager, a client-side SME, and a dotted-line PMO boss. Everyone expected updates. No one shared context. I learned to multitask under ambiguity, navigate escalation politics, and survive review loops.

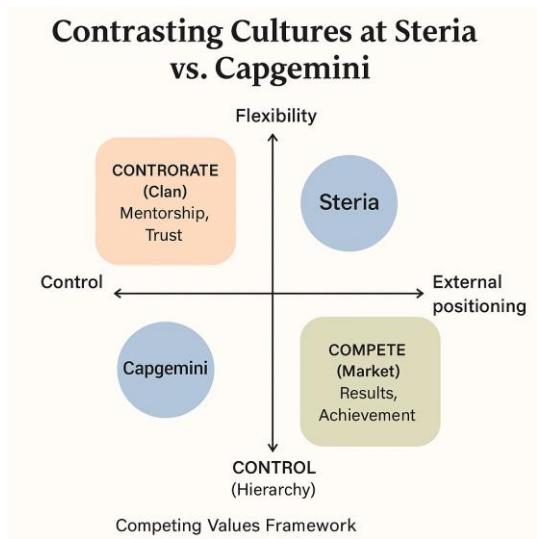
There were days when I was up at 6 AM for UK calls, debugging by 10, prepping demos by 2, and on internal alignment meetings till 8 PM. I began using sticky notes like oxygen – red for critical, green for clean. Sleep? Optional. Then came a bug. It wasn't just technical it was organizational. A mapping error caused a downstream discrepancy. A client VP flagged it. My lead didn't scold. He empowered. 'Can you own this?' That question shifted my gears from defensive to decisive.

I presented my fix to the client directly. 'Good. Send it to offshore.' I wasn't fired. I was trusted. The next week I was looped into a proposal. I didn't know effort estimation, but I knew the workflow.



Shaping Influence Without a Title

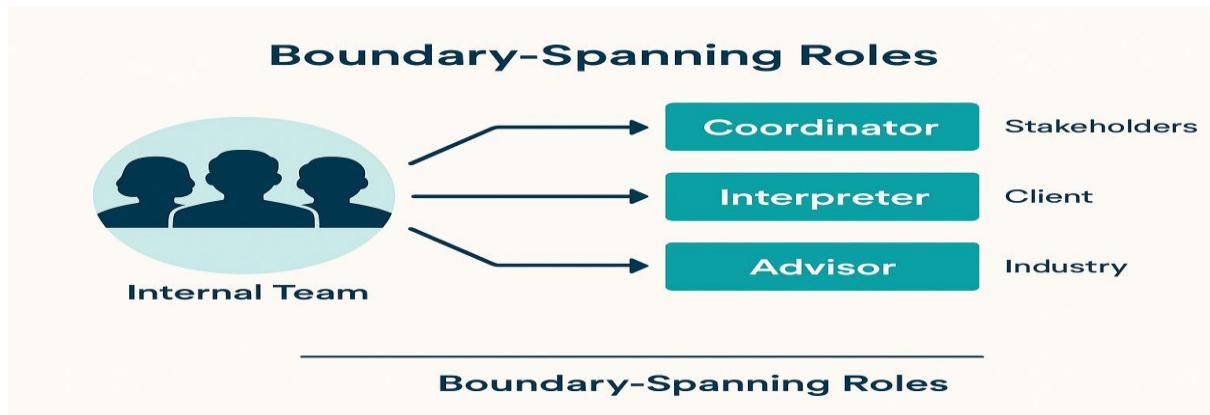
One day, during a solution workshop, a senior architect proposed a timeline I knew was unrealistic based on our current staffing. I had two options: stay quiet or speak up. I chose the latter. I presented an alternate staffing model based on data from our previous release. There was a pause. Then a nod. Then agreement. That moment wasn't just about getting heard. It was about stepping into professional credibility without needing positional authority. Lesson, In flatter systems, influence comes not from designation, but from preparation and delivery.



Becoming the Bridge

Over the next year I became a go-to person for knowledge transitions. When our France delivery team needed clarity on legacy batch processes I stepped in to bridge the gap between documentation and what was actually happening on the ground. Later when a new team in Pune joined, I led shadow sessions. It started informally but soon became a recognized responsibility. What made this phase different was the freedom to contribute beyond my immediate scope. Capgemini allowed me to work across teams and locations. I was not restricted by module boundaries or hierarchy. My influence grew through initiative and credibility not position. This was my first experience in a workplace that encouraged cross-functional collaboration and informal leadership.

This phase taught me something essential. Good organizations do not just promote people. They create the space for people to grow into leaders



Boundary-Spanning Roles Chart – Cross-Unit Collaboration Begin

Using **Daft's contextual dimensions**, Capgemini's strategy focused on client intimacy and delivery efficiency. The environment called for agility, and the culture shifted toward collaboration. This allowed me to operate beyond my formal role and contribute across functions. It was my first experience of structure enabling flexibility and growth

DWO Reflection – DWO Concept Application Summary

DWO Concept / Framework	My Experience at Capgemini (2009–2012)
Mechanistic vs. Organic Design	I transitioned from Steria's rigid, hierarchical structure to Capgemini's more fluid environment. Roles were broader, and adaptability was encouraged over compliance.
Work Design Evolution	My responsibilities expanded from routine coding to dynamic, decision-influenced activities spanning design reviews, client discussions, and early solutioning.
Competing Values Framework	The environment pushed for performance but increasingly valued collaboration. I began to see how innovation emerged through shared ownership and peer alignment.
Boundary-Spanning & Lateral Influence	Without a formal title change, I began influencing outcomes by liaising across solution architects, testers, and delivery leads earning trust before authority.
Environment–Structure Fit	As projects grew in complexity, Capgemini's structure evolved shifting from siloed teams to cross-functional pods. My own role expanded organically within this shift.

Chapter 4: New Soil, New Self – My Replanting at Infosys (2012)

Where I learned that structure can feel suffocating until you realize it's also holding you steady.

Infosys India | 2012

Theme: Transition Shock, Cultural Rigidity, Process Immersion, Unexpected Connection

The Great Shift – From Capgemini to Infosys

In early 2012, I walked into the Infosys campus in Pune for onboarding. Towering buildings, biometric gates, precisely orchestrated HR desks it felt like entering an airport that only flew to one destination: Discipline. Coming from Capgemini's semi-fluid work style, this was a culture shock. At Infosys, everything had a system.

You clocked in at 9:00 AM. Clocked out after 6:30 PM. If you didn't meet your 9.5-hour quota, your timesheet wouldn't reflect full-day effort. You couldn't exit campus without biometric swipe-outs. Even the cafeteria had a queue management portal. And yet, it worked. Things moved on time. Emails were acknowledged. Escalations were rare.

It was *mechanistic perfection*. And for someone who had just left the dynamic chaos of pre-sales delivery firefighting, it was oddly comforting.

Punch In. Perform. Punch Out.

The first few weeks were about learning the rhythm.

- Punch in before 9:30.
- Spend 9.5 hrs in the system (yes, system-tracked).
- Submit daily status updates in the tracker by 6:00 PM.
- Maintain break logs. Access the project floor only with smartcards.
- Every document had a naming convention. Every mail had a template.

There was no room for improvisation but that also meant there was no room for chaos.

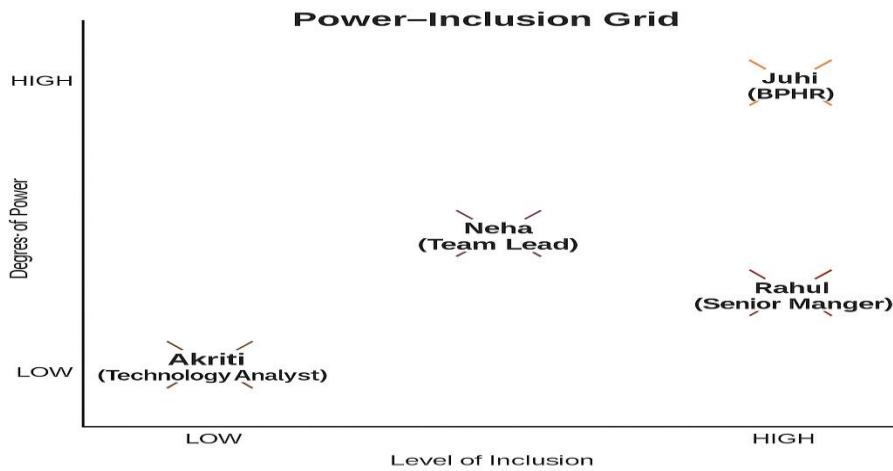
What struck me was how **smooth** it all was. And the credit went, in part, to an unexpected ally.



Juhi BPHR – The Invisible Backbone

Juhi, my assigned **BPHR (Business Partner HR)**, was an email away but felt omnipresent. Whether it was system access, workstation allocation, or escalation on bench duration she responded with timelines, not empathy. But she got things done. When my project ID was

delayed for Jakarta onboarding, she escalated before I even asked. When I had no idea where to log technical training hours, she sent me a link with three screenshots. She wasn't warm. But she was efficiently dependable. Juhi was the human interface to a mechanical system precise, clinical, and deeply essential.



The Bench That Wasn't a Break

I spent 18 days on the bench. That's when I discovered that in Infosys, even idleness was engineered. I logged into knowledge portals. Attended tool training sessions. Enrolled in a soft skills course on cross-cultural communication. And, silently, I began planning my next move. I didn't know it yet, but the Jakarta opportunity was forming behind the scenes. A module needed a mainframe dev with decent communication skills. My profile had been tagged. No interview. Just an internal transfer mail.

Key Decision, I didn't ask if I was ready. I said yes.

Where Structure Met Serendipity

Ironically, it was this hyper-structured world with its logins, lunch slots, and logic gates that led me to the most unpredictable twist in my story. It happened during a shared training session on business rules logic. A crowded lab. A faulty projector. And one adapter, apparently the only one that worked. Arun Sharma and I both reached for it at the same time. What began as a polite laugh over shared tech frustration turned into a real conversation. Then project alignment. Then late-night coffee chats in the Infosys campus food court each one a little less about code and a little more about life.

Everything around us was monitored swipe-ins, training completions, utilization scores. Except this. In a space designed for system execution, a quiet human connection slipped through the gaps. Amid all the punch-in punch-out logs, something organic took root. Love, not logic, broke the Mold.

DWO Reflections

DWO Concept / Framework	Application at Infosys (2012)
Mechanistic Work Design	Defined rhythms, processes, and a strict approval-based hierarchy
Environment–Structure Fit	Efficiency was high but adaptability required navigating invisible cultural protocols
Doing-to-Knowing Model	Bench was not passive it was a structured time for proactive upskilling

Support Functions as Informal Enablers	Juhi (BPHR) became a soft power node demonstrating how structure leans on informal leaders
Human Connection in Mechanistic Culture	Even within rigid systems, emotional bonds and peer networks found space to bloom

Chapter 5: Jakarta – Growing Without a Manual

Where Trust Took Root in Chaos, and Culture Was the Real Architecture

Infosys Jakarta | Tokyo Marine Insurance Project | 2012
Theme: High-Context Culture, Invisible Structures, and Relational Navigation

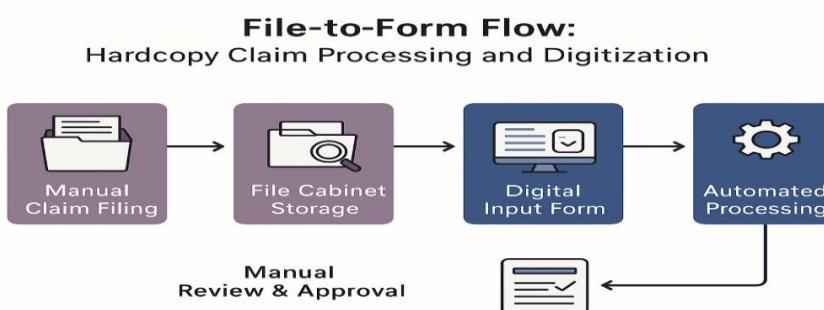
Jakarta greeted me with chaos and kindness in equal measure. The roads were crowded, scooters flowed like rivers, and yet there was a rhythm to it all. But nothing prepared me for how work would unfold. I was used to project kick-offs, mail trails, shared drives, and process playbooks. Here, there was none of that.

I was sent from Infosys for a POC (Proof of Concept) for Tokyo Marine's Indonesian subsidiary, tasked with modernizing their insurance processing. Our proposal was simple: migrate legacy systems, build a file-based interface layer, and reduce the overwhelming paper trail. There was no kick off meeting. No shared drive folder. No clear project plan.

When I asked about documentation, my local counterpart, Ahmad, replied, "We will build it as we go." I checked the org chart. It listed names, but gave me no clue who actually made decisions. I was assigned a "business liaison," but it was clear that the real power lay with Pak Rinaldi, the grey-haired operations lead who never showed up in formal communication chains but whose opinion everyone quietly sought.

It took me a week to realize that the formal hierarchy here was symboli what mattered was who you knew, not what your role was. I was operating in what Hofstede might describe as a high-context, relationship-first environment. Deadlines were flexible, authority was implicit, and documentation was considered polite but optional.

What wasn't simple? The human systems.



When the Files Were Real Files

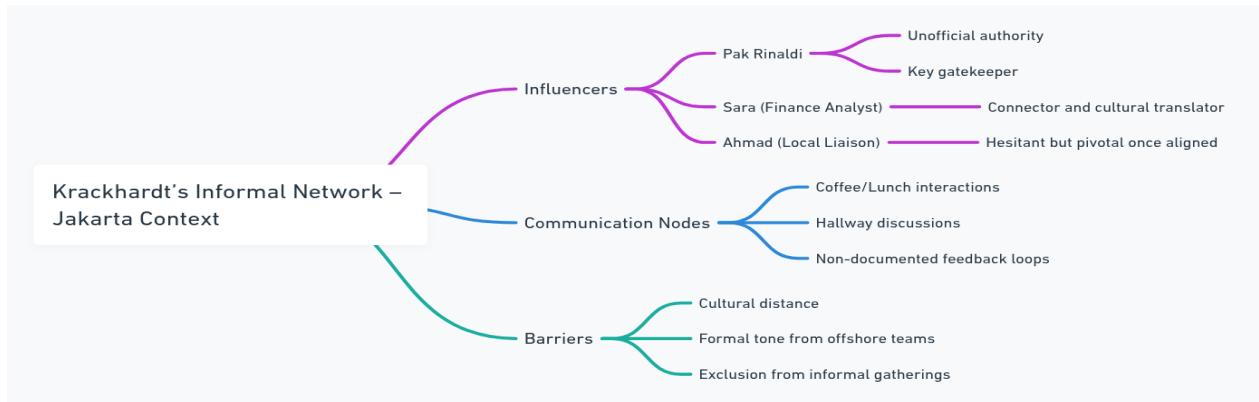
Unlike modern systems, this office ran on physical files.

- Paper claim forms
- File cabinets for every HOD
- Manual tracking logs with handwritten signatures
- Printed ID scans, even for internal audits

Our proposal required them to digitize this process. But even the proof-of-concept was met with

hesitation. “We have no issue with this system,” said one operations head. “But who will type these details? Who will validate them without a signature?” There was no resistance in word but a wall of silence in actions.

No formal handover. No access to live cases. No one willing to sit through a requirements session. I realized I wasn’t just here to change a system I was here to disrupt a deeply cultural habit of work.



Alone with a Proposal, Outside the Circle

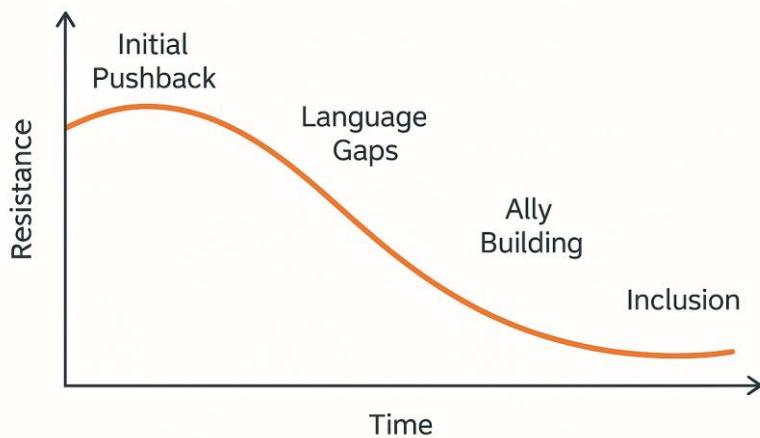
Even lunchtime reminded me I was an outsider. Menus rarely offered vegetarian options. Colleagues bonded over sambal and satay; I picked at toast or carried fruit from the hotel. Being a pure vegetarian in Jakarta was isolating. Every meal included chicken or seafood. Most menus didn’t mention egg or meat oil content. At lunchtime, I often found myself alone, picking through salad bowls and toast while others shared fragrant rice platters and sambals. But food wasn’t just about nutrition. It was about bonding.

While I sat quietly in my corner, others built rapport, shared project frustrations, and aligned goals over sambal goreng and coffee. I missed more than flavors. I missed access to the informal systems where real alignment happened. For weeks, I felt like a consultant with no seat at the real table.

But it wasn’t just food it was connection. Conversations, feedback, clarifications all happened **during meals or coffee breaks.**

Resistance Curve

Cultural Adaptation at Tokyo Marine



Meeting Sara – A Human API



Two weeks in, **Sara**, a finance systems analyst, asked, “Want to join me for lunch? There’s a veg place in Jalan Sabang.” It changed everything. Over warm tempeh and tofu, she told me how:

- **Pak Rinaldi**, though unofficial, had more power than project heads
- **Ahmad**, my local liaison, wouldn’t commit unless it was “personally safe” for him
- The offshore team’s overly formal tone was viewed as disconnected
- Documentation was ignored unless someone had walked over and explained it face-to-face

Sara was a connector. She had no direct involvement in our project, but she knew everyone and understood how decisions were really made.

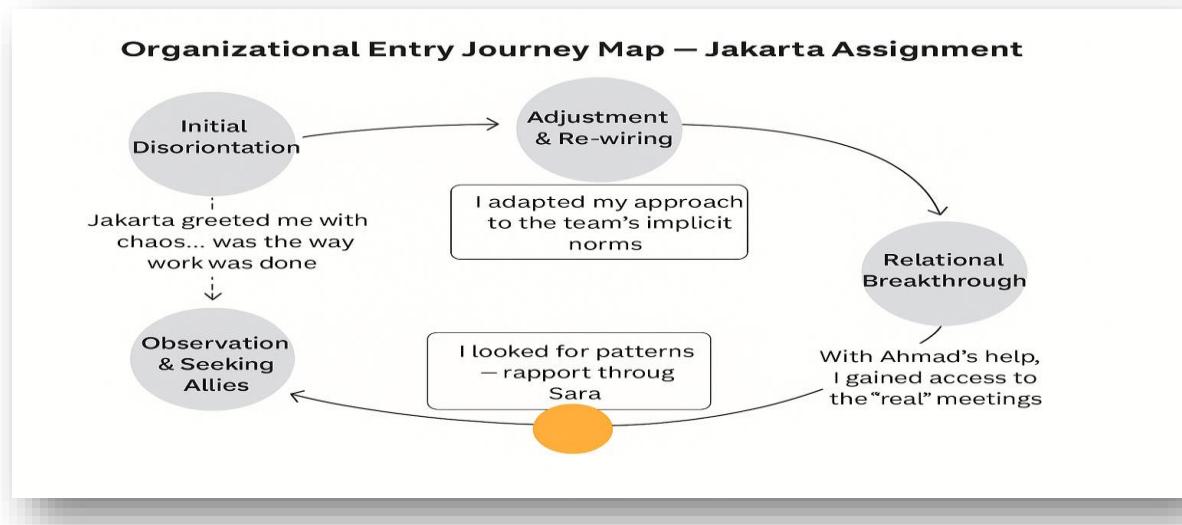
“You have the right answers,” Sara said, “but you’re using the wrong language.” She didn’t mean Bahasa Indonesia. She meant the **language of relationships**.

Switching My Design Language

I stopped sending project memos. I started sketching workflows on a whiteboard in the open area. I asked Ahmad, “Can we sit with a branch coordinator and walk through one real claim?” No emails. Just face-to-face collaboration. When the HODs saw how the digital input forms mirrored their paper slips, they smiled. “They still look like our format!” someone said. We had translated software into comfort.

Jakarta didn’t give me a process map. It forced me to build a people map. I entered thinking the structure would be formal, digital, and clear. What I found was a world where soft power, personal bonds, and relational alignment drove every decision.

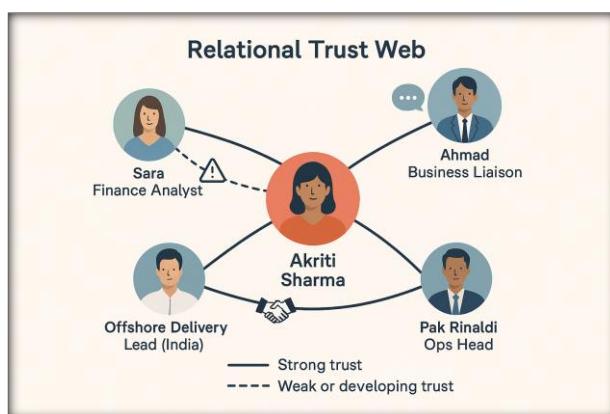
- High-context, relational systems cannot be “project managed” they must be experienced and navigated
- Influence is not always documented but it is always felt
- Change doesn’t begin with tools. It begins with translation into comfort and shared language



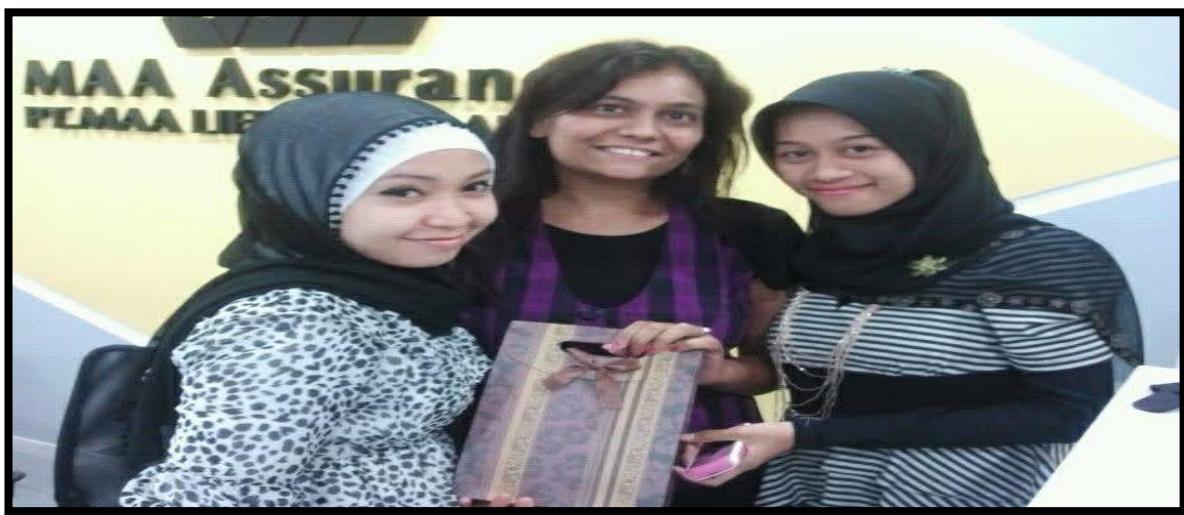
Adaptive Engagement Flow

The Real “Go-Ahead”

One day, during the final demo, Pak Rinaldi turned to Ahmad and asked, “Will this work for our field agents?” Ahmad replied: “Yes. We’ve tried it on two sample policies.” That *we* changed everything. It wasn’t just that the system passed. It was that Ahmad felt ownership. That moment wasn’t about technology. It was about permission by trust.



Farewell, Jakarta: From Outsider to Embedded Ally



As my assignment neared its end, Jakarta slowly stopped feeling foreign. I had learned to read its rhythms not just in traffic patterns, but in the quiet pauses before decisions, the glances exchanged during meetings, and the unspoken trust that began to build. I found pockets of familiarity in the most unexpected places: a corner café that served tofu noodles, evening walks past local stalls, weekend explorations to Kota Tua with colleagues who'd become friends. Ahmad once joked, "You understand our system better than some of us do."

Office visibility, once elusive, had become natural. People began seeking me out for input not just because of my technical knowledge, but because I had learned how to deliver it the Jakarta way: through presence, listening, and respect for relationships.

On my final day, the team surprised me with a small farewell lunch. There was laughter, a vegetarian platter thoughtfully ordered, and a warm note from Sara that read,

"You didn't just work here you became one of us."

As the plane took off from Soekarno-Hatta airport, I looked down at the maze of streets, grateful. Not just for the professional transformation, but for the personal one. Jakarta had not just tested my capabilities it had expanded my lens on what it means to truly collaborate across borders, cultures, and comfort zones.

DWO Reflections: Designing in the Dark

DWO Concept	Jakarta Experience	Insight Gained
High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication (Edward Hall)	Communication was informal, nonverbal, and relational. Alignment happened over meals, not memos.	In high-context cultures, communication is the structure not just a tool.
Informal Networks and Shadow Power (Krackhardt Model)	Formal hierarchies were symbolic. Real influence came from unlisted figures like Pak Rinaldi and allies like Sara.	Informal networks don't support change they are the system in loosely structured environments.
Adaptive Engagement & Soft Systems Thinking	Traditional waterfall delivery failed. Shifted to whiteboard demos, side-by-side working, and trust-based design.	Comfort must be designed before change can be adopted.

Structure–Environment Fit (<i>Design Adaptation</i>)	Infosys' formal delivery structure clashed with Jakarta's relational, flexible decision-making style.	Success required adapting my approach not forcing the client's structure to fit ours.
Cultural Inclusion & Relational Trust	Initially isolated due to food and cultural gaps. Gained trust by showing presence, patience, and cultural respect.	Cultural intelligence isn't a soft skill it's a core organizational design competency.

Message to My Younger Self in Jakarta:

Don't lead with the solution. Lead with presence.

" Because in invisible systems, the strongest wire is the one you don't see but feel when you pull".

Chapter 6: Roots Across Time Zones – When Codes Met Commitments in Sydney

Westpac, Love, and the Quiet Leadership of Holding Two Worlds Together

Sydney, Australia | 2014 | Infosys Westpac Project

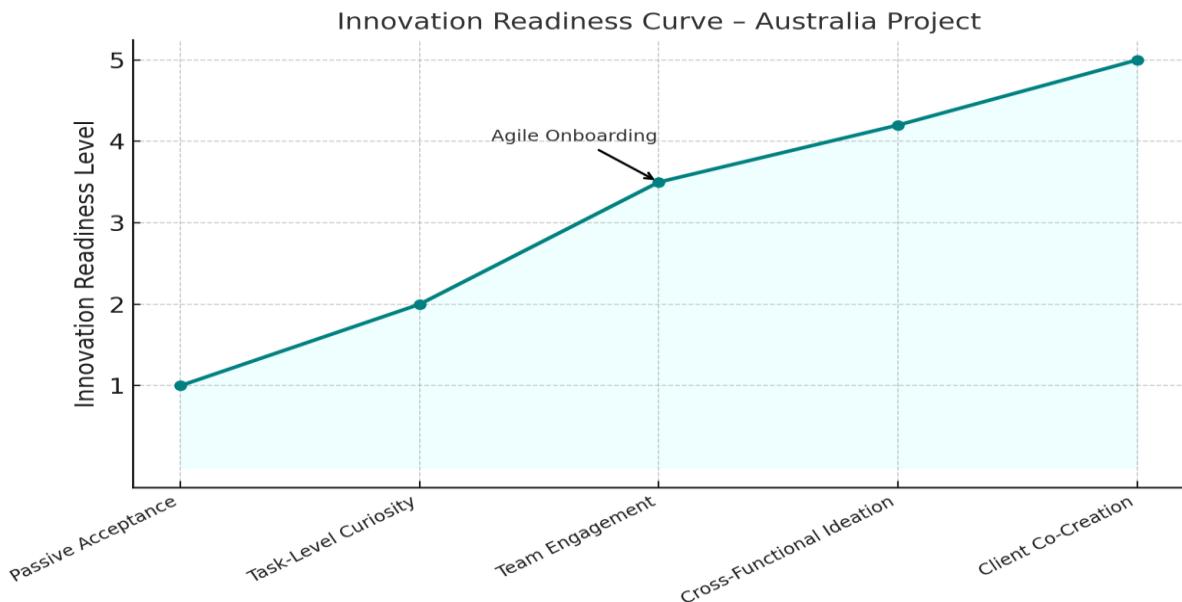
Theme: Time-Zone Tension, Emotional Intelligence, Boundary-Spanning Roles

Sydney smelled of sea breeze and soy lattes. In 2014, when I landed in Australia for my next onsite assignment with Infosys, I was carrying more than my luggage. I was the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for Westpac's CRM ecosystem a massive responsibility that made me both visible and vulnerable. On my very first day, I was introduced in a project stand-up not by name, but as:

“This is Infosys. This is the person who'll take care of our downstream stability.”

It hit me. I wasn't here as an individual contributor. I was the face of offshore. Every bug I resolved or deferred, every email I responded to or missed wasn't just a task. It was a reputation marker.

There were no internal hierarchies protecting me. Just expectations, and a room full of client architects, testers, and analysts waiting to see if I could deliver.



Unlike Jakarta's spicy pace and shadowy communications, Sydney was organized, predictable, and in some ways deceptively relaxed. Westpac's Darling Harbour campus had clean white walls, standing desks, breakout lounges, and something I wasn't used to Australians who truly switched off after 4 PM on Fridays.

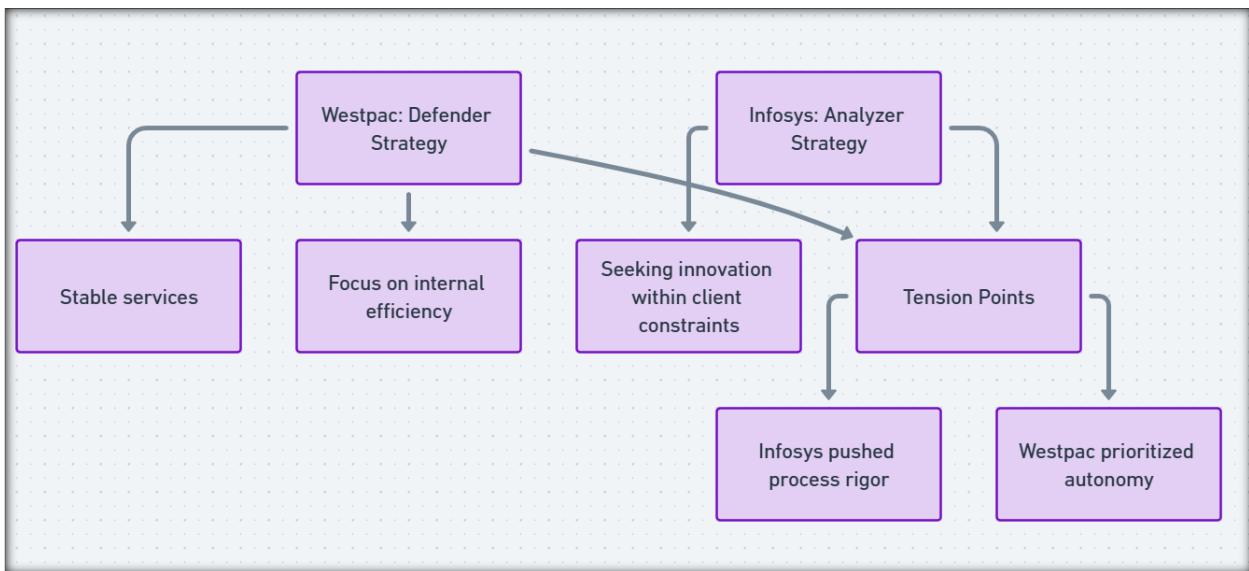
"It's time to hit the beach," laughed Ben, my functional counterpart, as he unplugged his laptop. "No meetings after 3 PM, Akriti. That's the Aussie rule."

Environmental Fit & Culture Shock

Westpac operated in a low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance culture almost opposite of my previous environments. This was a textbook mismatch between environment and inherited structure. I came from a mechanistic setup where control, hierarchy, and responsiveness were paramount. But here, autonomy and work-life balance weren't perks they were defaults.

I struggled. Fridays especially. The floor would clear out by 4 PM, but Indian teammates on offshore support or stuck in dependencies still pinged me. A part of me envied the locals' ability to disconnect. But another part drilled into "client first" doctrine felt guilty.

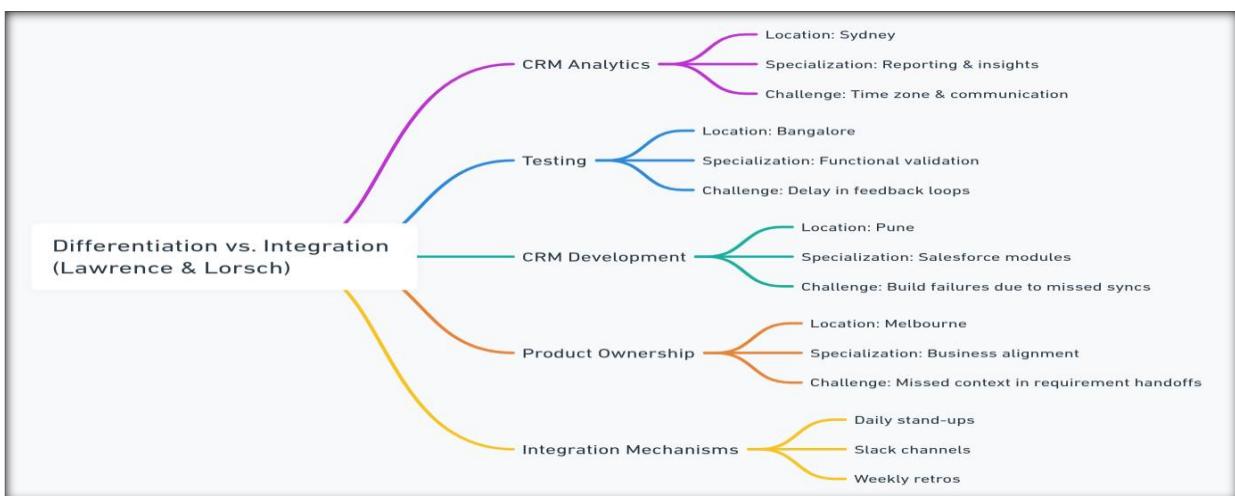
The burden of being SPOC was invisible but immense. I had no one to escalate to onsite. I was the final bottleneck and the first responder. I would often sit alone in the glass fishbowl meeting rooms, bridging time zones while watching seagulls soar over Sydney Tower.



Miles & Snow Typology – Strategic Fit

Designing Work: Managing Interdependence

Westpac's CRM system spanned marketing, service, and lending platforms. Dependencies were reciprocal, meaning tasks fed into and from each other in real-time. It wasn't just about integration it was about alignment across teams that barely spoke the same technical language. The Infosys team was fragmented support sat in Bangalore, development in Pune, testing in Sydney, and product owners in Melbourne. We needed a structural fix, but what helped more was what DWO calls an informal network diagnosis.



I found myself forming unspoken alliances: Ben from the analytics team who'd nudge his peers to review faster, Julia from testing who'd flag bugs over lunch instead of Jira, and Sam, a dev-turned-father, who stayed late on Thursdays just so I'd get that one build pushed. Krackhardt's networks came alive here: I leaned on the advice network to triage unknown bugs, the trust network when a release went wrong, and the communication network to ensure dependencies didn't break. These webs weren't on org charts they were forged in feedback loops and post-standup coffees.

Recognition and the 'Insta' Moment

Working at Westpac introduced me to the power of **systemic recognition**. Their delivery ecosystem wasn't just about outputs. It was about **naming contribution**, spotlighting performers, and sharing credit.

In India, even high-performing team members often remain invisible behind layers of hierarchy.

In Sydney, even a line of well-written code could earn you a public mention.

I was once recognized in a cross-functional meeting by the Test Manager for "**proactive environment validation that prevented three defects before SIT.**" That single callout opened doors suddenly, I was being consulted for upstream designs and change impact assessments.

Recognition, I realized, wasn't just a feel-good token. It was a **reconfiguration of influence**.

That year turned out to be my best project. I received **multiple STAR and Insta Awards**, a kind of internal Oscars that Infosys gave for impact delivered with agility. One citation read:

"For holding the CRM system together under pressure, across time zones, and always with a smile. You made this look easy when it wasn't."

But the true recognition came when Westpac offered to extend me for another six months and my name started surfacing in other CRM projects across the bank.

That project didn't just validate my skills it clarified my value.

Learning to Let Go

Ironically, one of the hardest lessons wasn't technical it was emotional. I had to unlearn over-responsibility. In a culture where empowerment was expected, me micromanaging or staying late wasn't seen as dedication it was seen as not trusting the system.

Ben once pulled me aside: *"Akriti, we know you're brilliant. But you don't have to carry the mountain. We share the load here."*

That moment was transformative. It echoed the design principle of integration without over-centralization let the nodes do their job. I didn't need to be a hero. I needed to build systems that worked even when I stepped away.

Fridays, Finally

By month six, I too left by 4 PM on Fridays. I had found my rhythm. My networks were strong, the team was trained, and the escalation matrix was real not just on PowerPoint. I had lunch by the quay, caught weekend trains to Blue Mountains, and even joined a yoga group in Parramatta. When I flew back to India, the farewell email from Westpac read:

"You weren't just our SPOC you became our shock absorber."

Reflections Through the DWO Lens

DWO Concept	Manifestation at Westpac
Environment-Structure Fit	Australian flat, flexible culture clashed with Infosys' rigidity
Interdependence Management	High reciprocal dependency required seamless coordination
Informal Networks	Advice and trust networks formed across geographies
Culture and Control	Shift from behavior control to trust-based autonomy
Human-Centered Design	The human element well-being, empowerment was integral

Chapter 7: Quiet Roots, Loud Impact – Navigating the Infosys Years (2015-2022)

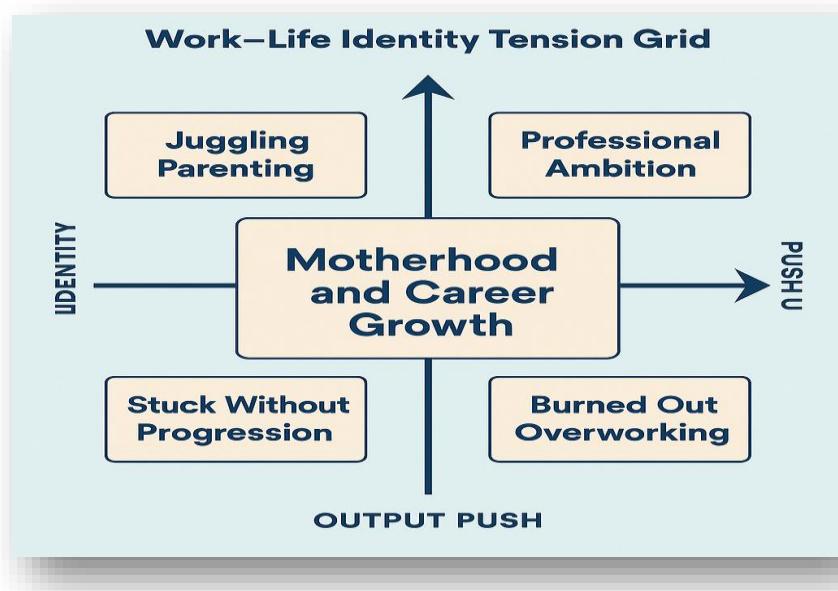
Where Role Drift Met Real Growth Through Motherhood, Mentorship, and Momentum

Infosys India | 2015-2022

Theme: *Role Drift, Constructive Culture, Work-Life Design, Boundary-Spanning, Informal Networks, Strategic Visibility*

The Morning Stand-Up vs. The Midnight Feed

When I returned from Sydney in 2015, I came back changed. Married to Arun, I quickly stepped into a dual shift daytime at Infosys, nighttime as a mother. Maternity wasn't a break. It was a redesign. I logged into the Infosys VPN with hair still wet from a hurried shower. Jira dashboard on one screen, baby monitor on the other. By 9:00 AM, I was managing blockers on a testing sprint call while clearing banana puree from my baby's cheek. Clients didn't know. Maybe even managers didn't. But my peers knew. And in quiet nods on Teams chat, they acknowledged the juggling act.

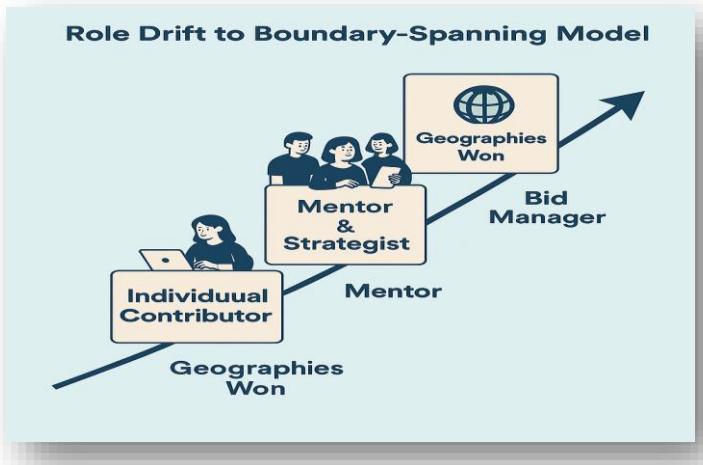


Work-Life Identity Tension Grid – Output Push vs Identity Pull

Motherhood didn't reduce ambition but layered it.

When Strategy Whispered, and I Listened

By 2017, something had shifted. I wasn't writing code anymore. I was translating client asks into feasible testing architectures. Junior engineers came to me before they went to leads. The test architect on one call casually said, "Akriti, can you own the proposal walkthrough?" No official announcement. No title change. Just a silent transfer of weight.



I stepped into this invisible arena where:

- Testing RFPs landed on my desk, even when I wasn't the lead
- Presales Excel sheets needed my pricing eye
- Leadership started tagging me on global bid calls

I was *becoming* a bid manager without the badge. There's no badge of honor, no welcome mailer, no team huddle. It creeps in. One week, you're helping an account manager clean up an RFP response. The next, you're looped into a pricing call. Before you know it, you're organizing rehearsals, rewriting solution decks, editing executive summaries, and herding global teams toward a submission deadline like it's the moon landing.

And that's exactly how I slipped into Infosys Testing Presales. I didn't step into the role. I became it.

It was 2018. My daughter had just begun preschool. Life outside work was already a high-stakes juggling act. Inside work, things were evolving fast. Testing wasn't just about defect detection anymore; it had become strategic, infused into DevOps, security, and AI-enabled platforms. Clients were demanding global delivery models, co-innovation labs, outcome-based pricing. Every RFP was now a miniature MBA case study.

I began with smaller deals simple test automation proposals. But soon, I found myself leading pursuits for \$10M, \$20M, and eventually, a massive **\$50 million US retail bid** that changed everything.

The Testing Universe: My Multi-Geography Command Center

My kitchen clock said 8:00 PM. My Outlook calendar said "EMEA Bid Review."

The baby monitors blinked red. The screen blinked "Defect Tracker Freeze."

From Sydney to San Francisco, I became the strategic SPOC for global testing bids. I wasn't managing a team I was orchestrating one across time zones, tools, and temperaments.

Each bid was its own ecosystem:

- A US-based domain expert who only replied between midnight and 3 AM IST
- A Pune-based estimator who wanted "buffered effort" in every module
- A hyper-precise UK client who once questioned font consistency in the proposal deck

And there I was connecting them all. This wasn't just bid management. This was diplomacy, design, and delivery with invisible threads.

Life in the Bid War Room

Imagine this: it's 10:30 PM in Bangalore. The US team is waking up, the Netherlands team has just gone offline, the Australian client has left comments in a Google Doc, and legal is

demanding final sign-off. Everyone is emailing, pinging, debating, revising and there's me, somewhere in the center, orchestrating the chaos.

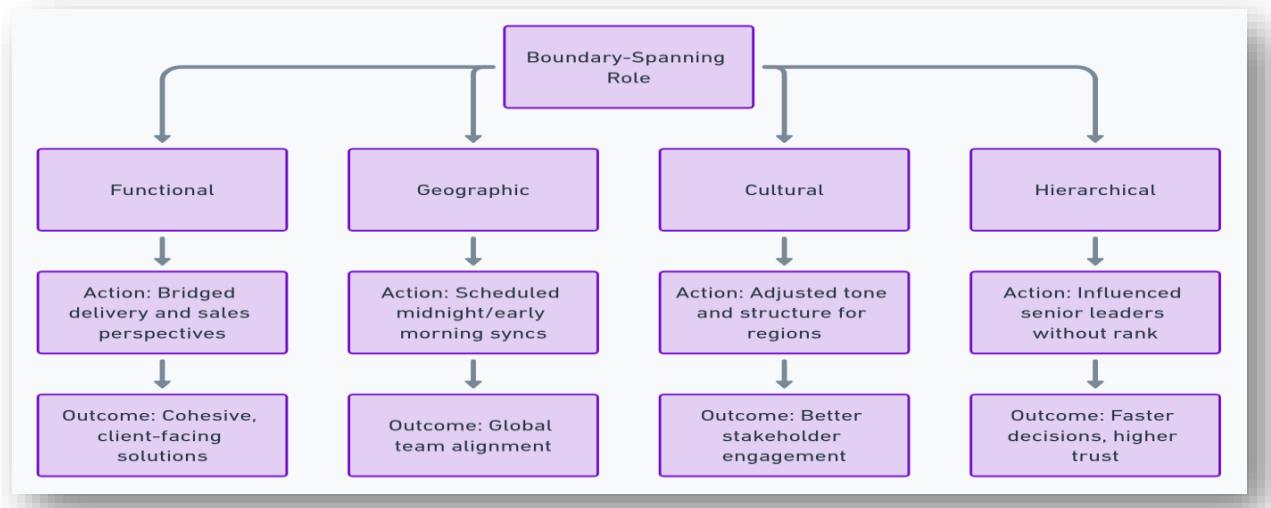
I became the single point of cohesion in a fragmented orchestra. Like Nick Fury, I didn't have superpowers. But I had vision, resilience, and a knack for bringing the Avengers together. Solution architects, delivery SMEs, sales leaders, pricing analysts, risk officers none of them reported to me, yet all of them relied on me.

"Akriti, can you chase legal?" "Akriti, the commercial sheet needs revision." "Akriti, can you rewrite the summary to align with the new positioning?"

I learned to lead without title, to influence without force. My weapons were empathy, follow-through, and deep structural understanding.

Boundary-Spanning in Action

In DWO terms, my role was a classic boundary-spanning position. I operated across verticals (testing, infrastructure, digital), geographies (US, EU, APAC), and functions (sales, delivery, legal, pricing). This wasn't just coordination it was integration under pressure.



Interdependence and Informal Networks

Bid management was never a straight line. Dependencies were reciprocal. Solution content impacted pricing, which impacted timelines, which altered commercials, which circled back to solutions.

To survive this, I built informal networks. Karan from pricing became my ally. Lea in Dutch legal trusted my judgment. Rohan from delivery looped me in for early solution shaping. These were not formally assigned roles they were relational assets, earned through consistency and quiet credibility.

In Krackhardt's language, I didn't just tap the communication network. I built the advice and trust networks.

Nick Fury Needed No Applause

There were moments of frustration. Bids would get dropped. Credit would bypass me. Meetings would begin with, "Let's wait for the sales lead," even though I had stitched the entire response

together. But over time, subtle acknowledgments appeared:

- "Can Akriti anchor this one too?"
- "She makes the deck sound like a story."
- "Get her in before the pricing mess starts."

In DWO, this is the shift from mechanistic attribution (roles/titles) to organic recognition (value delivered).

I wasn't just participating in bids. I was curating experiences crafting the Infosys narrative across continents, translating tech into outcomes, chaos into cohesion.

\$50 Million, and a Cradle in the Background

In 2019, a major banking RFP landed. The deal was valued at over **\$50 million**, spanning 8 geographies, 11 testing towers, and a delivery timeline that made even my VP raise an eyebrow. I was asked to "support the bid."

Translation: drive everything except the signature.

For two months, I lived on Coffee and whiteboard stickies. My son once scribbled over a cost model. I laughed, then recreated the sheet.

When the client replied, "This is the most grounded, complete proposal we've seen," I didn't forward the message.

I saved it in a folder titled "**Real Wins.**"

The Visit That Sealed the Deal – When IAG Came Calling

It started like any other week, but this one would end with a win. The IAG client visit from Australia had the makings of a logistical tangle multiple senior leaders, shifting schedules, expectations of executive alignment, and cultural immersion. I was handed the responsibility to manage it solo. No safety net. No co-anchor. And I rose to it.



From curating a strategic seminar agenda to aligning Infosys leadership for tailored sessions, I orchestrated each interaction with precision. I designed a tech-focused webinar aligned to their transformation vision. I managed site tours, hosted authentic food experiences, and ensured every touchpoint felt intentional not performative.

There were no missteps. No missed details. Just one cohesive experience that showcased who we are, and what we stand for.

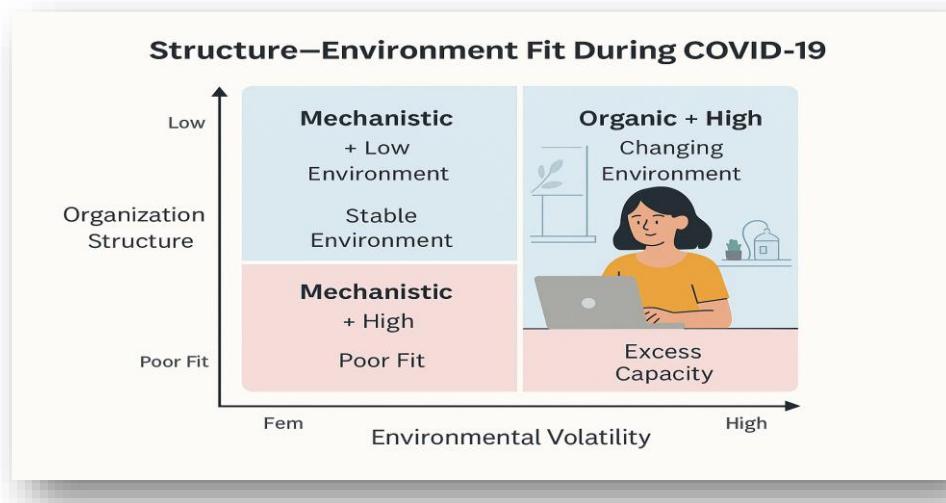
When the deal was signed days later, the client's parting line still echoes in my mind:

"This wasn't a visit. This was clarity. We felt your commitment in the details."

That's when I knew I hadn't just managed a visit. I had built a bridge. And that bridge led us straight to victory.

[Covid When the World Froze, My Calendar Didn't](#)

COVID-19 arrived like a global reset but my life didn't pause. It pivoted. From the outside, Work from Home looked like a gift to mothers "finally, flexibility." But inside, it was a strange new pressure cooker. School went online. Daycare disappeared. Deliverables didn't.



I would switch between helping my toddler color inside the lines... and rewriting commercial annexures. I once dialed into a proposal review while coaxing a feverish child to nap. My laptop sat beside a nebulizer machine. My to-do list danced with client deliverables and kitchen duties. But something strange happened too my clarity sharpened. With no physical room to run to, I redesigned time like a spreadsheet. I didn't balance work and life I integrated them, brutally and beautifully.

The shift from office to home revealed the fluidity of boundaries and the importance of organizational adaptability. Mechanistic systems struggled. Informal influence, relational trust, and self-leadership took center stage.

COVID didn't collapse my world. It helped me build a quieter, stronger one inside the storm.

[Constructive Culture vs. Systemic Invisibility](#)

Presales often sits in the shadows. It's not delivery. It's not marketing. It's the glue, the invisible labor that wins business.

My growth happened in those invisible spaces. Between 2018 and 2022:

- I worked on 100+ bids across sectors.
- Won three major deals over \$30M.
- Built a library of client-aligned responses.

- Mentored junior presales analysts into strong independent anchors.
- But none of this showed on the org chart.
What changed? Allies.

BPHR leaders like Juhi, who once said:

“Akriti, your work may not be loud. But it’s foundational.”

She helped me enter the leadership shadow cohort. Not as a performer. But as a builder.

My Daughter's One-Liner

One day, while preparing a major bid rehearsal, my daughter peeped into the room.

“Mumma, are you winning another million-dollar homework?”

I smiled. Because yes, that's what it was. Winning homework. In silence. With structure. Without sleep.

Between every bid tracker and every nap time,
Between every proposal and every preschool run,
I was not just delivering projects.
I was redesigning ambition.
Not loud. Not titled. But unmistakably impactful.

The Gift of Stillness – WFH and Quiet Upskilling

The pandemic didn't just confine us it clarified us. While the world held its breath, I quietly planted seeds. Between late-night proposal reviews and early-morning pancake battles, I reclaimed something precious: focused time. Without commutes or office corridors, my home became a silent accelerator for growth.

I completed the NASSCOM Women Wizards Tech Leadership Program, mastered Azure Fundamentals, studied Data Governance, and finished Agile and Cloud certifications. I dove into Design Thinking, refreshed Performance Testing, and even revisited essentials like Presentation Skills, Client Interfacing, and Risk Management. Some were technical. Some were tactical. But all were transformational.

WFH wasn't a break it was a reset. A replanting. A conscious investment in future readiness. As per DWO's Open Systems theory, individuals thrive when their environment shifts and they are empowered to adapt. I wasn't trained *by* the system I grew *despite* its pause. That's what made the learning real, and resilient.

DWO Summary Reflection

DWO Concept	Realization in My Presales Journey
Boundary-Spanning	Worked across time zones, business units, hierarchies
Interdependence Management	Managed complex, non-linear collaboration loops
Informal Networks	Built peer trust and influence through delivery and credibility
Invisible Labor Recognition	Relied on internal allies to amplify and validate effort
Constructive Culture	Mentored, improved systems, and shaped submissions beyond assigned tasks

Final Note

Presales didn't give me a cape. But it gave me something more powerful: the ability to lead without shouting, influence without authority, and win without applause.

And in the quiet corners of midnight rehearsals and multi-million-dollar wins, I discovered a new definition of ambition:

To architect victory without being on the battlefield. To design the win, even when you're not on stage.

Chapter 8: The Return That Wasn't a Rewind – Replanting in Dutch Soil

Where Strategic Depth Replaced Domain Breadth One Dutch Deal at a Time

Capgemini India | 2022-Till date

Theme: Structure–Environment Inversion, Cross-Functional Influence, and Strategic Adaptation, Strategic Visibility

Rejoining Capgemini but on a Whole New Floor

It was the kind of homecoming that didn't come with applause, but with an entirely new script. In 2022, I returned to Capgemini not to the coding desk I had once left behind in 2012, but into a sharply strategic, geography-led role within the Netherlands business unit. I was no longer the young mainframe developer tinkering inside silos. I was now a Bid Manager, responsible for shaping the direction and scope of large and complex digital transformation deals. And this time, I wasn't building programs I was shaping narratives, designing strategies, and steering multi-million-euro pursuits.

But the real shift wasn't just my designation. It was the **architecture of the work itself**.



A Tale of Two Structures – Infosys and Capgemini (From Global Tech Threads to Local Strategic Roots)

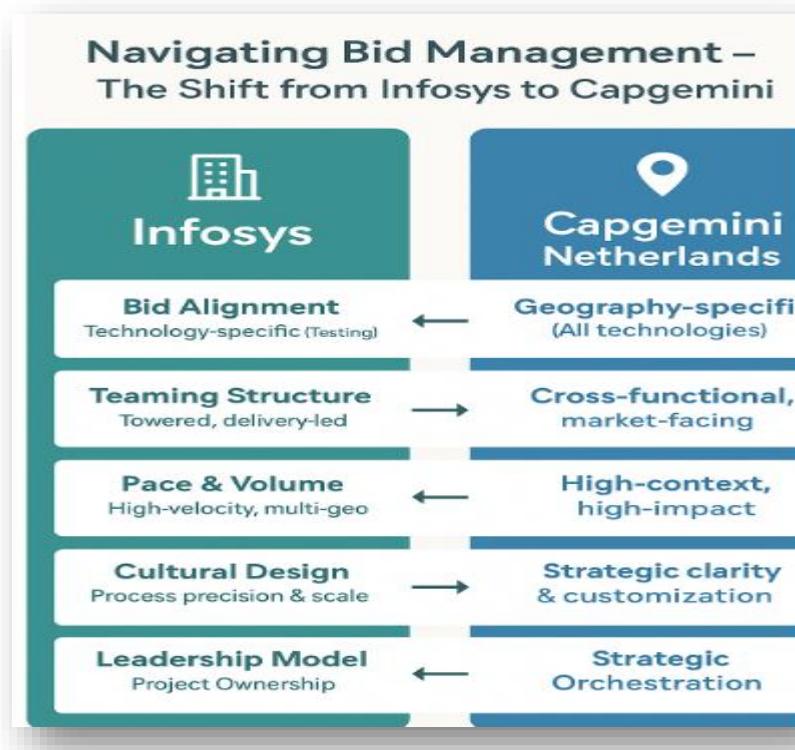
I could feel the shift from the very first week. At Infosys, bids moved like high-speed trains fast, focused, and tech-specific. My world was testing. The asks were familiar, the structure predictable, and the deliverables repeatable. I was running multiple bids across geographies, refining process precision with every lap.

But at Capgemini Netherlands, everything slowed down and then deepened. The client didn't just want speed; they wanted meaning. They weren't asking for a testing solution they were asking for a transformation partner who understood their market, their strategy, their culture. Suddenly, I was no longer a delivery anchor I was a strategic orchestrator, working across

technologies, crafting personalized stories, aligning cross-functional teams, and driving clarity in complexity. It was no longer about doing more. It was about doing what mattered and doing it well.

At Infosys, the bid universe was structured around technology. I lived in the testing tower leading automation, performance, functional, and security testing proposals that spanned the globe. Geography didn't matter. Whether it was a retail major in the US or a telecom player in Australia, if the bid was testing-related, I was looped in. The domain was constant; the client landscape changed.

Capgemini flipped that logic.



Here in the Netherlands, I wasn't aligned to a single technology stream. I was aligned to a geography. It didn't matter if the opportunity was in SAP, cloud, cybersecurity, or AI-led customer experience **if the client was Dutch and the ambition was transformation**, I was at the center of it. This reversal in structure wasn't a nuance. It was a professional revolution. I went from owning deep, repeatable content in a single domain to **curating bespoke, high-context responses** across all technologies. Where Infosys gave me volume and domain mastery, Capgemini offered value and scope complexity.

Stretch, Expand, Adapt – The New Learning Terrain

And it wasn't just about what I worked on. It was also about **how I worked**.

Infosys had a deeply layered structure, optimized for reuse, velocity, and tower-led coordination. There were templates, content libraries, and tower-wise roles. Roles were modular. Interactions were often parallel tracks, feeding into a central composite proposal.

Using Daft's lens, I could clearly see the structural contrast. Capgemini Netherlands ran differently. It wasn't about modular assembly. It was about bespoke orchestration. Every deal was a clean slate. Every RFP felt like an entirely new language to decode not because the requirements were obscure, but because the expectations were uniquely Dutch: clarity, transparency, logic, and most of all relevance.

The clients weren't buying a service they were investing in simplification through strategic consolidation. The Dutch market had matured beyond transactional outsourcing. They didn't want five vendors with overlapping capabilities. They wanted one trusted orchestrator a partner who could align cross-tower capabilities, guarantee integrated accountability, and speak the language of their business in Dutch boardrooms.

So, while Infosys had trained me to specialize, Capgemini asked me to expand. I had to dive deep into cybersecurity bid responses one week, understand legacy SAP carveouts the next, and pivot to cloud-native modernization strategy for public sector clients the following month. There was no "safe zone." But in that very stretch, I found renewed strength.

[The New Design: Influence Without Authority](#)

From a DWO perspective, this wasn't just a job switch it was a **structure-environment fit transformation**. Capgemini's Dutch business was designed to mirror the market's need for consolidated, strategic engagements. Instead of functionally siloed delivery, the structure was matrixed, dynamic, and market-oriented. Roles like mine weren't "bid processors" they were **strategic orchestrators** functioning across solution, delivery, commercials, legal, security, and regional sales, without formal authority over any.

The shift demanded more than experience. It demanded **presence**.

Unlike the global proposals I led at Infosys, where the structure carried scale and repeatability, here, I had to carry **strategic intelligence across functions** without control, but with influence. I coordinated with cybersecurity leads, regulatory compliance heads, cloud solution architects, and data protection officers. There were no boundaries. Only intersections. I wasn't at the center of a web. I was the web.

[Navigating the Dutch Way – Calm Precision, Trusted Autonomy](#)

And what a contrast it was where Infosys thrived on volume and velocity, here the focus was depth and trust. A Dutch client once told me during a negotiation call, "We already read your capabilities online. We don't want a pitch. We want alignment."

That single line defined everything.

It wasn't about narrating services it was about co-authoring journeys. I had to study every client's business history, current strategic priorities, and pain points. I had to connect the language of CTOs with that of CFOs. My proposals weren't documents. They were operating models in disguise each sentence reviewed for tone, intention, and accountability.

Capgemini's culture only deepened that experience. The Dutch team had a refreshing approach low power distance, high intellectual accountability, and a culture of silent precision. People didn't grandstand in meetings. They showed up prepared, respected time, and focused on outcomes. And in this environment, I found my voice carried farther not because I spoke louder, but because I spoke with clarity.

[A Win That Defined the Difference](#)

One of my proudest moments came during a multi-million -euro vendor consolidation deal Manufacturing deal . It was a deeply strategic win where we offered to replace three incumbent suppliers with a unified delivery model. I wasn't just the bid anchor I was the **conductor**, aligning legacy application owners, cyber compliance leads, transition managers, and deal review boards. I wrote executive summaries, rewrote solution narratives, refined pricing logic, and stitched them into a proposal that didn't just pass scrutiny it earned respect.

And when we won the deal, the client's feedback was simple:

"This wasn't just a bid. It was a blueprint we could believe in."

DWO Reflection :

DWO Concept	Reflection
Structure–Environment Fit	Shift from tech-led (Infosys) to geo-led (Capgemini NL) structure required adaptive role alignment.
Matrix Roles	Managed bids across functions without formal authority led through influence.
Strategic Choice Theory	Role expanded due to Capgemini's focus on vendor consolidation and transformation-led strategy.
Adaptive Learning	Transitioned from testing expert to multi-tower strategist across digital deals.
Culture–Structure Alignment	Dutch low power distance enabled flat, accountable collaboration and precision-focused delivery.

Final Notes– Anchored in Purpose, Not Process

Capgemini Netherlands didn't just change my scope. It changed my **story**.

From tower-based delivery at Infosys to **territory-based orchestration** at Capgemini, I learned that real leadership isn't about how many decks you close; it's about how deeply you understand why each one matters. This role didn't make me louder. It made me **clearer**.

Not faster but **more focused**. And perhaps, not bigger but **more rooted**. Because growth, I've come to realize, is not always in vertical leaps. Sometimes, it's in the silent anchoring beneath the surface the kind that prepares you for the next season of bloom.

Chapter 9: The Bloom Beyond the Bid – Growing into the Future

Where Learning Becomes Leadership, and Growth Becomes System Design

IIM SIRMAUR | 2024-2026

Theme: Open Systems, Self-Redesign, and Strategic, Analytics and digital Transformation Leadership in a Learning Organization

In every organization I've served, I've navigated structures some rigid, some fluid. But over the last two years, I've begun navigating something even more intricate: my own redesign.

As a Senior Presales Manager at Capgemini Netherlands, I no longer just respond to opportunities I help shape their very architecture. I don't merely submit bids; I co-create intent, orchestrate trust, and guide complexity into clarity. But even as I became a central node in Capgemini's strategic orchestration model, I felt the next evolution calling.

That's when I chose to pursue an Executive MBA in Digital Transformation and Analytics. It wasn't a step up the ladder. It was a step *back* into the engine room.

I wanted to understand not just the front-end of client interaction, but the back-end of systemic alignment. And in DWO terms, this journey was a shift from operating within the system... to learning how to redesign the system itself.

The Spark Behind the Shift – When Inspiration Came from Home

The real decision, though, was made at the dinner table.

One evening, amid the usual noise my daughter giggling over her drawings, the laptop still open with half-finished emails Arun looked at me and said, "You know what your problem is? You've outgrown the system you're working in. You don't just execute. You restructure. Why not learn to design the system from the top?"

That line stayed with me.

He saw something I hadn't paused to recognize. He didn't just encourage me **he sparked it**. He stepped in took charge of school runs, bedtime stories, sick-day cuddles on days when I was deep in case submissions or midterm strategy reviews. My daughter too, unknowingly, became my quiet coach whispering "Mumma, you can do it," while I prepped for leadership presentations.

And my parents visiting just when the load grew heavy took over with grace forming the invisible scaffolding behind my visible climb.

Family, I've come to believe, is not just support.

In DWO terms, they are the informal network that enables systems to transform.

[EMBA as an Open System And I, Its Adaptive Node](#)

From day one, the EMBA program revealed itself as an open system a dynamic flow of inputs (case studies, peer insights, leadership frameworks), throughputs (analysis, reflection, debate), and outputs (renewed decision-making capacity). The environment was VUCA volatile, uncertain, cognitively demanding and required me to become structurally adaptive.



I saw myself evolve from an instinctive operator into a deliberate designer of work.

The program challenged me to reframe how I think about:

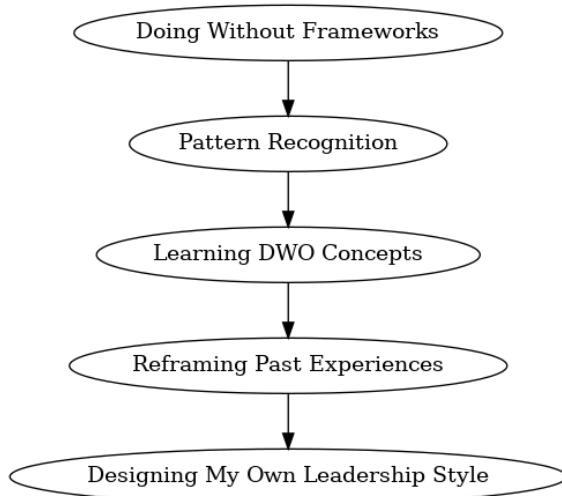
- Value chains not as process flows, but as human systems
- Digital maturity not as tech investment but as alignment across people, process, platform
- Transformation not as disruption, but as *designed learning loops*

[From Mechanistic Delivery to Strategic Design](#)

Every DWO concept I studied found a reflection in my daily work:

- The **structure–environment fit** I lived at Capgemini became clearer as I mapped client strategies to our own bid alignment model.
- The **matrixed coordination** I handled became more intentional, as I learned to navigate tensions between autonomy and integration.
- The concept of **informal networks** deepened my respect for allies like pricing, legal,

- and solution leads who made success possible, even outside formal reporting lines.
- And the **learning organization model** helped me realize that even as a bid manager, I was shaping not just deliverables but capability narratives, future roles, and micro-cultures within teams.



Designing My Own Growth Trajectory

This wasn't just education. It was **systemic reconfiguration**. As I built strategy canvases in class, I applied them at work. As I learned about interdependence and task design, I reflected on every multi-tower RFP I'd led. As I studied digital disruption, I reframed my own role as a *translator* of client vision into technical clarity. The EMBA gave me what no role had before: *The language of systems. The tools of transformation. And the confidence to design, not just do.*

Replanting the Metaphor: Planting for the Future

When I began this story, I spoke of **planting**. Of laying quiet roots, of absorbing before rising. Now I see that metaphor in new light.

This wasn't just a slow climb. It was a designed system of growth

- I was exposed to high-pressure interdependence (reciprocal task structures).
- I navigated role drift with stability, even when structures weren't built for it.
- I balanced constructive culture with invisible leadership, earning trust through delivery not declarations.
- I iterated, adapted, re-skilled and then made those very adaptations *visible*.

In DWO terms, my story is a living model of adaptive alignment where environment, structure, leadership, and learning were never static. They evolved. And so did I.

DWO Epilogue Summary – Redesigning the Self as a System

DWO Concept	Realization in My Journey
Open Systems	EMBA experience as dynamic, contextual learning ecosystem
Structure–Environment Fit	Transition from Infosys to Capgemini mirrored by internal redesign
Adaptive Learning	Learning loops between EMBA theory and daily bid execution
Matrix Roles & Influence	Orchestrating cross-functional teams without formal authority