

By Sven Bossu

Associations Are Not That Different

While Citibank has a different scale and purpose than most of the 42,000 international associations worldwide, there are more similarities than one would imagine when it comes to global leadership strategies. The key difference is that, given the limited means most associations have, they need to be more creative in applying these strategies.

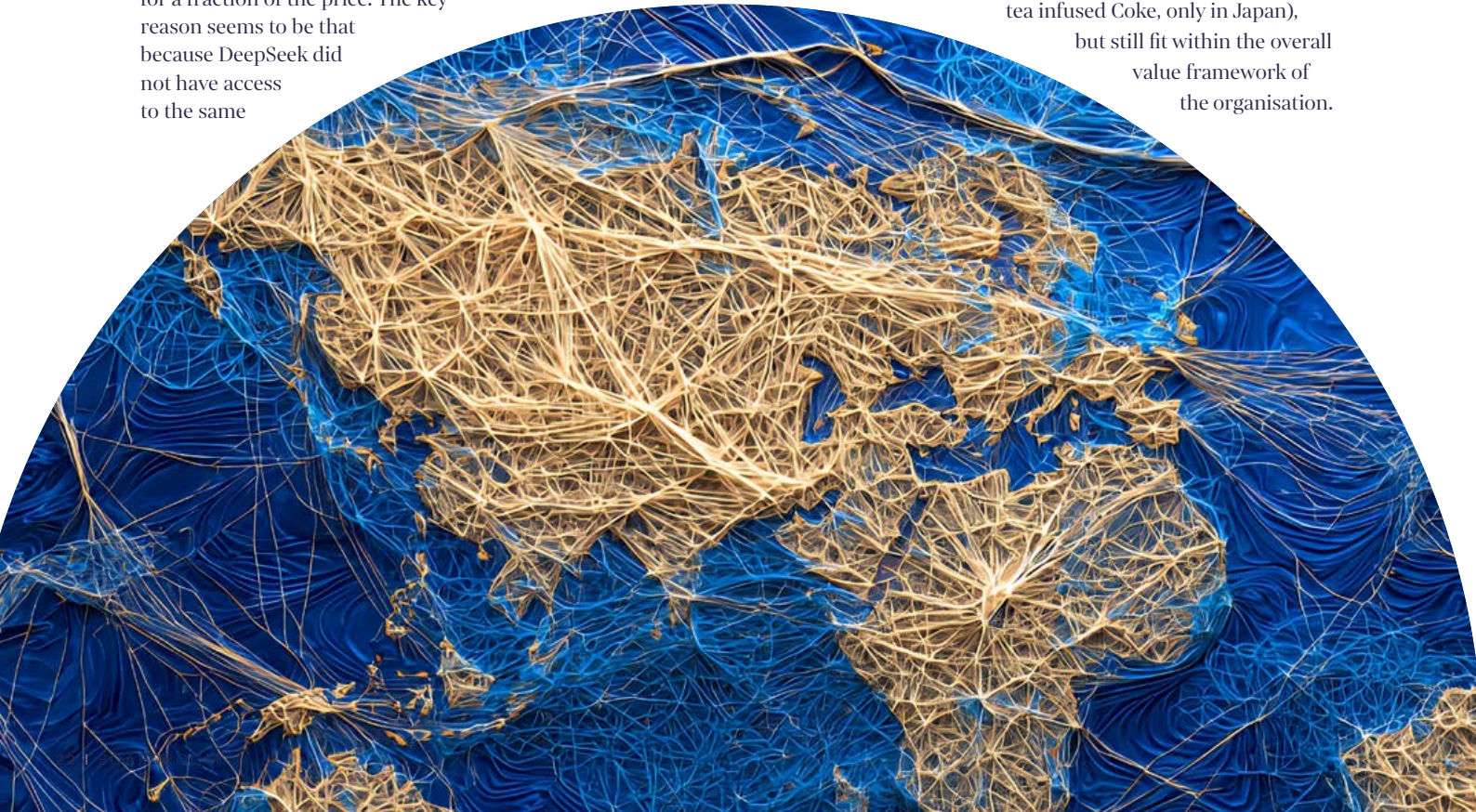
Sometimes you get inspiration from a very different industry, in this case AI and more in particular DeepSeek. This Chinese company managed to achieve the same outcome as the US based company Open AI, but – so it claims – for a fraction of the price. The key reason seems to be that because DeepSeek did not have access to the same

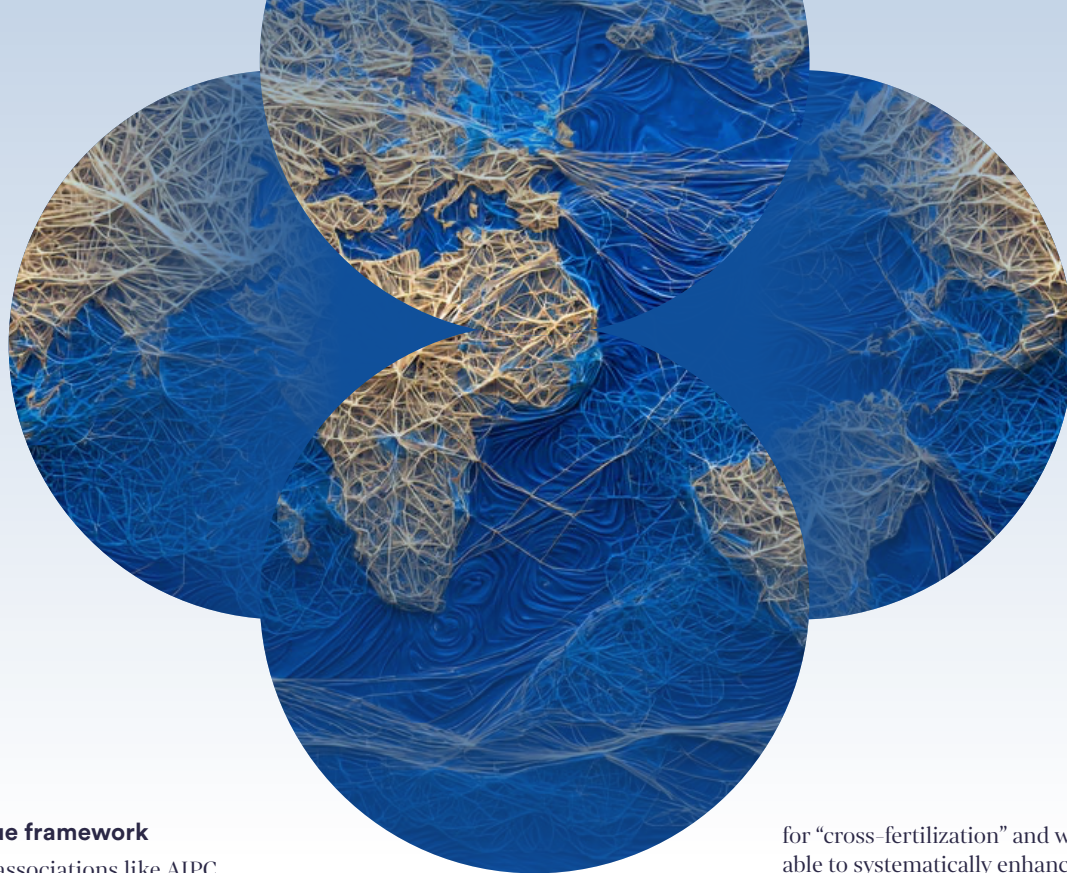
technology and capital, they had to be more creative.

It is a bit similar when it comes to associations and global leadership strategies. A global leadership strategy is

about having a structured approach, allowing to balance core values and adaptation to local differences. Big corporate companies like Coca-Cola, Citibank, etc. have products which are adapted to local market needs (green tea infused Coke, only in Japan),

but still fit within the overall value framework of the organisation.





Core value framework

For small associations like AIPC, defining the core value framework is relatively easy. At the same time, AIPC is a truly global association, with members in over 60 countries and the ambition to grow both our geographical footprint and the number of members in countries where we are already present.

And while our core value proposition (supporting excellence in convention centre management) is applicable in all those countries, the needs with regards to – for example – professional education are very different, simply because the environment in which our members function is so different. So, similar to Coca-Cola, we need to adapt our “products” to local needs, but without the multi-million dollar budgets to define, test and roll out those adaptations.

Fortunately, small associations have a secret weapon: other small associations. AIPC took a first step towards a more regionalised approach with its alliance with the Convention Centres of Canada, which resulted in a co-created Academy in 2023. Until then the AIPC Academy – a five-day bootcamp for upcoming

leaders, touching upon all aspects of convention centre management – only existed in Brussels. At AIME 2025 in Melbourne, we announced a similar alliance with the Australian Business Event Association (ABEA), which will also include an Australia/New Zealand Academy taking place in June this year. And in parallel, we developed an African Academy, with a first edition taking place at the Cape Town ICC last year.

As a result, in 2025, we will reach over 140 upcoming leaders worldwide via 4 Academies and we will be able to offer them tailor-made programmes, leveraging both the AIPC experience and the local knowledge of our partners.

Significant impact

I do realise that the numbers look small. But the impact is significant.

Short term, we will now engage with four times as much upcoming convention centre leaders, we will have established a network of partnerships with other associations which allows

for “cross-fertilization” and we will be able to systematically enhance what we do by applying lessons learned in those different settings in a structured way.

Long term, we believe this will result in more member engagement at different levels within our member organisations and we also believe that the partnerships with the other associations will allow to elevate all the communities involved.

There are days when I really wish we had the multi-million dollar budget. But at the end, I do believe that by being creative and by collaborating with our peers, we can deliver more value in a far more cost-effective way. And that is what our members – both from AIPC and the associations we partner with – expect and deserve.

Sven Bossu is CEO of AIPC, which represents a global network of over 200 leading centres in 55 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. www.aipc.org

