

Borrowed Breath – The AI Culture

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Views are personal and does not reflect the views of the organization I am employed.

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Many decades ago, I heard a profound statement that left an imprint on my mind:
“We have 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week — is it not possible to dedicate just one hour to give thanks to the Creator?”

That question still echoes within me.

What do we give thanks for? For life itself — the breath we take, the relationships we cherish, the comforts we enjoy, the knowledge we possess, and the health we often take for granted. So much of what we call ours was never truly ours to begin with. It was borrowed — entrusted to us for a time.

A life without breath is akin to dead wood — drifting as jetsam and flotsam in the vast ocean of humanity. Breath powers the mind, triggering pulses in the brain that make us human — distinct from other living organisms. It gives us the ability to think, analyze, visualize, improvise, draw from experience, and take risks with a **leap of faith — daring the soul to go beyond what the eye can see.**

And as I look at the modern world of Artificial Intelligence, I see a quiet parallel. Our creations now mimic creation itself. Machines think, write, and even create art — but all of it is borrowed breath, powered by the knowledge and data we feed into them. Just as life is a gift from the Creator, intelligence — both human and artificial — is a reflection, not an origin. We do not have wisdom; we channel it.

Governance Concerns

The introduction of computers once triggered a hue and cry , especially in developing countries ,that they would lead to widespread job losses.

Yet here we are, four decades later, using those very machines with newly acquired skills and greater efficiency.

Fax machines ruled the roost in the last century until they were replaced by email. Pagers gave way to mobile phones. And the cycle of evolution, learning, and reskilling continues, reminding us that progress rarely eliminates purpose; it simply redefines it.

So, can we look at Artificial Intelligence as just another step in this ongoing evolution ,one that will once again require reskilling, adaptation, and humility?

Or are we witnessing something deeper — a shift in how we define human worth itself?

Today, social media is flooded with proclamations that **“those who don’t embrace AI will be left behind.”** But perhaps the greater governance concern is not whether we use AI, but whether we understand it — **ethically, intellectually, and emotionally.** For history has shown that every leap in technology demands not just new skills, but new wisdom.

From governance to decision-making ,this is where leadership transforms from compliance to conscience

Vacillating between **“May I?”** and **“Should I?”** often leaves one bereft of wisdom; the very wisdom that, when voiced at the right time and with the right conviction, can tilt the scales of decision-making.

This single hesitation between permission and conviction is where leadership often falters, and where governance must mature from compliance to conscience.

Consensus, Unanimity, and Unilateral Decisions

Consensus is achieved when differing opinions converge toward a shared understanding. Unanimity, however, implies complete agreement, every voice aligning without visible dissent. And then there are unilateral decisions, made by one, often imposed on many.

Decisions discussed, debated, and arrived at through **true unanimity** carry greater weight because they reflect both reasoning and conviction. Yet, the **Abilene Paradox** warns us of the danger of false unanimity, when silence and conformity masquerade as agreement. In the same breath, the **Cobra Effect** reminds us that poorly thought-out incentives or short-sighted solutions can worsen the very problem they seek to solve.

Today, in the age of digital transformation, organizations often fall prey to these very traps. Highly opinionated articles, less researched, more rhetorical are circulated to propagate a certain way of thinking. This clouds our objectivity, leading meetings to conclude in unquestioned unanimity not out of conviction, but convenience, much like the **Abilene Paradox**. And thus, we find ourselves embracing technologies like AI, not through collective wisdom, but through collective conformity.

Borrowed Consensus, Manufactured Risk

To borrow from ISO 31000, **risk is the effect of uncertainty on objectives**.

But what happens when those very objectives are born out of the **Abilene Paradox**, when collective agreement masks individual doubt?

In such moments, uncertainty doesn't just affect the objective; it distorts it. And when distorted objectives meet unquestioned enthusiasm, they often trigger the **Cobra Effect**; well-intentioned actions that backfire through misplaced incentives or blind conformity.

When collective optimism silences critical dissent, it marks the beginning of an **"Oh No Moment"**; when unmanaged assumptions turn risk from being managed into a reality.

When Methodologies Meet Mindsets

Lean asks: "How can we remove waste and empower people to do it?" → It listens to the **Voice of the Employee (VoE)**.

Six Sigma asks: "How can we reduce variation and defects that affect customers?" → It listens to the **Voice of the Customer (VoC)**.

Lean Six Sigma unites both: "Let's improve processes by using employee wisdom to meet customer needs precisely."

But if our strategic direction is driven more by conformity than conviction, then risk becomes self-inflicted. That is why **bottom-up innovation** is not optional; it is essential for building a resilient value chain.

The voices of customers and employees represent reality: **unfiltered, diverse, often uncomfortable ,yet grounding**. They keep organizations tethered to truth, not trend.

Borrowed Wisdom vs. Borrowed Thinking

To borrow, therefore, is not wrong; it is how humanity learns and evolves. But borrowing must never replace discerning.

When we outsource our thinking, we risk silencing the very consciousness that makes us human ;the capacity to discern, to question, to reflect, and to humbly accept our fallibility. For in the end, both life and intelligence — **natural or artificial** — are borrowed breath. What we do with that breath defines not the power of our machines, but the depth of our humanity.

Every professional should strive to avoid the **“Oh No Moment”** — that instant when risk is not managed but felt; when the theoretical becomes tangible, and uncertainty transforms into consequence. It is the transition from potential to actual impact — the awakening that reminds us why governance, foresight, and humility must walk hand in hand.