SRI SATHYA SAI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER LEARNING

(Deemed to be University)

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND COMMERCE

ROOTS TO WINGS: THE LEADERSHIP CONCLAVE

Beyond Business: Inspiring Leaders

Creating Impact in the Age of AI.

Leadership Conclave – Day 1 Summary

Held on 11 November 2026 at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Day 1 of the Leadership Conclave explored the theme "Roots to Wings: Beyond Business – Inspiring Leaders, Creating Impact in the Age of AI."

Overall summary

How can leaders embrace AI without losing sight of what makes leadership human? This question connected Day 1's discussions across journalism, management, human resources and entrepreneurship. Speakers emphasised that while AI can improve efficiency and transform work, judgment, integrity, empathy and accountability must remain central. Continuous learning, practical expertise and financial literacy emerged as essential capabilities, alongside trust, communication, mentoring and compassion. Together, the sessions highlighted the importance of combining technological capability with enduring human values.

Dr. C. S. Chandrahaas

In his opening remarks, Dr. C. S. Chandrahaas, Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and Commerce, distinguished rule-based automation from probabilistic AI. He called for management education to adapt to changing business needs while strengthening human judgment. Drawing on Sri Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, he positioned enduring values as the foundation of meaningful technological progress.

Ms. Ayesha Khanum

Delivering the keynote on "Redefining the Newsroom – Leadership, Innovation and Impact in the Age of AI," Ms. Ayesha Khanum, Chairperson of the Karnataka State Media Academy, explored how AI can support research, transcription, translation and content adaptation. She

stressed that editorial responsibility remains firmly with journalists, who must protect accuracy, fairness and truth. Her discussion connected shared vision, trust and a clear editorial identity with continuous learning, while warning that literal AI translations can distort a message's meaning.

Student Panel

The student panel examined "Will AI Replace Managers—or Transform the Way Managers Lead?" Drawing on examples from Walmart, Levi Strauss, DBS Bank, Tata Steel and Klarna, the panel argued that AI adoption must deliver measurable business value. Managers must retain strategic judgment and accountability, with human oversight proportionate to the consequences of each decision. The discussion also considered three models of involvement and warned that excessive automation could limit foundational learning for younger professionals. Reskilling, mentoring, internal mobility and fewer unnecessary approval layers were proposed as ways forward. The central message was clear: tasks can be delegated to AI, but accountability cannot.

Alumni Interaction – Ask Me Anything

The "Ask Me Anything" alumni interaction brought the focus to career development, entrepreneurship and practical learning. Alumni encouraged students to help others succeed through clarity and trust, align their actions with their values and learn beyond the curriculum. They highlighted the importance of applying financial modelling, cash-flow analysis, costing and investment appraisal to real businesses, noting that qualifications alone do not guarantee success. Eco Handles illustrated how entrepreneurship can create livelihoods for rural women, while Ms. Keerthi Peratla connected mentoring and personal growth with reflection on the Bhagavad Gita. Across the conversation, perseverance, learning from setbacks and communicating contributions without exaggeration emerged as recurring lessons. Students were encouraged to identify worthwhile problems and create value beyond assigned tasks.

Fireside Chat – Beyond the Algorithm

The fireside chat, "Beyond the Algorithm," explored human responsibility in the age of AI. Moderated by Dr. Sai Giridhar Sairam, Executive Coach and CPO at SKN Organics Pvt. Ltd., the conversation focused on dignity, compassion and human oversight in AI-enabled workplaces, particularly recruitment.

Dr. Sai Prasad Acharya

Dr. Sai Prasad Acharya, Vice President – Human Resources at Reliance Retail, emphasised continuous learning and compassionate support for employees affected by difficult decisions. Linking professional responsibility with the values he learned at SSSIHL, he reminded the

audience that a leader's responsibility extends beyond the business decision to the people affected by it.

Ms. Sirisha Moparthi

Ms. Sirisha Moparthi, Senior HR Business Partner and Head – APAC at Milliman, described how AI accelerates reporting and data preparation. She emphasised the need to verify outputs and encouraged mutual learning between younger employees familiar with emerging technologies and experienced professionals with contextual knowledge. Her message highlighted the balance between technological speed and the reliability that comes from experience and judgment.

Sri Ravishankar Venkateswaran

Sri Ravishankar Venkateswaran, AI Experience Lead at Puppetica Media, drew on a career spanning advertising, multimedia, HR, filmmaking and language-related AI. He highlighted the role of mentors, experimentation and lifelong learning in opening new opportunities. His work on Punyakoti illustrated how creative interests can enrich professional experience, encouraging students to remain curious rather than limit themselves to a predefined career path.

Ms. Renuka B. L.

Ms. Renuka B. L., Founder of ACE it – Human Skills and Career Discovery and Advisor at KPMG, advocated a T-shaped approach to development: deep subject expertise supported by listening, collaboration, trust and assertiveness. Drawing on experiences of challenging unfair employment terms and an unsuitable AI recruitment assessment, she underscored the importance of dignity, feedback and human review in workplace decisions.

Moderator: Dr. Sai Giridhar Sairam

Bringing these perspectives together, Dr. Sai Giridhar Sairam reinforced care for others, continuous learning and human judgment as the foundations of responsible AI adoption.

Ms. Lathika Pai

In the Future Builders Dialogue on "Building in the Age of AI," Ms. Lathika Pai, Founder of Sonder Connect and Former Managing Director of Microsoft for Startups (MENA), spoke with Sri Karthik Shenoy, Senior Analyst – Investments (SAI).

She urged aspiring professionals and founders to combine adaptability and technological readiness with financial discipline and customer understanding. As entry-level and back-office roles evolve, she encouraged students to develop domain expertise, resilience and a habit of continuous learning. For entrepreneurs, she cautioned against premature expansion,

emphasising cash flow, customer-service costs, technology expenses after subsidies and adequate reserves. Rather than chase AI labels or valuations, businesses should solve genuine customer problems affordably. She also encouraged women from non-technical backgrounds to build confidence in technology and finance. Responsible AI use, she noted, requires understanding its limitations, speaking up when technology causes harm and seeking human guidance when responses are troubling or uncertain. Her discussion also highlighted physical activity and time outdoors as part of a balanced life. The overarching message was to build around real customer needs, take calculated risks and use technology responsibly.

Leadership Conclave – Day 2: Session-wise Essence

On November 21, 2001, at the First Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Schools held in Prasanthi Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh, Sri Sathya Sai Baba was asked about the role of technology, including computers, in education. His response urged educators to develop the human mind rather than depend uncritically on machines: "You should become a 'composer' and not a 'computer'." While acknowledging the benefits of computers when used according to need, he cautioned against allowing technological convenience to weaken independent thinking and drew attention to its implications for employment and social well-being.

This reflection offers a meaningful lens through which to consider artificial intelligence today. The emphasis is not merely on what technology can accomplish, but on the judgment, understanding and responsibility with which it is used. To be a composer is to understand purpose, bring ideas and people together, and create meaningful outcomes rather than simply execute instructions. The Leadership Conclave's Day 2 sessions develop this perspective through four complementary themes: independent judgment, human-centred transformation, responsible AI-enabled management and enduring character.

Session 1: Judgment in the Age of AI – Tushar Sharma, Adobe

Tushar Sharma's address underscored the growing importance of human judgment in an AI-driven workplace. As technology accelerates the preparation of analyses, proposals and other outputs, the managerial responsibility shifts towards reviewing evidence, testing assumptions and assessing consequences. His hypothetical credit appraisal exercise illustrated that a persuasive presentation cannot substitute for careful examination of financial risks and underlying cash flows.

The essence of the session was that leaders must retain intellectual independence while using AI to strengthen their capabilities. Making assumptions explicit, recognising uncertainty, encouraging questions and rewarding sound reasoning are essential to responsible decision-making. Foundational expertise must be developed through experience rather than delegated

entirely to technology. AI may assist in generating alternatives, but human professionals must determine what to trust, when to intervene and who remains accountable.

Session 2: Leading in the Age of AI – The Human Side of Digital Transformation – Sri Sudheer Warrier, CTO, Sundaram Finance

Sri Sudheer Warrier emphasised that meaningful digital transformation is fundamentally about people, not merely the adoption of technology. AI can extend human capability, but its value depends on a clear understanding of the business problem, the user's needs and the context in which work is performed. His examples of legacy system modernisation and credit appraisal highlighted the role of domain expertise in directing AI and validating its outputs.

The central message was to use AI for purposeful, high-value work without outsourcing curiosity or understanding. Effective transformation requires user involvement, thoughtful workflow design and changes in organisational behaviour. Leaders must understand how information is used, evaluate whether the resulting output is appropriate and preserve integrity, empathy and care. Technology should strengthen professional expertise and improve the human experience rather than pursue speed at the expense of sound judgment.

Session 3: The AI-Ready Manager – Student Panel

The student panel script, moderated by Sai Siddhanth Botta and featuring Prasad, Vikrant, Cherish, Suryavamshi and Utkarsh, presents the PILOT framework for responsible management in an AI-enabled workplace. Its five dimensions are to pick the right problem, integrate AI into how people actually work, lift people rather than productivity alone, own the consequences and track what truly matters. Together, these principles place customer value, workflow integration, employee development, accountability and meaningful outcomes at the centre of AI adoption.

The proposed discussion highlights the need to retain specialist oversight, develop foundational skills and verify claims before making commercial commitments. Its fictional boardroom dilemma illustrates the importance of clear authority for validating technical assertions, approving proposals and stopping unsupported commitments. The essence of the panel is that AI can support management, but cannot assume its responsibilities. Organisational success must be assessed through the quality of decisions, the development of people and demonstrable business value, rather than the volume of AI activity.

Session 4: What Should Not Change in a Changing World? – Sri Prasad Kalasani, Director, Caterpillar India

Sri Prasad Kalasani's address focused on the enduring values that must guide leadership amid technological and professional change. He emphasised the ability to distinguish convenience from correctness and described self-correction as a foundation of effective management. His

reflections encouraged individuals to examine their own conduct, accept feedback and uphold truth even when doing so is inconvenient.

The session presented leadership as a responsibility to help others grow, rather than a pursuit of personal recognition or short-term results alone. Patience, service, ethical conduct and the sustained cultivation of trust were central to this perspective. The progression from personal capability to personal commitment and collective responsibility reinforced the importance of credibility, availability and reliability. The essence of the address was to remain adaptable in skills while remaining steadfast in character, measuring success through the positive contribution made to people, organisations and society.

AI can provide knowledge, analytical capabilities and execution speed, but these alone do not make someone a leader. True leadership lies in knowing what is worth doing, understanding its consequences, bringing people together and taking responsibility for outcomes. As reflected in Swami's teachings, become a composer, not merely a computer—go beyond executing instructions to understanding purpose, integrating ideas and creating meaningful impact.

The two-day Leadership Conclave brought together industry leaders, alumni, faculty and students to reflect on the evolving nature of leadership in an AI-driven world. Across the discussions, a consistent message emerged: while technology can enhance capabilities and transform the way organisations work, effective leadership must remain grounded in sound judgment, professional competence, integrity, empathy and accountability. The Conclave reaffirmed the importance of combining technological adaptability with enduring human values, in keeping with the Institute's philosophy of Integral Education. Ultimately, leaders must not only navigate change but use their knowledge, values and capabilities to create meaningful and lasting impact on individuals, organisations and society.