Innovation is the Lifeblood of Any Organisation

Mike Schwarz on Leading with Vision: A Decade of Transformation at the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS)

Among maritime leaders, Mike Schwarz stands out for the indelible impact he has made since taking the helm of the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS) in 2014. Over more than a decade, he has steered the Institute from a modest professional body into one of the most respected global authorities for marine surveyors.

During his visit to Goa for the IIMS India Conference 2025, TradeMaker Magazine's Nishit Doshi engaged in an exclusive conversation with Schwarz about his journey, leadership ethos, and how IIMS continues to evolve amid sweeping changes across the maritime industry.

Excerpts…

Mike, it's a pleasure to have you here in Goa for the IIMS India Conference. What makes this particular event stand out for you — both personally and professionally?
I clearly recall the last IIMS India event in Mumbai before the COVID-19 pandemic — it was hugely successful, and I was impressed by the passion and professionalism of everyone who attended. The Goa conference carried that same energy. Delegates travelled great distances to be part of it, and it was especially meaningful to host this event midway through Capt Ruchin Dayal's presidency.

On a personal note, though my visit was short, spending time in Goa is always an experience.

With Capt Dayal now serving as IIMS President, this conference carries special resonance. What has been unique about your working relationship with him?
Over the years, I've worked with several IIMS Presidents, each bringing their own style to the role. Ruchin is exceptional in his passion for the profession — it's evident to all who know him. We've collaborated closely through eDOT Solutions, his company, which has developed several innovative apps for IIMS. What began as a working relationship has grown into a genuine friendship.

Ruchin is forward-thinking and deeply committed to professional development. His writings for *The Report* magazine are always insightful. We share a common goal: to elevate the marine surveying profession, ensure maritime safety, and strengthen learning opportunities for all.

You've been leading IIMS since January 2014 — an impressive span. What's your personal mantra for staying motivated and ahead?
Honestly, I'm not sure where the past eleven years have gone — no two days are ever the same. The shipping and boating world constantly evolves, and that makes it easy to stay motivated.

When I took over in 2014, IIMS was struggling for recognition beyond its own niche. My challenge was to make it a respected voice in the wider maritime industry.

Today, IIMS engages with regulators, P&I Club directors, and senior figures across the sector — conversations that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Innovation is our lifeblood. The world is full of once-successful organisations that lost their way by failing to evolve. IIMS will not be one of them.

Coming from outside the maritime and technical domain, how did you bridge the gap and earn the confidence of such a specialised professional community?
There were some testing moments early on. Understandably, people questioned what I could bring to a highly specialised field. My approach was to be open and transparent about the challenges we faced and the decisions needed to survive — and later, to thrive.

I reached out to key industry players and built credibility through engagement and delivery. Today, we measure performance through tangible results — membership growth, record student enrolment in our qualifications, strong attendance at training events, and our growing digital footprint.

What, in your view, has enabled IIMS to progress under your leadership, and how do you maintain that momentum personally?
Innovation and teamwork! I'm fortunate to have a highly committed team that keeps me on my toes. Every day is a learning opportunity. Emerging topics like lithium-ion battery safety, AI in surveying, and enclosed space fatalities are of great interest to me — they push us to keep learning and responding.

IIMS sets high standards and aims high. Success and relevance drive me — and that keeps the momentum alive.

You have a background in media, publishing, and membership organisations. How has that shaped your approach at IIMS?
It has had a major influence. IIMS today has a strong publishing portfolio. The quarterly magazine, *The Report*, has grown to around 140 pages and is widely respected — we were even nominated for a publishing award, which was a pleasant surprise.

Our communications strategy extends beyond print. The monthly digital bulletin reaches over 12,000 readers, and our website attracts thousands of unique visitors. Clear, consistent communication has been key to building engagement and trust.

You often speak about streamlining processes. What strategic decisions have made a lasting difference?
Some of the most effective changes are invisible. For instance, we've eliminated printed plastic membership cards, moving to digital delivery — reducing both cost and carbon footprint. Our new On Demand Training Portal lets surveyors learn at their own pace, and the IIMS news podcasts, launched in 2024, already attract more than 5,000 listeners monthly.

We also conduct regular membership surveys to understand our members' needs and shape future strategy.

How would you describe your leadership style — and how do you nurture future leaders within IIMS?
I've learned more from poor leaders than good ones. I believe in an open-door policy and an environment where everyone can contribute ideas. The IIMS team of twelve is close-knit, and I'm proud of our low staff turnover — many have been with us for years.

We also take time to bond outside the office — spending a couple of days each year in the New Forest to reconnect as people, not just colleagues. As for succession, I still have time ahead, but I look forward to helping identify and mentor the next generation of leadership when the time comes.

When you think about the future of IIMS, what excites you most?
The challenges ahead are immense — AI, lithium-ion safety, decarbonisation, and human factors remain pressing issues. I see it as our duty to help members navigate these complexities responsibly.

When I first joined IIMS, I hesitated to speak out. Today, I feel compelled to challenge unsafe or unethical practices — whether it's the continued fatalities in enclosed spaces or the dangers of misdeclared cargoes. We may not have all the answers, but raising awareness is vital to change.

What are your biggest personal learnings from your IIMS journey?
I've learned to never stop learning — every day truly is a school day. Networking remains invaluable; a single connection can shape the future. I take great satisfaction in helping members perform more effectively, and I've seen how technology can transform our operations. Above all, I cherish the relationships and friendships formed within the IIMS community and across the wider maritime industry.

What advice would you give aspiring leaders, especially those stepping into industries beyond their expertise?
Leadership skills are transferable — what matters is adaptability. You must get comfortable with being uncomfortable. When I joined IIMS, I had no prior maritime experience. That didn't matter. What mattered was listening, learning, and surrounding myself with experts who knew what I didn't.

Too many leaders rush to make their mark on day one. Real impact is measured by legacy, not immediate visibility. Leadership is not about knowing everything — it's about knowing when to ask for help.

The Final Word

As he enters his twelfth year at the helm, Mike Schwarz's passion for progress remains unwavering. Under his leadership, the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS) has evolved into a digitally agile and globally respected institution — one that continues to balance innovation with tradition. The IIMS he leads today stands as a testament to how vision, integrity,

and adaptability can redefine professional excellence. As the maritime industry navigates an era of rapid transformation, Schwarz's steady hand ensures the Institute remains both a guiding voice and a forward-looking force for marine surveyors worldwide.

Technology Should Serve People — Not Replace Them

Capt Ruchin Dayal, President of the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS): A Leader Bridging Tradition and Transformation

Few professionals reflect the evolving identity of modern marine surveying as distinctly as Capt Ruchin Dayal — a Master Mariner, technologist, and President of the International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS). Balancing heritage with innovation, Capt Dayal brings to the role over two decades of seafaring experience and digital transformation expertise through his firm, eDOT Solutions.

During the IIMS India Conference 2025 in Goa, TradeMaker Magazine's Nishit Doshi engaged in an exclusive conversation with Capt Dayal about leadership, technology, and his vision for a more connected, future-ready IIMS.

Excerpts…

The networking reception on 6 September allowed delegates to connect before the main conference. What role do such gatherings play in strengthening the IIMS global community?
Nishit, the informal evening at Benaulim was one of my favourite moments of the conference. Long before the first presentation, people were connecting — not just as professionals but as a community of mariners. Gatherings like this are essential to IIMS because collaboration is built on relationships, and trust is built through genuine human interaction — not online meetings but conversations, laughter, and sometimes debate over dinner.

As President, I make it a point to meet as many members as I can, listen to their stories, understand their challenges, and connect those experiences with the Institute's broader vision. These evenings remind every member that they are part of something both global and personal.

Marine surveying is deeply rooted in tradition. How has digitalisation modernised IIMS's operations, training, and outreach — and how have you and eDOT Solutions supported that process?
This question sits right at the crossroads of my two worlds — shipping and technology. Marine surveying will always rely on human judgment, but today, that judgment is expanded by data, AI, and immersive tools.

At IIMS, we have embraced e-learning, virtual classrooms, and digital certification systems, ensuring accessibility to surveyors worldwide. Through eDOT Solutions, we've supported the Institute in several initiatives — the CPD App for tracking professional development, the Surveyor Search App, and the IIMS Learning Portal, which now serves as the digital hub for courses and webinars. These tools simplify access, ensure authenticity, and make learning measurable and engaging.

None of this would have been possible without the forward-looking leadership of Mike Schwarz, whose vision positioned IIMS at the forefront of digital engagement. We at eDOT are proud to be part of that journey — blending maritime experience, technical precision, and AI-driven innovation to make IIMS truly future-ready.

IIMS represents more than 1,000 members across 100 countries. How do you ensure such a diverse community remains connected and engaged?
The IIMS community is one of the most diverse families I've encountered — surveyors from Singapore to Southampton, each facing distinct climates, regulations, and cultures, yet united by professionalism and integrity. My approach has been to encourage regional ownership — empowering local chapters to design events and training relevant to their realities while maintaining IIMS's global standards.

We've also built informal communication channels — regional groups, open digital platforms, and virtual meet-ups that encourage dialogue beyond formal structures. Personally, I stay engaged through messages, calls, or online sessions. Leadership, to me, is about approachability and listening, keeping alive the spirit of one global IIMS.

As President, what responsibilities do you believe IIMS holds toward its members and the broader maritime sector?
IIMS carries the weight of trust — from surveyors, shipowners, insurers, and regulators who depend on our integrity. Our duty is twofold: to equip our surveyors with the skills and tools to meet international standards, and to protect the profession's reputation through ethical conduct and continuous learning.

Under my leadership, we are reinforcing frameworks for competency validation and training to ensure our members remain current and credible. The IIMS seal must always stand for independence and excellence.

The maritime sector faces rapid change — sustainability imperatives, AI-driven inspections, and new regulatory challenges. How is IIMS preparing its members?
Change is constant in shipping, and IIMS must anticipate it. We're launching new courses on lithium-ion battery safety, digital inspections, and AI-assisted surveying — preparing members for realities already on the horizon.

My role is to ensure this transformation remains thoughtful. Technology should serve people, not replace them. We are designing learning frameworks that combine traditional seamanship with modern tech — where experience meets innovation. Through partnerships with companies like eDOT Solutions, we're building training that's both futuristic and deeply human.

Please tell us about your journey with IIMS and what keeps you committed to its mission.
My relationship with IIMS began over a decade ago when I presented a paper at the London Conference during a turbulent time in the iron-ore export trade. As a Master Mariner transitioning into technology, IIMS offered a space where practical experience met professional structure.

Over the years, I've also collaborated with other organisations — SAMS (US), AIMS (Australia), and national bodies in India — which gave me a broader understanding of how surveyors are valued globally. What keeps me inspired is IIMS's potential to bridge the traditional and the transformative, ensuring surveyors evolve alongside technology without losing their human core.

You're known for humility, diligence, and an ethical approach. How do these qualities shape your leadership and mentorship?
Leadership begins with listening. In both IIMS and eDOT, I strive to create an atmosphere where ideas, not titles, drive discussion. Humility keeps you teachable; ethics keep you grounded.

Mentorship is central to IIMS India's work — particularly for those new to the profession. I tell young professionals that surveying isn't about being right all the time; it's about doing what's right all the time. If that principle stays with them, we've succeeded.

What is your long-term vision for IIMS, even after your presidency concludes?
My vision extends beyond tenure. I want IIMS to evolve into a truly hybrid institution — one that values both expertise and innovation. The Institute's future lies in merging digital competency with maritime wisdom, without losing the human touch that defines us.
I plan to continue contributing in areas such as digital transformation, AI integration, and training standardisation. Leadership isn't about holding office; it's about creating momentum others can carry forward.

The India Conference 2025 in Goa was a landmark event. What motivated the choice of venue and concept?
Bringing the conference to Goa felt like bringing IIMS home. It's where my roots and company are based, and it represents India's maritime spirit. Our goal was to make the conference immersive, interactive, and human.

We introduced live quizzes after presentations, a role-play case study on cargo liquefaction, and dynamic panel sessions that challenged conventional thinking. My team at eDOT handled design, technology, and logistics — every detail meant to make delegates feel valued. The event demonstrated how India can host with both intellect and heart.

What message would you share with aspiring marine surveyors and young professionals entering the field?
To every aspiring surveyor, I'd say — your work matters more than you realise. Behind every safe voyage and every sound ship, there's a surveyor ensuring things go right. It may not be glamorous, but it's a profession of immense purpose.

Through IIMS India and eDOT, we're developing awareness programmes, simulation-based training, and storytelling initiatives that reveal surveying as a career of intelligence and integrity. Our next goal is to launch mentorship circles — pairing seasoned professionals with newcomers so that knowledge not only passes down but evolves with every generation.

The Final Word

As he leads IIMS through a period of technological transformation, **Capt Ruchin Dayal** stands at the confluence of maritime heritage and digital innovation. His presidency underscores a philosophy of inclusive growth, ethical leadership, and human-centred technology — ensuring that the Institute remains both forward-looking and firmly anchored in its values.

TM