Chapter 11. Apex government visibility – the abacus

Introduction

Chapter 7 introduced paradoxes as tensions between competing goods that cannot be solved once and for all, but must be continually settled. This chapter develops the abacus as a practical way of making those settlements visible. It begins with the recurring paradoxes and a common five-position scale, then introduces back-sighting so that every proposed placement can be tested against evidence rather than resting on assertion or political opinion.

The chapter then demonstrates the method through Russia and Denmark, first separately and then comparatively, before adding time to show trajectory. It concludes by extending the abacus from a diagnostic exhibit into a citizen-facing visibility tool: a visible, contestable account of institutional values that can eventually be connected to policy, outcomes and the wider aim of More Mores for More. The central conclusion is that the abacus becomes more useful as visibility increases, but its layers must remain distinct: it exposes underlying value settlements; the Periodic Table examines policy; and outcomes come later.

How this chapter unfolds

1. Reintroducing the abacus — Re-establishes ten recurring institutional paradoxes, the five-position scale and the reason government provides the first apex-level application.

2. Backsighting: testing the position against the evidence — Explains how a provisional ball placement is tested against supporting and contradictory evidence, and why evidence must be weighed rather than simply counted.

3. Producing the product: Russia and Denmark — Applies the same abacus separately to two contrasting countries so that different institutional settlement patterns become visible.

4. Putting the two countries on a single abacus — Combines the two country profiles on one instrument so that the contrast in institutional architecture can be read immediately as a pattern.

5. Corporations, government and the AI labs — Shows how the same abacus can be applied below government while recognising that corporations, including AI labs, operate within higher-level public design constraints.

6. Adding time: Russia's 20-year trajectory — Adds historical comparison so that the Abacus shows not only position but also the direction and speed of institutional change.

7. From the abacus to citizen visibility — Develops the abacus into a citizen-facing visibility tool and shows how visibility, trajectory, policy and eventual outcomes can form a wider feedback and control system.

8. What this means for humans — Shows how visible, evidence-backed institutional settlements can strengthen citizen judgement, challenge, accountability and correction.

9. What this means for AI — Shows how AI can make the Abacus practical at scale while remaining inside human aims, truth-seeking, contestability and legitimate authority.

1. Reintroducing the abacus

In a previous chapter we introduced the idea of paradoxes. Human societies do not operate simply by choosing between right and wrong. Many of the most important choices involve tensions between competing ways of organising ourselves.

Freedom has to coexist with control. Individual interests have to coexist with collective interests. Competition has to coexist with cooperation. Immediate needs have to be balanced against the interests of future generations.

These tensions cannot simply be "solved". They have to be continually settled.

This is particularly important in government. Government is the apex institution within a society. Its settlements of these fundamental tensions create design constraints within which many of the institutions below it—companies, schools, universities, communities and other organisations—must operate.

The abacus is a simple way of making these settlements visible.

Ten paradoxes

For the purposes of the abacus, we use ten recurring institutional paradoxes.

Importantly, they are arranged consistently.

The left-hand and right-hand sides are both legitimate goods. The abacus shows the direction of the current settlement between them; it does not arrange one side as bad and the other as good.

Context matters. Either good can need greater weight at a particular time, and excessive movement toward either end can create its own failure modes.

Arranging the paradoxes consistently gives the abacus vertical coherence as well as horizontal meaning, without turning the scale into a good-to-bad score.

Horizontally, we can see the settlement of each individual paradox.

Vertically, we can begin to see the overall character of an institution or society.

The five positions

-2 — Full left

The left-hand good substantially dominates the settlement.

-1 — Partial Left

The left-hand good predominates, while the right-hand good remains present.

0 — Held or balanced settlement

Both goods are substantially present. The tension is being held rather than dominated by either side.

+1 — Partial Right

The right-hand good predominates, while the left-hand good remains present.

+2 — Full right

The right-hand good substantially dominates the settlement.

The five positions therefore give us a common language with which to describe quite different societies and institutions.

The government abacus. Exhibit 11.1

Paradox	-2 Full Left	-1 Partial left	0 Held	+1 Partial right	+2 Full Right
1. Self-interest ↔ Common Good	Strong individual self-interest	Self-interest generally prevails	Self-interest and common good balanced	Common good generally predominates	Strong orientation toward the common good
2. Authority/Order ↔ Freedom	Authority and order strongly emphasised	Order generally prevails	Order and freedom balanced	Broad freedom within accepted rules	Maximum practical freedom with legitimate order maintained
3. Competition ↔ Cooperation	Competition strongly emphasised	Competition generally prevails	Competition and cooperation coexist	Cooperation predominates while competition remains useful	High cooperation, reciprocity and mutual benefit
4. Security ↔ Transparency	Security and state control strongly emphasised; transparency tightly limited	Security generally prevails; transparency remains	Security and transparency balanced	Transparency generally prevails; legitimate secrecy remains	High transparency; secrecy tightly limited
5. Present Needs ↔ Future Stewardship	Present needs dominate	Present needs generally predominate	Present and future balanced	Future consequences strongly considered	Strong stewardship across generations
6. Efficiency ↔ Resilience	Efficiency strongly prioritised	Efficiency generally dominates resilience	Efficiency and resilience balanced	Resilience deliberately built into the system	Strong capacity to absorb shocks, learn and adapt
7. Concentrated Power ↔ Distributed Power	Power highly concentrated for unified action	Power concentrated with meaningful checks	Concentrated and distributed power balanced	Power distributed with strong coordination	Widely distributed authority with effective coordination
8. Expertise ↔ Participation	Expert judgement strongly predominates	Experts generally lead deliberation	Expertise and participation balanced	Broad participation informed by expertise	Wide participation and expertise reinforce each other
9. Continuity ↔ Adaptability	Continuity strongly protected	Continuity generally prevails over change	Continuity and adaptability balanced	Institutions adapt readily while preserving continuity	Strong capacity for continuous learning and institutional improvement
10. Physical Abundance ↔ Relational Abundance	Physical abundance strongly prioritised	Physical outcomes generally predominate	Physical and relational abundance balanced	Relational outcomes strongly incorporated	Relational abundance strongly developed alongside physical abundance

The abacus therefore does something deceptively simple.

It turns otherwise vague statements about the character of a government into a visible pattern of institutional settlements.

A government might, for example, sit toward the right on long-term stewardship but toward the left on concentration of power. Another might strongly protect individual freedom but perform poorly on resilience or the common good.

The abacus does not require us to reduce these differences to a single score. Indeed, doing so would destroy much of its value. The pattern is the information.

Why government comes first

We begin with governments deliberately.

Government sits at the apex of the institutional architecture of a nation. Through constitutions, legislation, regulation, taxation, expenditure, property rights, enforcement and other mechanisms, government establishes many of the design constraints within which lower-level institutions operate.

A company can have its own culture and values, but it operates within company law, employment law, taxation, competition rules, environmental regulation and the wider institutional architecture established by government.

The same applies to universities, hospitals, schools, charities, communities and, increasingly, AI laboratories.

The government abacus therefore describes something deeper than the personality of a particular government or political leader. It begins to expose the institutional environment being created for everything beneath it.

From values to policy

The abacus operates at the level above individual policies.

The settlement of these ten paradoxes expresses the underlying values and institutional preferences of a government. Those values subsequently become visible through policies, laws, budgets, regulations and administrative behaviour.

For example, a government's position on concentrated versus distributed power should eventually be visible in the powers it gives local government, courts, regulators and citizens. Its position on short-term versus long-term stewardship should become visible in infrastructure, debt, education, environmental and intergenerational policy.

We will deal with that translation into policy later.

For now, the important point is simply:

Paradox → Settlement → Values → Institutional Design → Policy

The abacus gives us a way of seeing the first parts of that chain.

The next problem is who decides where to put the balls. If the positions are merely somebody's opinion, the abacus has limited value. Back-sighting addresses that problem by using evidence to test where each ball should actually be placed.

2. Backsighting: testing the position against the evidence

The abacus gives us a way of describing where a government appears to sit on each of the ten paradoxes, but that immediately raises the question of who decides where the ball goes. If one person places a government at -1 and another at +1, the instrument risks becoming another expression of political opinion. Back-sighting is the discipline that prevents that.

What is backsighting?

Backsighting is the process of taking a proposed position on the abacus and then working backwards to examine the evidence that supports—or contradicts—that position. The sequence is deliberately simple:

Proposed Position → Evidence → Challenge → Revised Position

Suppose, for example, that we provisionally place a government at +1 on Concentrated Power ↔ Distributed Power. Rather than accepting the placement, we ask what visible evidence would justify it. AI can then search across a very large body of information to identify evidence relevant to the proposition.

That might include constitutions, legislation, court decisions, regulations, budgets, government actions, institutional structures, election arrangements, independent assessments, historical records, speeches and actual observed outcomes.

Importantly, the process should search for evidence against the proposed position as well as evidence supporting it.

The purpose of backsighting is not to prove that the original judgement was correct, but to test it.

AI changes what is practically possible

Historically, doing this properly would have required enormous amounts of research. A researcher might have needed weeks or months to examine hundreds or thousands of documents and then compare them across countries and across time. AI changes the economics of this process.

It can potentially examine very large quantities of information, identify evidence relevant to each paradox, find contradictions, compare different sources and present the evidence in a form that a human being can inspect. The human does not disappear from the process: AI makes the evidence visible and manageable, while the judgement about what the evidence means remains open to examination and challenge.

Not all information is equal

There is, however, a second problem: finding information is not the same as finding truth. A constitution may say one thing while actual government behaviour demonstrates another; a political leader may make a statement contradicted by subsequent action; government statistics may be accurate, incomplete or selectively presented; newspapers may report the same event differently; an academic study may be rigorous or weak; a social-media post may contain direct eyewitness evidence or complete fabrication; and propaganda may be deliberately designed to create precisely the opposite impression from reality.

Evidence cannot simply be counted. It has to be weighed.

Ten weak pieces of evidence do not necessarily outweigh one highly reliable piece of evidence. Backsighting therefore requires us to examine both what the evidence says and how much confidence should reasonably be placed in it.

Evidence needs verification

Ultimately, information will need some form of truth verification.

Evidence might be assessed according to such characteristics as:

- whether it is a primary or secondary source;
- whether the underlying information can be independently verified;
- whether several genuinely independent sources corroborate it;
- whether the source has an incentive to distort the information;
- whether evidence and methodology are transparent;
- whether claims are consistent with visible behaviour and outcomes;
- whether contradictory evidence exists; and
- how confident we can reasonably be in the conclusion.

We are not attempting to design that verification system here. That is a separate problem and, later in the book, becomes an important pilot: the development of a Truth verification product. For the moment we need only recognise the dependency.

The quality of an abacus depends partly upon the quality of its backsighting. The quality of its backsighting depends partly upon our ability to distinguish stronger evidence from weaker evidence.

Backsighting must remain contestable

A further principle is that neither the AI nor the person constructing the abacus should become the final authority on truth. Every placement must remain contestable. Someone who disagrees with a ball's position should be able to inspect the evidence, challenge individual pieces of evidence, introduce contradictory evidence and argue for a different interpretation, with the abacus revised as the evidence changes.

The objective is not to manufacture certainty, but to improve the quality of collective judgement. Back-sighting therefore changes the proposition from a personal assertion—"this is where I think the government sits"—to an evidence-based and contestable judgement: "this is where the available evidence currently suggests the government sits; this is the evidence behind that judgement; this is how reliable we believe that evidence to be; and you can inspect and challenge both."

From opinion to a testable hypothesis

The relationship between the first parts of the abacus is now clear. The paradox provides the dimension, the five positions provide the scale, the ball provides the provisional judgement, back-sighting provides the evidence against which that judgement can be tested, and truth verification will eventually help determine how much weight different pieces of evidence deserve.

The sequence becomes:

Paradox → Position → Back-Sighting → Evidence → Truth Verification → Challenge → Revised Position

The abacus therefore does not claim to tell us the truth. It creates a disciplined mechanism through which our understanding of the truth can be continuously exposed, tested and improved. The next section demonstrates that process by applying exactly the same abacus to two sharply contrasting countries: Russia and Denmark.

3. Producing the product: Russia and Denmark

The two countries are first kept separate: two individual abacuses using the same ten dimensions and the same five-position scale. The placements are provisional and

based on current evidence. Each ball can then be back-sighted against the strongest evidence supporting or contradicting its position.

Position +2 means the right-hand good substantially dominates the settlement in the defined paradox; it does not mean 'better' or 'perfect country.'

Russia government settlements. Exhibit 11.2

Left hand paradox descriptor	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	Right hand paradox descriptor
Self-interest		●				Common Good
Authority/Order	●					Freedom
Competition	●					Cooperation
Security	●					Transparency
Present Needs		●				Future Stewardship
Efficiency			●			Resilience
Concentrated Power	●					Distributed Power
Expertise	●					Participation
Institutional Continuity		●				Institutional Adaptability
Physical Abundance		●				Relational Abundance

Insight

Russia's striking feature is vertical coherence toward the left-hand side of several paradoxes. Power, participation, time horizon and institutional form tend to reinforce one another in the same direction.

The clearest positions are Concentrated Power = -2, Authority/Order ↔ Freedom = -2 and Expertise ↔ Participation = -2. Current evidence describes political power as concentrated around the presidency, a subordinate judiciary and legislature, heavily constrained opposition and increasingly restricted information.

The interesting exception is resilience, provisionally placed at 0. A highly concentrated system can have considerable capacity to mobilise resources and withstand external shocks while settling other paradoxes strongly toward one side. That is precisely why the abacus should remain a pattern rather than becoming one overall score.

Denmark government settlements. Exhibit 11.3

Left hand paradox descriptor	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	Right hand paradox descriptor
Self-interest				●		**Common Good**
Authority/Order					●	**Freedom**
Competition				●		**Cooperation**
Security				●		**Transparency**
Present Needs				●		**Future Stewardship**
Efficiency				●		**Resilience**
Concentrated Power				●		**Distributed Power**
Expertise				●		**Participation**
Institutional Continuity				●		**Institutional Adaptability**
Physical Abundance				●		**Relational Abundance**

Insight

Denmark produces the opposite directional pattern to Russia: strong vertical coherence toward the right-hand side of several paradoxes.

It combines competitive democratic government, independent courts, strong civil liberties, relatively open government and extensive political participation. Freedom House currently scores Denmark 97/100, compared with Russia's 12/100.

Denmark is deliberately not filled with +2s. The abacus becomes useless if +2 is treated as ‘good’. For example, recent OECD evidence shows only 44% of Danes reported high or moderately high trust in national government in 2023, albeit above the OECD average of 39%. More recent OECD work also finds Denmark above average on most measures of complex decision-making, while perceptions of evidence use and intergenerational balancing have slipped somewhat.

So Denmark's interesting question is different:

How does an established institutional architecture maintain correction while its settlements continue to change through time?

What the two abacuses immediately show

Russia: predominantly -2, -1 — settlements tend toward the left-hand goods in this abacus.

Denmark: predominantly +1 — settlements tend toward the right-hand goods in this abacus.

The two profiles already demonstrate the power of the abacus. Before reading a page of back-sighting, the reader can see two very different institutional systems.

The evidence beneath each individual ball can then be opened selectively, using two or three of the strongest pieces of evidence to show how the placement has been back-sighted without overwhelming the reader.

4. Putting the two countries on a single abacus

Using exactly the placements we have already made, the combined abacus makes the contrast much more immediately visible.

Two-country abacus. Exhibit 11.4

Left hand paradox descriptor	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	Right hand paradox descriptor
Self-interest		🔴		🟢		Common Good
Authority/Order	🔴				🟢	Freedom
Competition	🔴			🟢		Cooperation
Security	🔴			🟢		Transparency
Present Needs		🔴		🟢		Future Stewardship
Efficiency			🔴	🟢		Resilience
Concentrated Power	🔴			🟢		Distributed Power
Expertise	🔴			🟢		Participation
Institutional Continuity		🔴		🟢		Institutional Adaptability
Physical Abundance		🔴		🟢		Relational Abundance

🔴 Russia 🟢 Denmark

What becomes visible

Putting the two countries onto one abacus changes the usefulness of the instrument. We are no longer merely describing countries individually. We can see institutional architecture comparatively.

Russia clusters strongly on the left. Nine of its ten balls are at Positions -2 or -1. The important exception is resilience at 0. That exception matters because it reminds us that the abacus is not measuring 'good government'. It is showing the direction of settlement on each paradox. A system can be highly concentrated and coercive and nevertheless possess substantial capacity to mobilise resources and survive shocks.

Denmark clusters strongly on the right. Nine balls sit at Position +1 and one at Position +2. Again, this does not mean Denmark is 'perfect'. It means that, on these particular paradoxes, its settlements tend strongly toward the right-hand goods.

The additional insight is visual. The words scarcely need to be read.

RUSSIA 🔴 ←——————————————→ DENMARK 🟢

That is potentially what makes the abacus a useful product. A citizen does not need to read a 200-page comparative governance report. The pattern is visible immediately.

Then the citizen can touch any ball and ask:

Why is Russia here? … Why is Denmark there?

And that opens the back-sighting underneath the ball. This creates a simple product architecture:

See the Pattern → Touch the Ball → See the Evidence → Challenge the Position

That is considerably more powerful than the abacus merely being an exhibit in the book.

5. Corporations, government and the AI labs

The same abacus process can be applied to corporations. A corporation can be positioned against the same paradoxes, back-sighted against the evidence, compared with other corporations and tracked through time.

However, a corporation does not exist independently of the institutional architecture around it. Corporations normally sit beneath the apex design constraints established by government. Laws, regulations, taxation, property rights, competition rules, employment rules and enforcement mechanisms establish the boundaries within which corporations operate.

This is especially important in considering the AI labs. Their capabilities are developing extremely rapidly, while many of the government design constraints that would normally bound institutions of such power remain incomplete, weak, fragmented or are still emerging. The AI labs therefore create a particularly important tension

between rapidly increasing institutional capability and the apex design constraints within which that capability operates.

Chapter 18 returns to this tension, applying the abacus to the US and Chinese frontier-AI systems and their relationship with government.

6. Adding time: Russia's 20-year trajectory

Adding time turns the abacus from a picture of position into a picture of trajectory. Two large balls on the same abacus can show Russia in 2006 and Russia in 2026:

The placements below are necessarily judgements, but there is good evidence that Russia was already substantially authoritarian in 2006 and has subsequently moved further in that direction. In 2006, for example, Freedom House already rated Russia "Not Free" and recorded a continuing deterioration in political rights and civil liberties; today's system is substantially more restrictive.

Twenty-year trajectory abacus – Russia 2006–2026. Exhibit 11.5

Left hand paradox descriptor	-2 Full Left	-1 Partial left	0 Held	+1 Partial right	+2 Full Right	Right hand paradox descriptor
Self-interest		🔴🟠				Common Good
Authority/Order	🔴	🟠				Freedom
Competition	🔴	🟠				Cooperation
Security	🔴	🟠				Transparency
Present Needs		🔴	🟠			Future Stewardship
Efficiency			🔴🟠			Resilience
Concentrated Power	🔴	🟠				Distributed Power
Expertise	🔴	🟠				Participation
Institutional Continuity		🔴	🟠			Institutional Adaptability
Physical Abundance		🔴	🟠			Relational Abundance

🟠 **Russia 2006** 🔴 **Russia 2026**

What this adds to the abacus

The historical placements are judgements rather than measurements. Their importance here is that they introduce time into the abacus.

Russia was certainly not Denmark twenty years ago. By 2006, Putin had already substantially centralised political power, tightened electoral arrangements and constrained NGOs and independent political activity.

But today's Russia has gone considerably further. Power is now described as concentrated around Putin; genuine opposition is suppressed; courts and the legislature are subordinate; the media environment is controlled; and restrictions on individual rights have intensified further since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

So the abacus gives us something new:

Position + Time = Trajectory

And trajectory may ultimately be more important than absolute position.

A country sitting at Position -1 but moving -1 → 0 → +1 is moving in a different direction from a country sitting at Position -1 after moving +1 → 0 → -1. The abacus records that direction without assuming that movement right or left is inherently better.

Russia makes that visible. The critical information is no longer simply where Russia is now, but where it was, where it is, and therefore the direction in which it has been moving.

That is a major extension of the product because eventually the citizen's abacus could show both the current ball and its historical trail. A citizen would see not merely the institutional settlement of their country or leader, but the direction and speed with which it is changing.

Later, when we develop the Periodic Table, we will go beneath this apex-level abacus and examine the dimensions of policy through which these underlying institutional settlements are expressed in practice. The Periodic Table will therefore allow us to see how a change in the apex abacus is translated into changes in actual policy over time. The abacus shows the change in underlying institutional direction; the Periodic Table will help show that change in action.

7. From the abacus to citizen visibility

The abacus has now been developed through several steps. It began with the ten paradoxes and five possible positions, then added back-sighting so that each ball could be tested against evidence rather than simply asserted. Applying it separately to Russia and Denmark made their institutional settlements visible; placing them on one

abacus made the contrast comparative; and adding twenty years of Russian history moved the instrument from position to trajectory.

The progression has therefore been:

Paradox → Position → Evidence → Comparison → Trajectory

That progression is still only the beginning of what the instrument could become.

Put the abacus in every citizen's hand

The next development is to take the instrument out of the book and put it in every citizen's hand. On a phone, a citizen could see where their country currently sits on each paradox, compare it with other countries, look backwards over five, ten or twenty years, and touch any individual ball to inspect the back-sighting beneath it: the supporting evidence, its quality, contradictory evidence and the confidence that should reasonably be attached to the judgement. The same architecture could eventually be extended to governments, political parties and individual political leaders.

The citizen would no longer see only what a politician says, but where that politician appears to stand, how that position compares with others, and how it has changed through time. In that form the abacus becomes more than an analytical tool: it becomes a **visibility tool**.

Visibility changes behaviour

Once citizens can see these things, citizenship itself begins to change. Political discussion can move beyond personalities, slogans and isolated policies toward the underlying values being expressed, the direction in which the society is moving, whether that direction is desired, why a leader has moved from one position to another, what evidence supports the judgement, and whether citizens agree with the settlement being made.

Citizens can therefore make different demands of leadership because they possess different information, while leadership operates in a different environment. A political leader who knows that changes in position can be made visible cannot rely as easily upon yesterday's statement disappearing into the political noise. The instrument retains the pattern and trajectory, with the evidence sitting behind each ball.

This does not force leaders to move toward +2 or the right-hand good, nor should it. There will be legitimate disagreements about where a society should sit on a paradox under particular circumstances. What changes is visibility: citizens can see the

settlement being made, and leaders know that citizens can see it. That creates a new feedback loop between citizen and leader.

Values → Visibility → Citizen Response → Leadership Response → Changed Values and Behaviour

The abacus therefore begins to operate as a cybernetic mechanism rather than merely a diagnostic instrument.

The next layer: from values to policy

The abacus operates at a high level, exposing the values and institutional settlements of the apex institution. Those values have consequences: they are expressed through decisions, and decisions are expressed through policy. The Periodic Table introduced later allows us to move down one level and examine those policy dimensions directly.

The two instruments can then be connected:

Abacus of Values → Periodic Table of Policy

A movement toward greater concentration of power should become visible in the relevant policies; a movement from long-term stewardship toward short-term interests should appear in fiscal policy, infrastructure, education, environmental policy or institutional investment; and greater participation should be reflected in electoral arrangements, deliberation, information access or decentralisation. The abacus shows that the underlying settlement has changed, while the Periodic Table helps show where that change appears in action.

A much bigger jump: from policy to economic outcomes

The analysis can eventually go further because policies have consequences. They can increase or reduce productivity and investment, create resilience or fragility, and increase or destroy innovation, human capability and physical wealth. This suggests another potential connection:

Values → Policy → Economic Outcomes

Establishing that relationship will be considerably more difficult because economic outcomes have multiple causes. Time lags, external shocks, geography, resources, technology, demographics and history all matter, so simple causal claims would be unsafe. AI nevertheless makes it increasingly possible to examine large quantities of historical and comparative information together and to ask better questions about the relationships between institutional values, policy choices and subsequent economic performance. The purpose is not to prove an ideology, but to make those relationships more visible and open to examination.

The biggest jump: from values to More Mores for More

Ultimately, economic performance is not the final aim. The aim established earlier in this book is More Mores for More, and it has two sides: physical abundance—wealth, productivity, goods, services, technology and infrastructure—and relational abundance—love, trust, reciprocation, kindness, truth, belonging, generosity, cooperation and the quality of our relationships with one another. The ambition is therefore much larger than connecting values to economic performance.

The longer-term aim is to explore:

Values → Policy → Physical Outcomes + Relational Outcomes → More Mores for More

This is a substantial analytical step, and the instruments needed to make all of these relationships visible do not yet exist. Measuring relational wealth will be particularly difficult: GDP and other economic measures provide an established, although incomplete, vocabulary for physical wealth, while nothing remotely comparable yet exists for relational wealth. That is not an argument for ignoring it, but for developing better instruments.

From a ball on a screen to a different control system

The path from the apparently simple abacus to a wider control system can now be seen. It begins by placing a ball on a five-position spectrum, then back-sighting that ball, comparing countries, adding time to expose trajectory, placing the instrument in citizens' hands, connecting underlying values to policy and, later, attempting to connect policy to economic outcomes and both physical and relational abundance.

The complete chain begins to look like this:

Paradoxes

↓

Values

↓

Abacus

↓

Back-Sighting and Truth Verification

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Visibility and Trajectory

↓

Citizen Response

↓

Leadership Response

↓

Periodic Table of Policy

↓

Economic and Social Outcomes

↓

Physical + Relational Abundance

↓

More Mores for More

These later connections remain to be designed, tested and demonstrated, but the direction is important. The abacus begins as a diagnostic tool; placed in the hands of citizens, it becomes a visibility tool; and connected to policy and outcomes, it can become part of a wider feedback and control system through which citizens can see not merely what leaders promise, but what values they express, how those values are changing, what policies follow from them, and ultimately what kind of society those choices are producing.

The final distinction

The final distinction is important: the abacus measures neither policy nor outcomes. It exposes the underlying value settlements. The Periodic Table is the next layer down; outcomes come later. Keeping those layers separate prevents us from claiming causation before we can demonstrate it.

8. What this means for humans

Chapter 1 showed our positive and negative problem-solving brain. Chapter 2 showed how civilisation repurposes those predispositions. Chapter 3 placed human beings and institutions inside holonic, homeostatic levels of complexity. Chapter 4 added truth and felt truths; Chapter 5 cybernetic control systems; Chapter 6 solvable problems; and Chapter 7 high-level problems as paradoxes. Chapter 9 brought those ideas together. Chapter 10 turned them into diagnostics with AI enhancement, and Chapter 11 introduced visibility as a way to change behaviour. The abacus now gives citizens a practical way to see one part of that architecture: how government is settling recurring human paradoxes.

For humans, the first gain is visibility. Political argument often arrives as slogans, personalities and isolated policies. The abacus slows that down. It asks us to see the

underlying settlement, the evidence behind the placement, the direction of travel and the countervailing good that may be getting lost.

The second gain is contestability. A citizen does not have to accept the ball because an expert, government or AI placed it there. The evidence can be opened. Strong and weak evidence can be separated. Contradictory evidence can be added. The position can move. That keeps judgement open to correction.

The third gain is memory. Institutions often drift gradually. A current position by itself can hide that movement. Adding time makes trajectory visible. Citizens can see not only where a government sits, but where it sat before and the direction and speed of change.

The deeper human implication is that visibility changes the control relationship. Citizens who can see settlements, evidence and trajectory can ask better questions of leaders. Leaders who know that movement remains visible operate under a different form of accountability. The aim is not to force every society toward the same position. It is to make the settlement visible enough for people to judge, challenge and correct it.

9. What this means for AI

AI makes the abacus practical in a way that was previously difficult. It can search large bodies of evidence, organise material against a common framework, look for contradictions, compare countries, preserve earlier states and repeat the process through time.

But AI does not own the settlement. It does not decide the aim of society, which paradox matters most, where legitimacy lies or what citizens should accept. Its role is to increase visibility and reduce the cost of disciplined comparison.

AI also has to work inside the truth disciplines already established in the book. Evidence must be weighed, not counted. Sources need to be visible. Counter-evidence must be sought. Confidence must match the strength of the material. Every placement must remain open to challenge and revision.

Used well, AI turns the abacus from a static exhibit into a living diagnostic. It can help people see position, evidence, comparison and trajectory, then update the picture as reality changes. Used badly, the same capability could manufacture authority around a weak or biased judgement.

The rule is therefore the same one that has been building through the book: humans set and legitimate the aims and settlements; AI helps us see, compare, test and remember; and the whole process remains inside a control-and-correction system that can challenge both human and machine judgement.