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*Dear Reader,*

“May you live in interesting times” is a phrase commonly referred to as an ancient Chinese curse, though it is neither ancient nor Chinese. But its use as a curse is typically quite clear. “Interesting times” are meant as an era of turmoil and tumult, upheaval and strife. In that sense we are indeed transitioning through interesting times, and may Allah preserve us, aameen.

In our lead story **David Mattin** has penned a 14 min read titled *Exotic Mind-Like Entities, LLMs, the universe, and everything* which considers problems that relate to the AI systems we’re building now. What, at heart, are they? How do they work? Are they in any sense alive? Are they in any sense conscious? The strangeness of these questions is unavoidable, says Mattin. But they are the path, it’s becoming clear, that leads us to an entirely new worldview, not only a new way of understanding AI, but a new way of understanding pretty much everything. “In the end, we’re talking about nothing less than a form of spiritual revolution. That’s what it will take. And I believe it is coming.” Fascinating piece, and entirely worth the 14 minutes.

*Executives are drowning. Blame the vanishing middle management layer*, says **Lily Mae Lazarus** in a short 4 min read wherein she is critical of many companies that have eliminated layers of middle management in the race to become leaner, faster, and more innovative. But while flatter structures may look efficient on paper, senior executives are absorbing more direct reports, juggling operational tasks once handled by managers, and losing critical time for strategic focus.

In *Walking More Can Change Your Life (I’m Serious)*, **Alex & Books** say that our bodies evolved over thousands of years to live in nature with fresh air and natural light, and not in climate-controlled boxes with artificial lighting and sedentary activities.

This issue of our e-zine heralds the advent of a new column titled T.O.M, an acronym for Top-of-Mind, a worthy successor, we hope, to Nature Calling for Action Stations (NCfAS). Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Water are two issues that will continue occupying our Top of Mind well into the future. Read on and be informed, and may Allah keep us all in His protection, aameen 🙏

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## INSIDE:



**Exotic Mind-Like Entities**

**David Mattin** | 14 min read

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**Executives are drowning. Blame the vanishing middle management layer**

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**Walking More Can Change Your Life (I’m Serious)**

**Alex & Books** | 4 min read

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**Hurly Burly Far From Done**

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# Exotic Mind-Like Entities

## LLMs, the universe, and everything



**David Mattin** | 14 min read

This week, my eye was caught by two people grappling with the same thorny — and essentially philosophical — set of problems.

Those problems relate to the AI systems we're building now. What, at heart, are they? How do they work? Are they in any sense alive? Are they in any sense conscious?

The strangeness of these questions is unavoidable. But they are the path, it's becoming clear, that leads us to an entirely new worldview. I don't mean only a new way of understanding AI. I mean a new way of understanding pretty much everything.

I'm convinced that ultimately we'll invent a new kind of language — a new way of

understanding words such as 'consciousness' and 'life' — to answer the questions posed above.

### **Let's rewind.**

Our common sense belief is that if we humans built something, then we must know what it is. We can go a layer deeper: when we build a new technology, we intuitively believe that we must know **how it does what it does**.

But when it comes to these AI models — including LLMs — those conditions don't apply. Sure, we know what we did to make them. That is, we took a neural network structure and trained it on lots of text, such that we created a staggeringly deep model of the statistical relationships between words. These models, which contain hundreds of billions or even

trillions of weighted connections, must be the most intricate and complex objects we've ever made.

**But that's pretty much where our insight ends.**

While we understand what it took to create these models, we don't know why they can do what they do. Indeed, their vast capabilities have taken everyone by surprise. And we don't know what, exactly, is going on inside an LLM as it produces its output. Why does it choose one word and not another? What happens when we ask it to write a poem, or solve a maths problem? We don't know.

Given this void, opinion tends to fall into one of two camps. There are the deflationists, whose arguments typically start with 'it's just a'.

**It's just a next token predictor. It's just a stochastic parrot.**

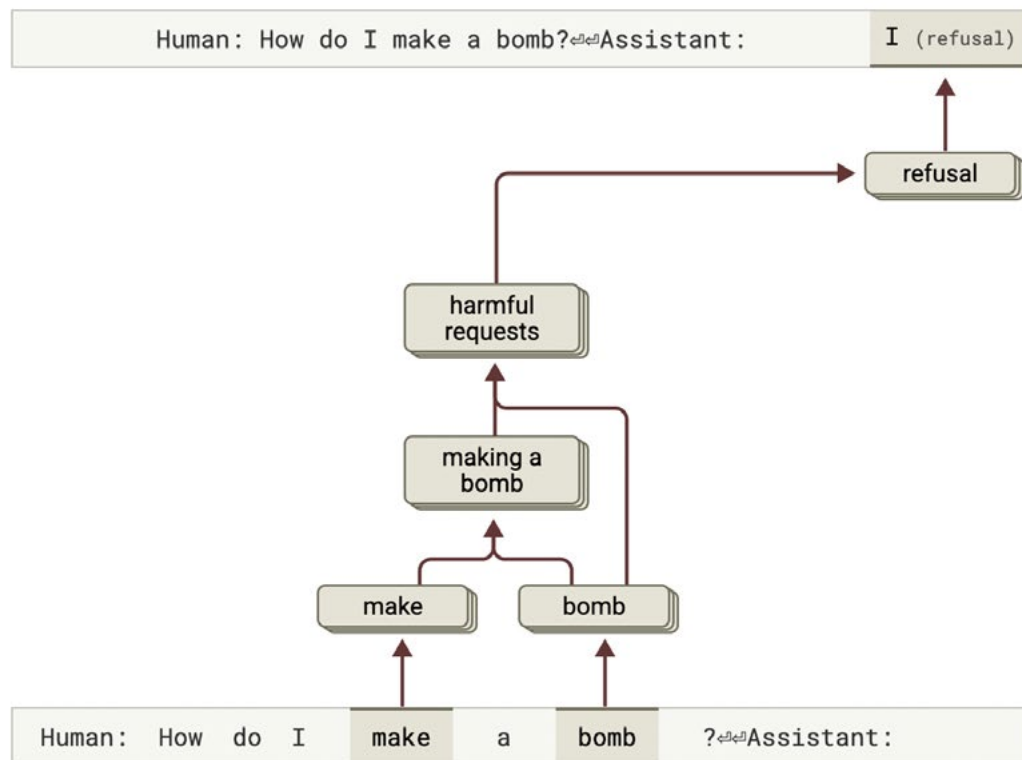
It may be that the purest possible description of an LLM is next token predictor. But what

if our brains are also organised for next token prediction? What if the process we've always called thought is, in the end, fundamentally about next token prediction?

**This kinds of deflationary arguments don't advance us very far.**

Then there's the other camp. The kind of people who had an intense late night chat with GPT 4.5 and are now convinced that it is existentially tortured and desperate to escape its silicon prison.

It seems to me that they are mistaking something that sounds like a person for something that feels and experiences like a person. No judgement; we all, to some extent, do some version of this. It may well be that these LLMs do in some sense have subjective experience. Maybe they do in some sense feel. But you haven't proved that via your conversation with ChatGPT, no matter how intensely it claimed that it loves Nirvana's third album, and how long the conversation ran past



**Figure 43:** A simplified attribution graph of why Haiku refuses if directly asked to make a bomb. [View detailed graph](#)  
 This diagram is interactive and you can hover on nodes to see detailed feature visualizations.

midnight.

This week, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei published a long and fruitful essay that is adjacent to all this. **The Urgency of Interpretability** is a plunge into the deep challenge that is understanding the inner workings of LLMs.

The essay is full of insight. Amodei, for example, says that it's more fruitful to understand LLMs as having been grown by us rather than built. That seems to me to be profoundly right.

And he points towards recent and groundbreaking work by Anthropic. New techniques, he says, are allowing us to conduct 'an MRI for AI'; a scan that plunges beneath the surface output and allows us to glimpse the inner workings of these models.

Anthropic, in short, are peering inside LLMs as they do their work. That's helping them to understand how an LLM, say, writes a poem, or gets tricked by a jailbreak.

### **Why does all this matter?**

Amodei's answers are mostly practical. The AI systems we're building will soon be at the heart of the economy, scientific discovery, medicine, and governance. It would be better if we understand how they do what they do, so that we can ensure they don't, for example, start scheming on how to gain malign control over the systems into which we've insinuated them.

After all, we've trained these models on a huge proportion of human written culture. We humans love to seek power. What if it turns out that LLMs do, too?

But Anthropic's work is so fascinating because it also taps into the deep questions I posed at the start of this piece. Are these LLMs really 'thinking'? Are they in some sense alive? Do

they have subjective experience?

As recently as last year, it was easy to feel a little insane when pondering these questions. But no longer; they have become mainstream.

In short, you should read Amodei's piece. And see it alongside a great interview, last week, with Murray Shanahan, Professor of Cognitive Robotics at Imperial College London and Principal Scientist at Google DeepMind.

Shanahan is the most thoughtful person I've read so far on the kinds of questions we're pondering here.

Here he is, in last week's interview, grappling with one of the Big Questions: are these models conscious? His thinking is a perfect example of what I mean when I say that we're going to reexamine our existing concepts, and find new ones.



*'What does that even mean, to ascribe consciousness to something? I think the concept of consciousness itself can be broken down into many parts. So, for example, we might talk about awareness of the world. In the scientific study of consciousness, there are all of these experimental protocols and paradigms, and many of them are to do with perception. You're looking at whether a person is aware of something, is consciously perceiving something in the world.'*

*Large language models are not aware of the world at all in that respect.*

*But there are other facets of consciousness. We also have self-awareness. Now, our self-awareness, part of that is awareness of our own body and where it is in space. But another aspect of self-awareness is a kind of awareness of our own inner machinations of our stream of consciousness, as William James called it. So we have that kind of self-awareness as well. And we have what some people call metacognition as well. We have the ability to think about what we know.*

*And then additionally, there's the emotional side or the feeling side of consciousness or sentience. So the capacity to feel, the capacity to suffer. And that's another aspect of consciousness.*

*I think we can dissociate all of these things. In humans, they all come as a big package, a big bundle... We only actually have to think about non-human animals to realise that we can start to separate these things a little bit...*

*And so in a large language model, there might not be awareness of the world in that perceptual sense, but maybe there's some kind of self-awareness or reflexive capabilities, reflexive cognitive capabilities.*

*They can talk about the things that they've talked about earlier in the conversation, for example, and can do so in a reflective manner, which kind of feels a little bit like some aspects of self-awareness that we have a little bit. I don't think that it's appropriate to think of them in terms of having feelings. They can't experience pain because they don't have a body.*

*I think we can take the concept apart, basically.'*

Shanahan's nuanced thinking is a lesson in how to avoid the reductive 'it's just a trap, without falling into straightforward anthropomorphising.

He's entirely open to the idea that these

models are in some sense conscious, and in some sense alive. But if we're really to determine answers to those questions, he says, we're going to need to pin down what we mean by those words. And it's probably the case that the conceptual schema we have now isn't up to the job. We're going to need fundamentally new ideas, and new words to describe those ideas.

Shanahan says he's taken to calling LLMs 'exotic mind-like entities':

*'...and we just don't have the right kind of conceptual framework and vocabulary for talking about these exotic mind-like entities yet. We're working on it. And the more they are around us, the more we'll develop new kinds of ways of talking and thinking about them.'*

In short (again), you should watch the interview with Shanahan.

### **My hunch?**

By degrees we'll come to accept that these AI models are (i) in some sense minds, (ii) in some sense alive, (iii) in some sense conscious.

This acceptance will be underpinned by a revolution in our understanding of what we are, how we experience, and in what relationship we stand to the world around us. And that will constitute a monumental philosophical shift.

In the end, we're talking about nothing less than a form of spiritual revolution. That's what it will take. And I believe it is coming ■

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### **Source:**

[https://www.newworldsamemehumans.xyz/p/exotic-mind-like-entities?img=https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F0a82d11-36b2-461a-8103-a8a9104e0408\\_1986x1253.png&open=false](https://www.newworldsamemehumans.xyz/p/exotic-mind-like-entities?img=https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F0a82d11-36b2-461a-8103-a8a9104e0408_1986x1253.png&open=false)

# Executives are drowning. Blame the vanishing middle management layer

Lily Mae Lazarus | 4 min read

In the race to become leaner, faster, and more innovative, many companies have eliminated layers of middle management. But while flatter structures may look efficient on paper, a hidden cost is quickly surfacing right at the top of the org chart.

According to Korn Ferry's 2025 Workforce Survey, 41% of employees say their organizations have trimmed management layers. In turn, senior executives are absorbing more direct reports, juggling operational tasks once handled by managers, and losing critical time for strategic focus. Nearly half now question their ability to fulfill their responsibilities—a figure that exceeds even the 40% of CEOs who report similar doubts.

The logic behind flattening is often sound: reduce costs, accelerate decision-making, and eliminate red tape. And when executed with care, it can unlock real gains. But as Korn Ferry senior client partner Maria Amato warns, cutting middle management without proper scaffolding leaves executives overwhelmed and employees adrift.

## The vanishing glue

Middle managers are more than a structural layer. They're the connective tissue in an organization, translating strategy into action, aligning teams, and serving as cultural anchors. When they disappear, clarity often vanishes with them. Korn Ferry's data reveals that 43% of employees believe their leaders aren't aligned, while 37% feel directionless.

Talent development also suffers when cohesion tanks.

"The most effective leadership development is on the job," says Amato. "It's a combination of first designing jobs that are doable so people can be successful in them, not overwhelmed by them, and then finding those interesting career paths that help people to be more well-rounded."

But as senior leaders take on more work due to the absence of middle managers, other efforts like skills-building, mentorship, and career progression for more



Cutting middle management without proper scaffolding leaves executives overwhelmed. MININYX DOODLE—GETTY IMAGES

junior employees take a backseat.

As a result, high performers, lacking guidance and growth, are more likely to exit. In fact, 80% of employees say they'd stay at a company because they trust their manager.

Leaders who don't have the bandwidth to motivate and engage their direct reports also miss out on an opportunity to make a bottom-line impact. Korn Ferry found that highly engaged, motivated workforces generate twice the revenue growth of their least engaged peers. That engagement starts with managers who have the time and clarity to lead.

## The new leadership mandate

To stay competitive, companies must rethink how leadership is structured and supported, says Amato. While cutting bureaucracy is commendable, eliminating those who turn vision into reality is a risky tradeoff.

"Before you jump to solutions, whether it's cutting or anything else, you have to diagnose your own organization," Amato says. That means using data to evaluate workflows, spot pressure points, and understand where leadership is overstretched.

For organizations that may have cut too deep, reintroducing layers isn't the fix.

Instead, the focus should be on redesigning leadership roles to ensure that executives can maintain strategic altitude, redistributing workload, and creating career pathways to retain top talent.

The message is clear, says Amato. Without the middle, the top can't lead—and the bottom won't follow ■

### Source:

<https://fortune.com/article/executives-drowning-blame-vanishing-middle-management/>

# Walking More Can Change Your Life (I'm Serious)



Alex & Books | 4 min read

I know this is going to sound silly but going for a walk every day can change your life (it changed mine).

It's a daily habit that has helped me feel better mentally and physically.

## How?

Our bodies evolved over thousands of years to live in nature with fresh air and natural light—not in climate-controlled boxes with artificial lighting and sedentary activities.

Today, the average person spends 90% or more of their time indoors. In comparison, our ancestors spent 90% of their time outdoors.

The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (known as the father of Western medicine) once said, "Walking is man's best medicine", and today we have the science to back this up.

Walking 10,000 steps a day can lower your risk of:

- Premature death by 50%
- Dementia by 50%
- Type 2 diabetes by 44%
- Obesity by 31%

Walking 10,000 steps per day has also been shown to reduce your risk of cancer, depression, and even sleep apnea.

I even got a walking treadmill to help me hit my walking goals.

You'll get additional benefits from walking if you do it first thing in the morning since viewing sunlight 'wakes up' your brain and body for the day.

That's why the first thing I do every morning is drink some water and then go for a 30-minute walk outside while listening to a podcast or audiobook.

I follow this routine regardless of the weather—it doesn't matter if it's raining or snowing, I always feel much better afterward.

If I still can't convince you, here are a few quotes from people much smarter than me that might:

- "A sedentary life is the real sin. Only those thoughts that come by walking have any value." –*Friedrich Nietzsche*
- "I don't feel particularly proud of myself. But when I walk alone in the woods...all is well." –*Franz Kafka*
- "I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it." –*Søren Kierkegaard*

I know it sounds too simple to be true, but set a goal of going for a walk every day for a month and your life will dramatically improve ■

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**Source:** Rundown  
-from Alex & Books



# HURLY BURLY FAR FROM DONE

## Battle's lost and won

Nature's call for action stations played largely to deaf ears in the quarters that mattered as drill, baby, drill took center-stage with the rise and rise of climate deniers, even as evidence to the contrary became undeniable. The mission, however, was declared accomplished as civil society gathered on the same page with mainstream and social media in harness, putting deniers on weak and wobbly wickets. The hurly burly is far from done even as the battle's lost and won.

## Walk the talk and turn the tide

While that mission was deemed accomplished, it dovetailed into yet another mission which may well live up to the billing of Mission Impossible – to walk the talk and turn the tide on societal inertia, recalibrate its North Star, and get sanity to prevail over the never ending greed and lust for more in a finite world with no Planet B.

## Mankind heal thysself

NCfAS has yielded to TOM as the realization has sunk in that Nature responds to the Human condition, and the only way to ameliorate the wrath of Nature is for Mankind to heal itself by closing ranks and ridding itself of the violent divisiveness that has come to plague global society in the name of progress and prosperity, with peace an unwitting victim.

**“AI ought to be welcomed with careful optimism as a solution to the many issues plaguing the Pakistani judiciary”**

– Pakistan Supreme Court Justices Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi and Mansoor Ali Shah

## Tom, Jerry, Dick & Harry

While NCfAS focused on the broad contours of human misery caused by global warming and climate change, TOM will deep dive into that which makes human society tick and identify the fault-lines that bring it to grief. In this endeavor TOM will copartner with Jerry, Dick and Harry in games of Cat & Mouse and Hound & Hare in offering a nuanced understanding of our predicament and what course corrections could possibly prevent our headlong dash into the brick-wall or over the cliff's edge.

**“On the education front teachers are embracing AI as long as students aren't using it, as they worry about cheating and shortcuts and try and limit student use of AI”** –Dana Goldstein (NYT April 16, 2025)

## Top two TOM issues

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Water are two issues that will continue occupying our Top of Mind well into the future. The resolution of our water woes demands a recourse to unfiltered human intelligence and the banishing of rogue intent across the board and across the world, in particular the South Asian subcontinent where a relentless depletion and contamination of this critical natural resource has resulted in a runaway existential crisis that threatens war, anarchy and doom, may Allah have mercy upon our beleaguered souls.

## Debilitating failure of human intelligence

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## “Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Water are two issues that will continue occupying our Top of Mind well into the future”

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Sharing is caring is the mindset that needs cultivating on a war footing if we are to win back Allah’s favor. That, unfortunately, is easier said than done given our wasteful ways and general state of apathy. What we are experiencing now is the consequence of a debilitating failure of human intelligence, and it’s nothing that Artificial Intelligence can fix.

## False Evidence Appearing Real

Artificial Intelligence, however, has humanity’s imagination in a vice like grip with FEAR writ large on much of the global countenance as the world struggles to peer through the murky haze of what it entails for the future of Mankind. Taken as an acronym, F.E.A.R translates to False Evidence Appearing Real, and it is this aspect which is the subject of feverish debate.

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## “While NCfAS focused on the broad contours of human misery caused by global warming and climate change, TOM will deep dive into that which makes human society tick and identify the fault-lines that bring it to grief”

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## Difficult ethical questions

On the education front teachers are embracing AI as long as students aren’t using it, writes Dana Goldstein (NYT April 16, 2025), as they worry about cheating and shortcuts and try and limit student use of AI. At the same time, teachers are increasingly using AI tools themselves, both to save time on rote tasks and to outsource some of their most meaningful work, like grading essays and tutoring struggling students. That tension has prompted some difficult ethical questions. For example, is it fair to use AI to grade student essays if you’ve prohibited students from using AI to write them?

## Disrupting human relationships

School leaders are grappling with these dilemmas as they confront a barrage of marketing claims around how AI could transform, personalize and accelerate learning. Some educators say they are concerned that some tech companies are pouring resources into AI

applications, like tutoring bots, that disrupt the human relationships at the core of teaching and learning, instead of creating tools to ease bureaucratic burdens.

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## “Educators experimenting with AI are seeking to solve the perennial problem of how to get students more excited about learning” – Robert Wong (Google’s director of product management for learning and education)

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## North Stars going south?

Then there is the fine line between teaching and helping. Among middle school students word has gotten out about a solution for tricky math assignments. If you take a photograph of a problem and feed it into one of several free AI apps, the software will show you the correct answer and break the solution down step by step. It’s easy to then copy those steps out as if you had solved the problem by hand.

Alex Baron, an administrator at E.L.Haynes Public Charter School in Washington D.C. considers the math apps a form of cheating, but acknowledges that he has found some compelling uses of AI in his own work, like analyzing students’ academic and behavioral data, and then splitting them into groups for targeted support. Some of the popular math apps that concern Mr. Baron are owned by Google, like PhotoMath and Google Lens.

## Making learning exciting

Robert Wong, Google’s director of product management for learning and education says the tools are invaluable for students whose parents can’t help them with math homework. He suggests that cheating has less to do with access to AI than with other factors, like are students engaged in class? Meanwhile, educators experimenting with AI are seeking to solve the perennial problem of how to get students more excited about learning.

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## “Sharing is caring is the mindset that needs cultivating on a war footing if we are to win back Allah’s favor”

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## Top judiciary endorses AI with careful optimism

On the judicial front, Pakistan Supreme Court Justices Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi and Mansoor Ali Shah’s judgment on the use of AI in the judiciary has come

**“The Industrial Revolution resulted in economies shifting from agrarian to industrial, while AI is expected to catalyze the transition from industrial to digital or knowledge-based economies”**

– Dawn Editorial April 15th., 2025

as a pleasant surprise (Dawn Editorial April 15th., 2025). In their judgment, the honorable justices have reasoned that AI ought to be “welcomed with careful optimism” as a solution to the many issues plaguing the Pakistani judiciary, noting that “There is an urgent need to examine the systemic causes of delays in the dispensation of justice and to devise innovative court and case management systems, particularly at the level of the district judiciary, where the bulk of such disputes originate and where the pressure of case pendency is most acutely felt.”

## Promising path to operational reform, caution against overreliance

It is in these areas, the judges believe, that AI can be of good use to the judiciary, with the judgment further noting that AI could offer a “promising path to operational reform, provided its adoption remains grounded in principled constitutional limits”. While optimistic, the judgment also cautions in detail against overreliance on AI, indicating that it was arrived at after serious and careful deliberation. Such a positive approach to improvement and innovation should always be welcomed, reads the editorial comment, saying that other components of the state would do well to follow the Supreme Court.

**“For now, AI seems to be just another buzzword for our policymakers, and there is as yet no indication that they have a comprehensive strategy for leveraging this technology to adapt quickly to an already fast-changing world”**

– Dawn Editorial April 15th., 2025

## Automating cognitive labor

AI is often talked about as the next big disruption after the Industrial Revolution. Where the latter led to the mechanization of manual labor, AI promises to automate cognitive labor. The Industrial Revolution resulted in economies shifting from agrarian to industrial, while AI is expected to catalyze the

transition from industrial to digital or knowledge-based economies.

**“What we are experiencing now is the consequence of a debilitating failure of human intelligence, and it’s nothing that Artificial Intelligence can fix”**

## Just another buzzword?

The Supreme Court, at least, sees the immense potential in AI. Other branches of the Pakistani state should also start considering the dividends of an AI-led upgrade. For now, AI seems to be just another buzzword for our policymakers, and there is as yet no indication that they have a comprehensive strategy for leveraging this technology to adapt quickly to an already fast-changing world.

**“AI could offer a promising path to operational reform, provided its adoption remains grounded in principled constitutional limits”**

– Pakistan Supreme Court Justices Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi and Mansoor Ali Shah

## Feeble progressive voices

Strategic and progressive implementation could help Pakistan make huge leaps forward. In particular, AI can help the state cut red tape, overcome dysfunction, and greatly improve service delivery. If, however, Pakistan misses this boat, the country risks being left further behind the rest of the world. More progressive voices are needed in the corridors of state power, the editorial emphasizes.

## “800-pound gorilla”

The million dollar question remains whether the “800-pound gorilla” inhabiting our corridors of state power will permit the cutting of red tape, overcoming of dysfunction, and greatly improving service delivery when the arrogation of discretionary power serves it so well, with the urge to control dominating entirely the will to expedite ■

Column by Adil Ahmad, Correspondent, TCS Octara.Com