

Sustainable leadership:

How to drive results without burning out your team

A joint perspective from Professor Alf Rehn and Auntie

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Executive summary

In a world of relentless change and automation, organizations face a critical paradox: how to drive results without exhausting their people. In his thought-provoking keynote, Professor Alf Rehn challenges leaders to rethink performance through the lens of humanity. He argues that true competitive advantage comes not from algorithmic efficiency but from the uniquely human abilities to imagine, empathize, critique, and create.

This white paper integrates Rehn's provocative ideas with Auntie's applied perspective on organisational wellbeing.

Together, they outline how leaders can foster cultures of care and excellence—where people thrive, mental wellbeing is prioritized, and sustainable performance follows naturally.

“Good enough is no longer good enough. Generative AI is a mediocrity engine—leaders must re-anchor their organizations in humane excellence.”

— Professor Alf Rehn

1. Leadership in inhumane times

Rehn describes today's workplace as "inhumane times"—a landscape where humans are often treated as data points and where efficiency metrics overshadow empathy and purpose. He calls for a new form of leadership that balances humanity with innovation.

Key insight: As automation accelerates, human value must be redefined. Organizations that ignore or minimize the human element risk becoming efficient—but emotionally hollow—machines.

Auntie's lens:

At Auntie, we see this challenge play out daily across hundreds of organizations. The link between employee wellbeing and performance is undeniable: companies with strong wellbeing cultures report 20–30% higher productivity, lower absence rates, and longer retention. Sustainable leadership begins with acknowledging that mental wellbeing is not a soft issue—it's a strategic one.

2. The three drifts: How we lost the human touch

Rehn identifies three gradual shifts that have distanced organizations from their humanity:

- Ignoring humanity: Reducing people to KPIs and productivity metrics.
- Forgetting humanity: Suppressing the “messiness” and diversity that make people creative and resilient.
- Replacing humanity: Automating human judgment and connection in the pursuit of efficiency.

Why it matters: When humans are treated as resources instead of individuals, creativity declines, burnout increases, and trust erodes.

“We built great institutions—and lost track of the human.”

— Rehn

Auntie's support:

For leaders, restoring humanity at work begins with self-awareness. Understanding your own values, limits, and strengths makes it easier to lead authentically, connect with others, and create a psychologically safe environment where people can be themselves.

Auntie supports this by offering low-threshold, professional conversations that help leaders and employees manage stress, strengthen resilience, and navigate change with empathy and clarity.

True leadership also requires reflection: moments to pause, gain perspective, and reconnect with purpose. Auntie provides a practical way to support this process, helping individuals build the emotional capacity and self-awareness that sustain humane performance over time.

3. The mediocrity trap: *Why “good enough” isn’t sustainable*

Rehn warns against a growing acceptance of “workslop”—the flood of generic, AI-generated, or uninspired output that technically meets requirements but drains engagement. When one team lowers the bar, others soon follow. The result: mediocrity disguised as productivity.

Rehn’s challenge:

Great leadership means resisting the algorithmic pull toward the average. Machines produce the median; humans can—and must—aspire to excellence.

How Auntie helps organisations counter mediocrity

Continuous self-reflection and self-development through Auntie’s professional support enable people to learn from challenges, grow through reflection, and strengthen their way of working and leading.

Low-threshold, solution-focused conversations help employees sustain focus, motivation, and clarity even in demanding times.

Goal-oriented reflective discussions build mental skills such as self-leadership, emotional regulation, and constructive communication—essential capabilities for meaningful collaboration and adaptability.

4. Diversity and the humane advantage

Rehn reframes diversity as a strategic engine of excellence, not a compliance metric. True innovation comes from bringing together people with different backgrounds, perspectives, and ways of thinking—and ensuring every voice is treated with respect.

“We’re all unique intersectional weirdos—and that’s what machines can never be.”

— Rehn

Auntie’s lens:

Psychological safety and inclusivity are prerequisites for wellbeing and innovation. Auntie supports this through services that help leaders and teams build emotional awareness, manage conflict constructively, and foster inclusive communication.

Practical takeaway: Diversity fuels creativity—but only when combined with cultures of civility and care.

5. Leading humanely: *Small acts, big shifts*

Rehn emphasises that transformation begins with micro-behaviours:

- Ban yawning at ideas. Treat every contribution with curiosity and respect.
- Ask, “Do you feel seen here?” Recognition fosters belonging and motivation.
- Model civility. Kindness is not weakness—it’s a performance multiplier.

Auntie’s approach:

Auntie provides solution-focused, goal-oriented conversations that help leaders strengthen their mental skills, manage pressure, and sustain balance.

Rather than formal training or coaching, Auntie offers professional psychological support that meets each leader where they are—helping them navigate demanding situations, understand their impact, and lead humanely in a world that often rewards speed over reflection.

6. From insight to action: *Building sustainable leadership cultures with Auntie*

Sustainable leadership is a journey, not a campaign. It requires consistent practices that reinforce both wellbeing and excellence.

How Auntie supports this journey:

- **Creates awareness:** Helps leaders and employees recognize early signs of stress and reflect on their ways of working.
- **Builds mental skills:** Strengthens self-leadership, emotional regulation, and communication—the human foundations of sustainable leadership.
- **Encourages open dialogue:** Normalises wellbeing and self-reflection as part of everyday leadership, not just crisis response.
- **Supports continuous growth:** Provides goal-oriented, solution-focused conversations that help people maintain balance and resilience over time.

Result: Organisations gradually shift from reactive problem-solving toward a more reflective, humane, and sustainable way of leading and working.

“Care and excellence aren’t opposites—they’re interdependent.”

— Rehn

Conclusion: the human edge

Professor Alf Rehn reminds us that technology may transform work, but it cannot replicate what makes us human: empathy, creativity, critique, and care. Auntie extends that message into practice—helping organisations translate humane leadership into measurable outcomes.

When leaders create environments that balance results with respect, they unlock not just performance, but purpose.

Sustainable leadership begins with the leader's own wellbeing. Only a self-aware, balanced leader can truly support a thriving team.

About Auntie

Auntie helps organisations turn mental wellbeing into business impact by providing accessible professional support that strengthens resilience, reduces absences, and boosts performance. Across hundreds of organisations and hundreds of thousands of employees, Auntie empowers teams to thrive in an era of change.

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