



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Fortune Favors the Bold: The Building of BCG X

By Sesh Iyer

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Sesh Iyer, a managing director and senior partner, leads with a blend of mission-centric technology and human-centric clarity. As the North America chair of BCG X, he's shaping the AI strategic agenda and AI at scale transformation for our clients. Through it all, he remains deeply grounded in trust, purpose, and service.

How I live, work, and lead today is rooted in the values and experiences I picked up in my formative years from my family.

My mother brought a quiet strength grounded in spirituality, reflection, and entrepreneurship. She gave me a sense of inner clarity and purpose. I learned intuition, reflection, and the power of conviction—and to anchor my decisions in something larger than myself.

My father was a fighter pilot. From him, I learned the cockpit mindset: discipline, precision, and calmness in intense environments and high-stakes situations. And of course, trust. He often said, “I have to really have faith that the person who packed my parachute is doing the right thing.” That mindset shaped how I think about leadership: every detail matters, every teammate counts, and no role is too small when it comes to achieving the mission.

Together, their influence gave me a blueprint for leadership: the fusion of steel and soul—bold action guided by deeper purpose with clarity.



From Submarines to Strategy to AI

I started as a systems engineer building mission-critical technologies for telecom networks and satellite systems. Later, I pursued computer science and software engineering at Carnegie Mellon and worked on designing software for nuclear submarines. This collective experience gave me an early foundation in computational thinking—the discipline of breaking complexity into solvable parts and applying technology to high-stakes problems. Systematically deconstructing challenges and applying technology to deliver breakthrough outcomes became core to what I did.

When I shifted into the business world, technology remained at the core of how I thought and worked. Its potential as a lever to drive sizeable impact has always felt boundless to me.

When I joined BCG (in the Technology practice area), I saw an opportunity to fuse deep technical expertise with strategic business thinking to drive business outcomes at scale. Soon after, we built our Gamma analytics business, and now, at BCG X, we have a razor-sharp focus on software, AI, and GenAI. It's been a journey of continuous reinvention. It used to be said that every business is a software business. Today, every business is an AI business—and I've spent the last two decades leading companies to harness and win with technology.

Launching BCG X: Boldness in the Face of Uncertainty



Launching BCG X, BCG's tech build and design division, was a defining moment. Clients needed not just strategy but also outcomes at scale. Not just decks, but AI, software, and data to work in their businesses. The ambition? To build an engine that couples consulting precision with tech firepower.

We had a bold mission. The first year was tough. We were building the plane midair. We faced a challenging economic climate, high expectations, fast-clock-speed technologies, and real ambiguity. But we stayed the course with a strong commitment from our CEO.

Today, BCG X is a global force multiplier, helping Fortune 500 clients achieve what only 8% to 10% of companies manage: scaling AI and digital transformations successfully. It's a testament to what's possible when purpose, persistence, and people are aligned.

The 10-20-70 Rule: Cracking the AI Code

We're at a pivotal moment. Yes, every business is becoming an AI business, but not every business is getting it right the first time. Too many companies adopt models and data but don't lead with value and deeply rethink their processes and teams.

That's the essence of BCG's 10-20-70 framework. In our experience, companies focus 10% on the algorithm and 20% on the data and tech. But the real muscle is in that remaining 70%: the people and process, the domain expertise, the change management, the human adoption, and business value. This is how we team with clients to move from strategy to MVPs [minimum viable products] to scaled transformations.

Man with Machine: The Future of the Agentic AI Enterprise

Across industries—from underwriting in insurance to marketing in consumer goods—we’re helping clients reimagine their core processes with agentic AI. By 2027, more than 40% of enterprise workflows will involve autonomous agents.

But the future isn’t about man or machine. It’s about man *with* machine. We’re not just deploying tools; we’re designing and building systems in which agents and humans drive outcomes together—in some functions, more agents and fewer humans, and in other functions, more humans and fewer agents—in what will be an enterprise agentic operating system. Doing so changes many things: decision velocity, workflows, organization structure, ways of working, and the role of leadership.

This isn’t theoretical. It’s happening today. We’re working hand in hand with clients to use this man-with-machine approach to deliver tangible results in less than 12 months—value at scale, not just proofs of concept. That’s the kind of work that excites me!

“Why” Before “How”: Grow by Growing Others

Before you are a leader, success is about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is about growing others.

At my core, I see leadership as service. My job is to remove roadblocks so that exceptional people can do exceptional things. Leadership isn’t about the spotlight—it’s about setting the stage for others to shine.

In every team I lead, I strive to create what I call the “unbroken chain of why.” From the client to the associate to the data engineer, everyone should understand why their work matters. As an example, when I was guiding a BCG X team building a GenAI solution but stuck in complexity, instead of telling them how, I asked why. Repeatedly. The result? A sharper, simpler AI product that frontline underwriters actually loved. Asking why isn’t delay. It’s precision. It forces teams to rediscover the signal in the noise.

I believe deeply in trust. In loyalty. In putting the team before the individual. And in authenticity—being real about what you bring, what you need, and how you show up. When people feel seen and anchored in purpose, they are empowered not just as individuals but also as high-performance teams that deliver.

A Grounding in What Matters: Family and Community

Yoga and meditation are huge priorities in my week, and *The Art of Living* is a spiritual constant in my life.

My family—my wife, my children, and my siblings—remain my greatest source of strength. We make space for each other, even in the busiest seasons. We hike, cook, and travel together—35 countries and counting. One of our favorite adventures recently was to Svalbard, a remote island in the Arctic Circle. The quiet beauty reminded us that the world is both vast and fragile—and that what we build and how we look after it matters.

My wife and I are deliberate in contributing to meaningful causes in the community, with a special focus on rare-cancer research. When cancer hits home, innovation isn't abstract—it's a lifeline. That's why we were thrilled to see research we helped fund —using CAR-T therapy to treat T-cell leukemia—achieve 90% remission rates in a trial conducted in 2024 and 2025. All we can say is, “Wow!”

The Final Word

If I had to capture BCG's culture in three words, they'd be bold, human, and transformative. Clients want outcomes anchored in a clear strategy that is then implemented with AI and technology at scale. That's why BCG X exists.

To anyone just starting their career in consulting: Chase momentum, not titles. Choose mentors over money, and impact over polish. Learn the new languages of leadership—AI, product, outcomes, teaming, and storytelling—because that's where value lives.

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