

LEADERSHIP INSPIRED

Social Impactors for India

October 2025 - Edition 04

COVER STORY

Evolving Role of Boards in the Social Sector

A Governance Blueprint

*by India Leaders for Social Sector,
Antara Advisory*

Page 9

Listening Boards,
Resilient Leaders

**Archana
Ramachandran**

Page 27

Financial Governance
for Nonprofit Leaders

**Kavita Gunderia,
Urmila Sampath**

Page 31

Building Strong
Advisory Boards

Tara Singh Vachani



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Finding Balance

Building a Mission-Driven Advisory Board at Adhyayan

At the ILSS Centre of Excellence for Board and Governance, we believe that strong boards create strong organisations. Effective boards unlock hidden potential by guiding the organisation's leadership in the right direction. They help refine strategies, raise funds, course-correct when the founder faces challenges, and serve as a valuable sounding board for the CEO.

The experience of two ILSS alumni at the Adhyayan Foundation illustrates what a truly effective board partnership could look like. When Adhyayan reached a critical stage of growth, its **CEO, Anushri Alva**, an alum of The ILSS Fundraising Program, realised the organisation needed more than good intentions from its advisory board. It needed structure, clarity, and a renewed sense of purpose. Around the same time, Jagdish Acharya, having just completed The ILSS Board Leadership Program, was looking for ways to apply his learning in a real-world context. **Jagdish serves as the CEO of the Paints & Coatings Skill Council** and has over 40 years of global leadership in the paints industry with Asian Paints and PPG, and currently serves on multiple corporate and nonprofit boards. Their paths crossed, and together they worked towards shaping a board that would not just advise but actively partner in Adhyayan's mission.



Alumni Spotlight



Adhyayan
Foundation

Vishakha Singh,
Program Manager, ILSS

From the very beginning, Anushri's attempt was to have an advisory board to fill gaps in her team's expertise. But by 2024, as the organisation grew, it became clear that the board needed a sharper, updated mandate aligned with Adhyayan's evolving goals. She and her team redefined this mandate, re-engaged existing members to confirm their interest, and invited new members whose expertise matched the organisation's growth needs. The result was an advisory board built on clarity and action: a mandate rooted in both member expertise and organisational priorities, hands-on involvement through action groups, and member-led meetings anchored in field visits. There was a constant push for regular updates, clear documentation, and open feedback to ensure that the board remained both engaged and effective.

A Mission-Driven Partnership

After completing The ILSS Board Leadership Program, Jagdish Acharya was invited to join Adhyayan as an Adviser. He decided to accept only after he was convinced he could bring genuine value to the organisation—and equally, that Adhyayan believed he could. As he explains it, 'Effective governance is a partnership where both sides recognise the comfort, trust, and value of working together.'

What attracted Jagdish was Adhyayan's focus on addressing the root causes of systemic failures in education rather than just the symptoms.

What attracted Jagdish was Adhyayan's focus on addressing the root causes of systemic failures in education rather

than just the symptoms. 'Their emphasis on strengthening school leadership and creating sustainable change resonated deeply with me, and I felt compelled to contribute in the best way I could,' he reflects.

For Jagdish, this alignment is what distinguishes a board that is merely functional from one that genuinely advances an organisation's mission. A mission-driven board, he explains, consists of members who are deeply committed to the purpose and outcomes of the organisation. In the context of an education nonprofit, this means council members show a strong dedication to the mission, use their expertise effectively, and dedicate time beyond scheduled meetings to support the work on the ground.

From Ideas to Impact



According to Anushri, commitment has been evident in Jagdish's engagement from the very beginning. 'He began by meeting our team multiple times, then visiting two of our field sites. After each visit, he shared detailed notes, which gave us not only fresh ideas but also a clear signal of his investment.'

Alumni Spotlight



Adhyayan
Foundation

Vishakha Singh,
Program Manager, ILSS

Since joining, Jagdish has:

- Provided feedback on communications, fundraising, and organisational strategy — often sharing written reflections beyond meetings.
- Supported fundraising directly, including organising an awareness luncheon with his peers.
- Been a constant source of encouragement, celebrating small wins and asking thoughtful questions that sustain the team's energy during challenging moments.

Lessons for the Sector

For board members transitioning from corporate backgrounds, Jagdish emphasises that the most important shift is recognising that, while structured thinking and problem-solving skills are valuable, they must be applied with

humility, patience, and openness to the social context.

‘In the corporate world, there’s often a tendency to intellectualise discussions and jump to solutions,’ he notes. ‘In the social sector, this risks overlooking the lived realities that shape outcomes. To be effective, you must invest time visiting the field, meeting stakeholders, and observing work on the ground. It builds empathy, insight, and relevance.’

Corporate professionals must embrace unstructured, iterative processes and bring expertise in a way that empowers rather than dominates. ‘It is as much about receiving as giving, as much about learning as guiding.’



Alumni Spotlight



Adhyayan
Foundation

Vishakha Singh,
Program Manager, ILSS

He adds that corporate professionals must embrace unstructured, iterative processes and bring expertise in a way that empowers rather than dominates. 'It is as much about receiving as giving, as much about learning as guiding.'

Anushri, reflecting on her journey, distils three key lessons for founders and CEOs working with boards:

- **Select board members thoughtfully.** Choose those whose values align with your mission and who have already shown genuine investment.
- **Establish constructive feedback systems.** Clear processes for evaluation and dialogue ensure accountability and evolution.
- **Foster communication and field engagement.** Keep members informed, involve them regularly, and encourage firsthand exposure to the work.

The Adhyayan story is a reminder that boards can not be passive structures; they are living partnerships. When leaders create space for shared ownership, and members bring humility, expertise, and trust, boards move beyond formality to become catalysts for growth.

As we reflect on the state of boards in India, this example offers a hopeful direction: governance that is participatory, transparent, and above all, mission-driven. For Adhyayan, this is still a journey in progress, as its leaders and board members learn together what kinds of engagement work best and where they can make the greatest impact side by side.

LI

Have a look at the AQEF team and board here:



The Adhyayan Foundation is committed to ensuring every child in India receives high-quality education, regardless of their socio-economic background, location, or circumstances. They firmly believe that every child deserves the opportunity to unlock their full potential. To this end, the foundation enables and supports government schools to create child-centred and inclusive learning environments which lay the groundwork for a child's future.

Adviser to Adhyayan Foundation

JAGDISH ACHARYA, CEO, Paints & Coatings Skill Council

