INFLUENCER
AN OUTLOOK ON LEADERSHIP & CHANGE

HUMANdynamic

AI AND ETHICS:

THE LEADERSHIP BALANCING ACT

January is when many leaders reset dashboards and targets.

In 2026, I would ask a different question to start: "What role is AI playing on my team right now, and what role is left for my humans?" One of the more interesting articles in my reading set, a 2025 article in the Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology, talks about another conflict: fairness vs. Freedom. The authors propose a dual-layered approach to thinking:

- **System level:** How the AI was made. Is it trained on data that is fair? Is it checked for bias on a regular basis?
- **Human level:** How do people feel about it? Are there easy controls and clear choices so they still feel in charge?

That idea of two layers is also very helpful for leaders.

At the system level, we need clear rules about what AI can and cannot do, where human approval is required, and what "good" means in terms of fairness and privacy. We need the freedom to say, "This does not feel right," and go against the machine. The more I read and think about it, the more I see that the tired "innovation versus ethics" debate misses the point. Ethics is not a stop sign; it is the software that lets AI grow without losing trust, burning people out, or leaving whole groups out.

My second commitment for 2026 is personal. In an AI world, being a leader is not just about using tools; it is also about building a character that knows how to use them well. Philosophical traditions and contemporary leadership research serve as a reminder that humility, equity, and accountability must guide my actions. Without them, AI will quietly push us into boring work where we do not have to make decisions that matter.

So, I have one clear design rule: AI does the hard work. People do the heavy work.

- **AI is responsible for:** options, speed, scale
- **Humans are responsible for:** judgment, escalation, exceptions

Make that explicit in role charters and team agreements.

Then, make the collaboration visible. Whenever an AI-assisted decision is presented, ask three questions out loud:

1. **What did the system optimize for?**
2. **Whose perspective or data might be missing?**
3. **What do we choose, knowing our values?**

Those questions keep humans firmly in the loop.

I'm also connecting ethics to energy management: A useful January activity - have your team finish the sentence,

"AI helps me most when..." or "AI worries me most when..."

Let those insights guide meaningful improvements, refine the way we work, how people are trained, and the rules.

Ultimately, it is not about who is more "tech-savvy" when it comes to bridging the gap between AI and the next generation. It depends on who is willing to listen, share power, and come up with a way to work where curiosity, caution, and care can all be present.

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