Navigating the AI Revolution: The Case for Leadership Preparedness

I'm Jennifer Cohen, Co-Founder of Seven Stones Leadership, and this blog is based on a keynote I delivered at Mobius Executive Leadership's annual Next Practice Institute (NPI) program in 2024. In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant future—it's an immediate reality. My colleague, Dr. Karim Lakhani, Professor at Harvard Business School and founder of the D^3 Institute, has dedicated his career to researching innovation, digital transformation, and AI. Our recent conversations made it clear to me that leaders must urgently reframe their understanding of AI's trajectory. This blog explores the key themes we discussed, shedding light on the existential questions AI presents and the necessity for proactive leadership.

PART I. A Call to Awareness: The Existential AI Crisis

Dr. Karim Lakhani has always been one of the most balanced, level-headed people I know. But recently, when he called me, his voice carried an urgency I had never heard before. He said, *"If you're not having an existential crisis as you look at these large language models, you're not paying attention."* That got my attention.

AI is iterating at an unprecedented pace, far beyond what we expected. Despite the growing awareness of AI's potential, many leaders remain woefully unprepared. During a CEO roundtable at Harvard Business School, Karim asked a group of executives: *What are you most concerned about with AI?* Their responses centered on market share, hidden AI usage within their organizations, and potential workforce reductions. These are important concerns and… they do not get at the deeper questions AI demands we ask.

AI's Accelerated Evolution: A New Species Among Us?

Karim isn't the only expert speaking this way. My colleague Valerie Pisano, CEO of Mila in Montreal, an organization dedicated to ethical AI development, echoed these concerns. Valerie works closely with Yoshua Bengio, a pioneer in AI research, and together, they've been exploring what it means to coexist with machines that possess superhuman reasoning, problem-solving abilities, and persuasive communication skills.

AI is not just a tool—it's becoming an entity that influences human decisions and actions. As AI systems gain agency, we risk losing control over key decisions in democracy, national security, and the economy. The question we must confront is not *whether* AI will change our world—it already is—but *how* we will shape that change.

The Timeline: A 3- to 5-Year Window for Change

If you think this is something far off in the future, think again. Industry leaders predict that within the next three to five years, AI systems will reach or surpass human-level intelligence in multiple domains. The societal shifts we anticipated are already happening—manipulation through social media, disruptions in the financial sector, and shifts in judicial decision-making. We have a short window of time to adapt. We are being called to move now instead of waiting.

Beyond Market Share: The Questions Leaders Must Ask

Many leaders today are still focusing on traditional business concerns—profitability, competition, and workforce efficiency. But we need to be asking much bigger questions:

- Economic Order: What, if anything, in the current economic model will we need to change in AI? (Right now, 8 men have the same amount of wealth as 4,000,000,000)
- Social Order: Given the rise globally of authoritarianism, how can democracy be maintained in the age of AI, deep fakes and misinformation? Why does it matter as you think about leading into the future?
- Organization of Labor: AI is slated to radically transform the labor market and the future of work. As this process unfolds, what does that mean for the structure of your organization and of people's jobs overall?
- Labor Itself: What is the future of work and its purpose? Is it to produce? To be fulfilled? Something else?
- What is uniquely human? Why does it matter that you have something to say about that as a leader?
- Technology is changing us. These technologies are changing our thinking processes, and our relationships to ourselves and others. How is that relevant to your leadership? How will you shape how technology is used?
- Purpose of Life: Why are we here? What does that have to do with how you lead now?

These are not abstract or philosophical questions—they are urgent, strategic imperatives that will determine the course of our future.

If AI is reshaping our world, then we must rethink the very foundations of how we lead. In Part II, we'll explore how to move beyond the status quo and reimagine a future guided by ethical leadership and Sustainable Abundance.

If these questions intrigue you, I invite you to watch my full discussion *(starts around the 9:15 mark)* with Dr. Karim Lakhani and Valerie Pisano.

PART II. Reimagining Context: Moving Beyond the Status Quo

In **Part I**, we explored the urgent questions AI presents—about leadership, economic and social structures, and even the nature of humanity itself. The accelerating pace of AI development makes it clear that we are standing at a critical inflection point. We can continue operating within the same systems that have shaped our world thus far, or we can step back, challenge our assumptions, and imagine a different future.

At **Mobius Executive Leadership's Next Practice Institute (NPI)**, we designed an experiential exercise to illustrate this choice. We divided the room into three sections: democracy, capitalism, and infinite possibility. The goal was to illuminate the often-unquestioned frameworks that shape our thinking. Many of us assume that the systems we operate in—capitalism, democracy, traditional economic models—are fixed. But history tells us otherwise.

Paradigms shift. The Industrial Revolution reshaped economies. The internet revolutionized information access. Now, AI is ushering in a transformation of equal or greater magnitude. The question is: **Will we allow AI to reinforce existing inequalities and power structures, or will we harness this moment to design something new?**

To move forward responsibly, leaders must be willing to **break free from the status quo and explore a new paradigm—one grounded in ethical sustainability, shared prosperity, and human well-being.** This is where we turn our attention next.

The Sustainable Abundance Paradigm

At Seven Stones Leadership, my business partner Gina LaRoche and I have spent years exploring what it would take to operate from a different paradigm—one we call **Sustainable Abundance.** This framework acknowledges both ethical sustainability and the inherent abundance of resources available to humanity.

- **Sustainability** requires ethical considerations, reciprocal relationships, and justice.
- **Abundance** challenges the scarcity mindset that drives competition and hoarding of resources.

By embracing this paradigm, we can shift AI's trajectory away from pure profit-driven models and toward a future that promotes equity, well-being, and ethical governance.

A Leadership Imperative: Preparing for AI's Unfolding Future

As I reflect on these conversations, I am reminded of Einstein's famous words: *"No problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it."* AI demands that we step outside of our habitual ways of thinking and embrace a wider perspective.

To lead effectively in the age of AI, we must:

- **Develop AI literacy** to understand its true capabilities and risks.
- **Expand ethical considerations** to ensure AI aligns with human values.
- **Advocate for proactive regulation** to prevent AI from being monopolized by a few corporations.
- **Engage in scenario planning** to prepare for multiple possible futures.

Conclusion: Embracing the Responsibility of Leadership

AI is not just another technological advancement; it is a force reshaping the very fabric of society. The choices we make now—about governance, economic structures, labor, and ethics—will determine whether AI serves the collective good or deepens existing inequalities.

The good news? We are *not* powerless in this transformation. Leadership today requires **more than adaptation—it demands imagination, courage, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.** The question is not whether AI will change the world; it already is. The real question is: **Will we be passive participants, or will we actively shape a future that upholds human dignity, ethical responsibility, and sustainable abundance?**

This is our call to action. We must move beyond outdated paradigms, embrace new ways of thinking, and lead with both wisdom and foresight. The future is not predetermined. It is ours to design.

If these ideas resonate with you, I invite you to explore them further in my full discussion *(starts around the 9:15 mark)* with Dr. Karim Lakhani and Valerie Pisano, where we dive deeper into the leadership shifts needed in the age of AI. The time to engage is now—let's shape the future with intention and responsibility.

FYI: ChatGPT was used in translating the talk into this written piece.