Chapter 7. High-level governance problems are best seen as paradoxes

Introduction

As we saw in chapter six, when problems move up the levels of problem solving, especially into Level VI and Level VII complex human problems, they stop behaving like ordinary technical problems.

Level I to Level V problems can often be solved by logic, rational analysis, science, measurement and disciplined execution. A business problem can be extremely difficult and still be solvable. For example, a chief executive has to create sustainable long-term return on equity, improve it over time, allocate capital, manage risk and keep the organisation alive. That is complex, but it is still largely a solvable problem inside an agreed legal and institutional frame. However, at upper level V paradox begins to emerge.

A Level VI or Level VII human problem contains values that are both true, both necessary and partly in conflict. Those tensions cannot be optimised away. They have to be recognised, argued over, restrained, institutionalised and periodically re-settled. That is what is meant here by paradox.

Paradox is the characteristic form of high-level human problem solving. It begins where optimisation runs out: two truths, values or needs are both real, both necessary and partly in conflict.

A paradox is coupled to other tensions and must be seen across a spectrum rather than as a binary choice. It is settled rather than solved. Every settlement distributes advantage and restraint, so it requires legitimacy. It remains viable only while reality and trust continue to support it. When it is perturbed beyond its operating range, it must be re-settled.

This is why paradox is essential to More Mores for More. More physical abundance can give civilisation more things. Paradox-holding gives civilisation the social architecture through which freedom, fairness, dignity, cooperation, truth, order and inclusion can coexist at scale. Institutionalised, it turns moral aspiration into moral structure.

Wealth and productivity often make that structure easier to create because they provide room for compensation and transition. But they do not create it automatically. The paradox work is the continuing human task of recognising both necessary truths, restraining destructive extremes and building **settlements** that

remain legitimate enough to hold. **It is the work of governments, not corporations**. Corporations operating at level V-VII hold internal and strategic paradoxes, but cannot legitimately settle society-wide paradox.

A paradox is therefore **a coupled tension between necessary but conflicting truths, needs or values**. It is expressed across a spectrum of degrees, settled rather than solved, and reopened when reality changes. The measure of success is not the disappearance of tension. It is whether the settlement allows the society to preserve both truths sufficiently to keep living, learning and developing together.

How this chapter unfolds

1. What a paradox is — A paradox holds two truths, needs or values that are both real, both necessary and partly in conflict.

2. Paradoxes are coupled — One paradox usually connects to several others, so changing one settlement can disturb the wider system.

3. Paradox settlements sit inside the 8+1 system of design constraints — Settlements hold through reciprocal constraints between levels, institutions and people, plus self-restraint.

4. The five-position spectrum — A spectrum replaces either-or thinking and makes visible whether one pole dominates or both goods remain alive.

5. Paradoxes are settled, not solved — Law, custom, roles, institutions and moral norms turn enduring tension into a workable social settlement.

6. Settlements create winners and losers — Every settlement distributes advantage and restraint, so legitimacy determines whether people will accept the loss.

7. Settlements hold until they no longer hold — A settlement remains viable until reality changes enough to push it outside its operating range.

8. Wealth often helps settlement — Productivity and surplus create room for compensation, transition, public goods and wider inclusion.

9. Paradox can back-test different settlement pathways — The five-position spectrum becomes an abacus that makes settlements visible and comparable across countries and time.

10. What this means for humans — The Introduction and Chapters 1–6 now combine into a practical picture of how humans can see, hold and re-settle high-level tensions.

11. What this means for AI — AI can strengthen visibility, modelling and correction, but it cannot legitimately settle human paradoxes for us.

1. What a paradox is

At Level VI and Level VII, paradox becomes the characteristic form of complex problem. Complexity arises because a finite and changing human system must satisfy several valid constraints at the same time – a paradox. A paradox is a live tension between two truths, needs, values, or operating principles that are both real and both partly necessary. It is not merely a contradiction, a disagreement, or a puzzle with one clever answer.

Such a system must preserve freedom and order, competition and cooperation, truth and harmony, present needs and future viability. As scale increases, the density of these constraints also increases: more people, institutions, levels, interests and time horizons interact, feedback becomes slower, and action on one good changes the conditions under which other goods can be protected. One paradox therefore couples with, and often generates pressure within, several others.

Paradoxical complexity cannot be eliminated by choosing one pole or be solved once and for all. From a human point of view, it has to be settled sufficiently for people to act, cooperate and live together. Laws, institutions, roles, norms and reciprocal constraints compress the interacting tensions into a workable operating range. Time is essential to that settlement: trust, reciprocation, delayed exchange and feedback allow goods that cannot be fully reconciled in a single decision to be balanced across repeated interactions. The settlement does not remove the underlying paradoxes. It holds them provisionally and must be corrected or re-settled when changing circumstances, accumulated consequences or new evidence move the system outside its viable range.

Paradox requires judgement rather than elimination. Freedom must be held with order, competition with cooperation, justice with mercy, stability with change, individual agency with collective belonging. The aim is not to defeat one side, but to find a settlement that keeps both necessary goods alive in the right proportion for the level, context and time.

The twelve human paradoxes discussed below and listed in Exhibit 7.1 are not choices between a good pole and a bad pole. Each identifies a recurring tension that leadership must hold rather than eliminate. In some cases the two poles are both necessary goods; in others the wording deliberately exposes a failure tendency on one side and a countervailing restraint or corrective on the other (usually a failure on the left, in innovation versus sclerosis on the right). The required balance is therefore an ‘and’ balance - not a permanent midpoint, but a legitimate and

continually corrected settlement that keeps the necessary goods, restraints and corrective forces alive in the proportion required by the level, context and time:

National advantage versus global restraint - A government has a primary duty to protect the security, prosperity and interests of its own citizens. A nation that cannot act for itself will not retain their loyalty or trust. Yet nations are also parts of larger economic, environmental, technological and security systems.

National advantage pursued without restraint can export pollution, conflict, instability and economic harm to others. Global restraint pursued without recognition of national responsibility can become remote, illegitimate and incapable of commanding domestic support. The required settlement holds sovereign interest and global stewardship, allowing nations to advance their people while restraining actions that threaten the wider whole.

Short term versus long term - Every human system must survive the present and preserve the future. Immediate dangers, needs and opportunities cannot simply be deferred in the name of long-term planning. Nor can present demands be met by consuming the resources, trust and institutional capability upon which future life will depend.

Short-term dominance produces expediency, debt, exhaustion and declining resilience. Long-term dominance can become remote, inflexible and indifferent to present suffering. The settlement must therefore combine immediate responsiveness with future stewardship, linking today's decisions to their consequences across years, generations and institutions.

Competition versus cooperation - Competition creates energy. It tests capability, exposes underperformance, rewards improvement and drives innovation. Cooperation creates a different but equally necessary capacity: trust, shared infrastructure, coordinated action and the ability to achieve what no actor can achieve alone.

Competition without cooperation becomes predation, fragmentation or a race to the bottom. Cooperation without competition can protect incumbency, collusion and mediocrity. High-performing systems preserve competitive drive and cooperative capacity, using each to correct the excesses of the other.

Wealth inequality versus wealth distribution - Societies need to recognise contribution, enterprise, skill and risk, and those differences will often produce unequal rewards. Yet unequal starting points, inheritance, accumulated advantage and market power mean that wealth cannot be treated as a simple measure of

merit. Societies also need a distribution of resources and opportunity sufficient to protect dignity, participation and social mobility.

Wealth inequality without adequate distribution can harden into permanent privilege and allow economic advantage to become political and institutional power. Distribution without sufficient recognition of contribution can weaken responsibility, investment and productive effort. The settlement must therefore allow unequal reward while preventing inequality from destroying opportunity, citizenship or social cohesion.

Exclusion versus inclusion - Every functioning society has boundaries, standards and obligations that determine who belongs, how people participate and what membership requires. At the same time, inclusion expands dignity, opportunity and belonging by allowing people who were previously excluded to contribute to and benefit from the wider society.

Exclusion can become a means by which established or elite groups protect their own position and deny legitimate participation to the majority or to outsiders. Inclusion without sufficient boundary can weaken coherence, standards and capacity. A legitimate settlement therefore widens participation while preserving the obligations and conditions that make membership meaningful.

Law serving power versus law restraining power - Law can be used by those with wealth, status or political authority to protect their position, shape enforcement and place unequal burdens on people with less power. Yet the central civilisational purpose of law is the opposite: to place rules above persons, constrain arbitrary power and provide a common framework within which rights and obligations can be enforced.

When law serves power, privilege becomes self-protecting and the wider population loses confidence that rules apply equally. When law restrains power effectively, government, wealth and institutional authority remain contestable and weaker parties retain credible protection. The settlement requires law to remain impartial enough to constrain power without becoming so rigid or expansive that legitimate judgement and adaptation are paralysed.

Control versus freedom - Control provides the authority, common rules and enforcement required for order, security and coordination. Freedom enables thought, expression, initiative, dissent and diverse ways of living. Without sufficient control, powerful actors can impose costs on others; without sufficient freedom, authority becomes obedience imposed through fear or force.

Control taken too far becomes oppression, suppressing individual choice and institutional challenge. Freedom taken too far can leave government unable to restrain coercion, disorder or concentrated private power. The settlement is therefore lawful freedom: enough authority to protect people and preserve order, with enough liberty to keep authority open to challenge, correction and renewal.

Secrecy versus transparency - Secrecy can be legitimate where government requires confidential space for security, negotiation, private deliberation or effective judgement. Transparency allows people to see how authority is exercised, how decisions are made and whether public power is being abused.

Secrecy without transparency can hide corruption, incompetence, capture and arbitrary power. Transparency without legitimate confidentiality can destroy security, candid deliberation and the capacity to negotiate or experiment. The settlement must therefore protect necessary discretion while making power sufficiently visible for accountability, truth-seeking and correction.

Innovation versus sclerosis - Innovation enables societies and institutions to adapt, solve new problems, create new capability and challenge arrangements that no longer work. Continuity also matters because institutions carry accumulated knowledge, relationships, routines and legitimacy that cannot be recreated instantly.

Innovation without enough continuity can outrun learning and destroy useful capability before replacements are proven. Continuity taken too far becomes sclerosis: incumbents protect themselves, privilege sustains existing arrangements and necessary renewal is blocked. The settlement must therefore preserve institutional memory while keeping credible pathways open for experimentation, challenge and replacement.

Innovation versus safety - Innovation enables societies to solve problems, create wealth and develop new capabilities. Safety protects people and systems from harms that innovators may not anticipate or may have incentives to discount.

Innovation without safety can release irreversible or systemic damage. Safety without innovation can preserve obsolete arrangements and prevent solutions to existing dangers. The and balance supports experimentation within boundaries, combines freedom to learn with precaution, and adjusts restraint as evidence accumulates.

Indifference versus compassion - Leadership must recognise that people experience illness, misfortune, disadvantage and circumstances beyond their

control. Compassion prevents a society from treating every poor outcome as deserved. At the same time, people possess agency, and durable assistance cannot remove every expectation to act, contribute or change where they are capable of doing so.

Indifference allows leadership to disregard suffering, unequal starting points and materially different human capability. Compassion taken too far can become over-protection that weakens agency, reciprocation and self-responsibility. The settlement therefore joins care with reasonable expectation, providing help where it is needed while preserving the capacity and obligation to contribute where that remains possible.

Punishment versus rehabilitation - Punishment signals that wrongdoing matters. It protects victims, restrains harmful conduct and affirms the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Rehabilitation recognises that people may change and that permanent exclusion can destroy both the person and the possibility of restored social cooperation.

Punishment without rehabilitation becomes vengeance, cruelty or perpetual exclusion. Rehabilitation without punishment can deny harm and remove accountability. The settlement holds consequence and restoration, imposing proportionate restraint while preserving a credible route to rehabilitation, reintegration and return.

Taken together, the twelve paradoxes describe a society's continuing work of holding necessary goods, restraints and corrective forces in relationship. No single balance is correct in every circumstance. The position may move as threats, knowledge, technology, resources and social conditions change. What must not be lost is the capacity to keep the countervailing requirement alive: the continuing recognition that a viable settlement depends on more than allowing one tendency, interest or institution to dominate.

Not all twelve paradoxes impact all issues; and during the course of this book we will select subsets of the twelve when discussing issues such as deliberation and truth seeking.

Twelve core human paradoxes. Exhibit 7.1

No.	Human paradox	What the paradox holds
1	**National advantage** versus **Global restraint**	Holds a government's duty to advance the security, prosperity and interests of its own population together with restraint where national action imposes serious costs on the wider international system.
2	**Short term** versus **Long term**	Holds the need to respond to immediate threats, needs and opportunities together with the duty to preserve future capability, trust, resources and institutional viability.
3	**Competition** versus **Cooperation**	Holds rivalry, contestability and the pressure to improve together with the cooperation, shared rules and collective capability required to sustain the wider system.
4	**Wealth inequality** versus **Wealth distribution**	Holds unequal rewards for contribution, enterprise, skill and risk together with distribution sufficient to preserve opportunity, dignity, social cohesion and broad participation.
5	**Exclusion** versus **Inclusion**	Holds the boundaries, standards and obligations required for coherent membership together with widening participation, dignity, opportunity and belonging.
6	**Law serving power** versus **Law restraining power**	Holds the risk that wealth, status or political power can bend law to protect privilege against the requirement that law constrain power, apply impartially and protect those with less power.
7	**Control** versus **Freedom**	Holds the authority and common rules required for order, security and coordination together with meaningful individual freedom, choice, dissent and institutional challenge.
8	**Secrecy** versus **Transparency**	Holds legitimate confidentiality for security, negotiation and effective judgement together with sufficient transparency for scrutiny, accountability, truth-seeking and correction.
9	**Innovation** versus **Sclerosis**	Holds the need for experimentation, renewal and adaptation together with continuity and institutional

		memory, while preventing continuity from hardening into incumbent protection, capture and sclerosis.
10	**Innovation** versus **Safety**	Holds the freedom to create, test and release new capabilities together with the duty to anticipate harm, impose proportionate limits and prevent irreversible or systemic damage.
11	**Indifference** versus **Compassion**	Holds expectations of agency, contribution and responsibility against the danger that leadership becomes indifferent to suffering, disadvantage and materially unequal human capability.
12	**Punishment** versus **Rehabilitation**	Holds the need to recognise wrongdoing, protect others and impose proportionate consequences together with the possibility of rehabilitation, reintegration and renewed cooperation.

A paradox becomes politically, morally and institutionally important when both sides carry different **felt truth**. People do not merely think the paradox; they feel one side of it as identity, justice, safety, fairness, dignity, freedom, loyalty or survival.

This is why paradoxes are so difficult. They are not solved by proving one side wrong. They are held by creating a **settlement** that gives enough recognition, room and restraint to both sides.

Paradox is therefore the **social counterpart** to physical problem solving. A technical system can often be brought to a defined operating state. A social system has to keep several necessary goods alive at once. Its success lies not in eliminating tension, but in structuring that tension so that people can continue to live, cooperate and develop together.

Main features of paradoxes. Exhibit 7.2

Feature	Meaning	Example
Winners and losers	Every settlement allocates advantage, cost, legitimacy and restraint	Taxpayers pay; families comply; children and the future society benefit. Legitimacy determines whether loss is accepted.
Settled, not solved	Tension is compressed into a workable arrangement.	Universal education: private family responsibility was re-settled as a public obligation funded by taxes
Spectral	A paradox is not a binary switch; it has degrees	Full left, partial left, centre, partial right, full right. The centre is not always ideal, but it is where both truths remain visible.
Held until perturbed	Settlements last only while reality supports them	Technology, war, economic collapse, inequality, corruption, migration or loss of trust can reopen the paradox.
Wealth helps	Surplus gives room for compromise, transition, compensation and public goods	Productivity creates the surplus that makes inclusion, welfare, retraining, education and institutional redundancy easier.

2. Paradoxes are coupled

Major paradoxes rarely appear alone. They are coupled to other paradoxes. Freedom versus order often couples to truth versus harmony, punishment versus forgiveness, competition versus cooperation, merit versus equality, and short term versus long term.

This coupling is one reason settlements become unstable. A society may think it is handling one issue, but underneath it is handling a cluster of connected felt truths. A debate about drugs, for example, is also a debate about freedom, pleasure, addiction, crime, compassion, responsibility, health, profit, punishment, policing, family damage and public order.

The holonic and recursive arguments from earlier chapters help explain this. A settlement made at one level changes the conditions experienced at other levels. A rule that protects individual freedom may impose constraints on families, health systems or communities. A rule that strengthens public order may reduce personal

discretion. The paradox is therefore distributed across a system rather than contained in one decision.

Paradox coupling illustrated for five domains. Exhibit 7.3

Government domain	Presenting issue	Central paradox	Commonly coupled paradoxes
1. Criminal justice and policing	How should society respond to crime, violence, disorder and harm?	Freedom versus order	– Punishment vs forgiveness; – truth vs harmony; – security vs risk; – compassion vs responsibility; – means vs ends
2. Drugs, addiction and public health	Should drug use be punished, treated, regulated or tolerated?	Freedom versus order	– Compassion vs responsibility; – punishment vs forgiveness; – truth vs harmony; – market freedom vs public protection; – family autonomy vs state intervention
3. Free speech, media and misinformation	How much speech should be protected, restrained, corrected or sanctioned?	Truth versus harmony	– Freedom vs order; – privacy vs transparency; – security vs risk; – inclusion vs boundary; – means vs ends
4. Welfare, taxation and redistribution	How much should society take, give, require and guarantee?	Merit versus equality	– Compassion vs responsibility; – mine vs ours; – short term vs long term; – individual vs community; – competition vs cooperation
5. Immigration, citizenship and membership	Who belongs, who enters, who receives rights, and on what terms?	Inclusion versus boundary	– Freedom vs order; – truth vs harmony; – compassion vs responsibility; – security vs risk; – individual vs community; – short term vs long term

3. Paradox settlements sit inside the 8+1 system of design constraints

A paradox settlement is a reciprocal field of **design constraints**. A law, norm, institution or policy constrains the people beneath it, but those people also constrain the settlement through compliance, resistance, evidence, trust, cost and consequence and self-restraint.

This is why paradox settlements are never purely top-down. The L+1 holon constrains the settlement, but the settlement also changes what the higher whole can become.

Chapter five introduced the 8+1 design-constraint field. For any central settlement, there are four reciprocal relationships operating vertically and horizontally that create eight active design constraints. Self-restraint is also influential in how interrelations are conducted.

Architecture can limit behaviour, but stable paradox settlement also requires people, institutions and technologies **not to exercise every power available to them**.

Consider the paradox between **freedom of expression and the order needed to protect a truthful and workable public sphere**. At the national level, the **L+1 holon**—government operating through parliament, courts, regulators and constitutional law—sets the governing settlement. It protects freedom of speech while defining boundaries around defamation, incitement, electoral interference, fraud and other serious harms. It does not decide every statement or control every conversation. It establishes the design envelope within which citizens, media organisations and digital platforms may act.

Inside that envelope, the settlement is maintained through an **8+1 field of reciprocal constraints**. **Government constrains platforms** through law, transparency requirements and appeal rights, while **platforms constrain government** by exposing official conduct and resisting unlawful demands. **Platforms constrain users** through moderation and authentication rules, while **users constrain platforms** through choice, complaint, evidence and public pressure. Professional media, civil-society organisations and competing platforms provide further scrutiny, challenge and alternative channels. Each holon both constrains and is constrained by the others, so no single actor becomes the final guardian of public truth.

Architecture alone, however, is insufficient. The **plus one is self-restraint**. Government must not use every legal or technological power available to suppress

criticism. Platforms must not exploit every capacity to capture attention, manipulate behaviour or remove inconvenient speech. Media organisations must distinguish public-interest reporting from sensational amplification, and citizens must refrain from knowingly spreading falsehood or using freedom to intimidate others. The paradox is held when freedom remains real, harmful conduct is bounded, power remains contestable, and every participant accepts that possessing a power does not create a right to exercise it without restraint.

4. The five-position spectrum

A paradox should be seen as a spectrum, not as a binary switch. Between the two poles there are positions of degree. The centre is not always perfect, but it is usually the place where both truths are still visible.

The spectrum also makes moral structure possible. Instead of labelling one side good and the other bad, the system asks what each side contributes, where either is over-expressed, and what rules or practices can preserve both within a viable range.

Five-position spectrum. Exhibit 7.4

Full Left	Partial Left	Centre / Held Tension	Partial Right	Full Right
One pole becomes dominant and suppresses the opposite truth.	One pole leads, but the opposite truth remains partially recognised.	Both truths are visible and are held in a workable balance.	The other pole leads, but the first truth remains partially recognised.	The opposite pole becomes dominant and suppresses the first truth.

A workable settlement rewards contribution while protecting dignity, access and basic fairness.

Example of the five-position spectrum for five paradoxes. Exhibit 7.5

Paradox pair	Full left	Partial left	Centre / held tension	Partial right	Full right
Control versus **Freedom**	Control dominates	Control leads	Control and Freedom are both protected	Freedom leads	Freedom dominates
Secrecy versus **transparency**	Secrecy dominates	Secrecy leads	Secrecy and transparency protected	Transparency leads	Transparency dominates
Punishment versus **rehabilitation**	Punishment dominates	Punishment leads	Punishment and rehabilitation both protected	Rehabilitation leads	Rehabilitation dominates
Means versus **ends**	Means dominate	Means lead	Means and ends protected	Ends leads	Ends dominate
Innovation versus **sclerosis**	Innovation dominates	Innovation leads	Renewal and continuity held	Continuity leads	Sclerosis dominates

5. Paradoxes are settled, not solved

The most important distinction is this: paradoxes are settled, not solved. A mechanical problem can be solved. A paradox can only be compressed into a workable institutional, moral, legal or cultural arrangement.

The settlement may look like law, custom, regulation, role design, tax structure, education, ritual, professional practice, constitutional principle or moral norm. But the underlying tension remains alive underneath the settlement.

Universal education is an example of a paradox that has largely been settled. The settlement says that children are private family members, and also future citizens, workers, neighbours, voters, soldiers, carers, innovators and members of the wider community. Therefore, strangers pay taxes to educate the children of strangers, and are happy to do so as long as it is seen to be fair and useful.

This is how More Mores for More becomes social architecture rather than merely personal aspiration. The society does not depend upon every person spontaneously choosing the wider good. It embeds a settlement in roles, funding, expectations and institutions so that people are enabled and constrained to act more socially than they might have done alone. This is moral structure, architecture that makes us better than we would be on our own.

6. Settlements create winners and losers

Every settlement allocates advantage and disadvantage. This is unavoidable. A settlement privileges some behaviours, restrains others, funds some interests, taxes others, legitimises some claims and delegitimises others.

Because there are winners and losers, paradox settlements **require legitimacy**. People are more likely to accept loss when they believe the settlement is recognisable, procedurally fair, reality-tested and connected to a larger common good and open to future deliberation.

This is why felt truth matters. If a group experiences a settlement as humiliation, exclusion, exploitation or moral erasure, the paradox has not been properly held. It has merely been suppressed until enough energy returns to reopen it.

Legitimacy does not mean that everyone receives everything they want. It means that the settlement can be seen as a serious attempt to recognise both necessary truths, distribute restraint fairly and preserve the viability of the wider whole.

7. Settlements hold until they no longer hold

A settlement can last for decades or centuries if reality continues to support it. But a settlement is not permanent. It holds until it is perturbed.

Perturbations include new technology, war, demographic change, economic collapse, inequality, institutional corruption, new scientific knowledge, migration, media change, climate stress or loss of trust. The perturbation does not necessarily create the paradox. It reveals that the old settlement no longer matches reality.

When a settlement breaks down, people often rediscover the suppressed side of the paradox. What had seemed settled becomes morally alive again.

This links paradox directly to homeostasis. A settlement is a social operating range. It absorbs ordinary variation and continues to hold the competing truths in a viable relationship. When a perturbation exceeds that range, the system can no longer

return automatically to its former position. It must re-examine the settlement and establish a new balance.

8. Wealth often helps settlement

Many paradoxes are easier to settle when a society has surplus wealth. Wealth is not the same as wisdom, but surplus gives room for compromise. It allows compensation, transition, public goods, welfare, retraining, infrastructure, enforcement, education and institutional redundancy.

This wealth is usually a derivative of productivity. Productivity creates the surplus that makes kindness, inclusion and long-term investment easier. Without surplus, paradoxes become harsher because every settlement feels like direct loss.

Universal education also shows why wealth helps settlement. It was expensive, but industrial and administrative societies increasingly needed literate, numerate, trainable citizens. Productivity helped fund education, and education then fed productivity. The settlement became self-reinforcing.

The relationship to More Mores for More is direct. More physical capability creates room for more social inclusion, restraint and care. But the translation is not automatic. Surplus creates the possibility of a more generous settlement; paradox-holding determines whether that possibility is actually realised.

9. Paradox can back-test different settlement pathways

The five-position spectrum introduced in Section 4 and Exhibits 7.4 and 7.5 can be extended into a paradox abacus. Each paradox becomes one row on the abacus, with the current settlement located from −2 to +2: the outer positions represent dominance by one pole, the intermediate positions represent a legitimate but left- or right-led settlement, and zero represents a held tension in which both poles are strongly protected.

The purpose is not to calculate a single “correct” answer. It is to make visible how a person, organisation, institution or country is presently holding a set of necessary but competing goods. A single row allows one settlement to be examined; placing several rows together reveals the wider pattern. The abacus can then be used horizontally to compare different systems on the same paradoxes, longitudinally to see whether a settlement has moved over time, and vertically to examine whether the position on one paradox is reinforcing or destabilising positions elsewhere. In this sense, paradoxes are not independent dials: excessive order may affect truth,

excessive boundary may affect inclusion, and the treatment of competition may alter both cooperation and equality.

The following exhibit 7.6 backsights the approach against two sharply contrasting national settlements. Denmark is rated 97/100 and “Free” in Freedom House's 2026 assessment, while Russia is rated 12/100 and “Not Free”.

The Russian assessment is deliberately made with a Putin overlay: it seeks to describe how the national governing system actually operates under Vladimir Putin rather than Russian society or Russian citizens in the abstract. Recent analysis characterises the regime as personalistic, with decision-making concentrated around Putin and a long-established power vertical in which access, position and resources are strongly conditioned by loyalty to the apex.

For Secrecy ↔ Transparency, the unit of analysis is specifically government itself—how much the state protects the secrecy of its own decision-making versus exposing its actions, information and reasoning to independent scrutiny. The resulting positions are therefore evidence-informed judgements about two different settlement architectures, intended to be examined and challenged rather than treated as mechanical scores.

Position for ten major human paradoxes, *Denmark* and *Russia* as examples. Exhibit 7.6

Paradox pair	−2 Full left	−1 Partial left	0 Held tension	+1 Partial right	+2 Full right	Commentary on Russian back-sighting results and abacus positioning
1. National advantage ↔ global restraint	National advantage dominates	National interest leads	National and global interests protected	Global restraint leads	Global restraint dominates	Sovereign power, geopolitical influence and national strategic interest placed well ahead of external restraint. International constraints are accepted principally where they remain compatible with Russian state interests.
2. Competition ↔ cooperation	Rivalry suppresses cooperation	Competition leads	Competition and cooperation protected	Cooperation leads	Cooperation suppresses competition	Competition for influence, resources and position operates inside the Russian power structure, but independent cooperation capable of creating alternative centres of power is constrained.
4. Exclusion ↔ inclusion	Exclusion dominates	Exclusion leads	Exclusion and inclusion held	Inclusion leads	Inclusion dominates	Formal membership is broad, but political, institutional and civic inclusion is conditional. Opposition groups, independent organisations and actors outside accepted state boundaries face significant exclusion.
5. Wealth inequality ↔ wealth distribution	Inequality dominates	Inequality leads	Inequality and distribution held	Distribution leads	Distribution dominates	Wealth and economic influence are highly concentrated. Privileged access to assets and opportunity is strongly associated with political power. Redistribution does not offset the concentration of wealth and privilege.
6. Innovation ↔ sclerosis	Innovation dominates	Innovation leads	Renewal and continuity held	Continuity leads	Sclerosis dominates	Russia retains important scientific, military and technical capability, but entrenched institutions, political centralisation and protection of established interests constrain wider experimentation, renewal and competitive innovation.
7. Control ↔ freedom	Control dominates	Control leads	Control and freedom protected	Freedom leads	Freedom dominates	Political control and state authority dominate the settlement. Opposition, independent media, civil society and dissent operate within increasingly narrow boundaries set by the state.
8. Laws for the rich ↔ laws for the poor	Law favours	Privilege leads	Equal law protected	Poor favoured	Law favours poor	Formal law exists, but political connection, wealth can substantially affect exposure to enforcement and access to protection. The practical settlement therefore privileges powerful insiders over equal application of law.
9. Secrecy ↔ transparency	Secrecy dominates	Secrecy leads	Secrecy and transparency protected	Transparency	Transparency dominates	Government decision-making is highly opaque and concentrated near the apex. Independent scrutiny, access to information and visibility of the reasoning behind major state decisions are heavily restricted.
10. Indifference ↔ compassion	Indifference dominates	Indifference	Indifference and compassion held	Compassion leads	Compassion dominates	The state retains pensions, family benefits and other forms of social provision, but these can be subordinated to state and regime objectives.
12. Punishment ↔ rehabilitation	Punishment dominates	Punishment	Punishment and rehabilitation protected	Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation dominates	The Russian criminal-justice settlement places comparatively heavy weight on punishment, deterrence and custodial control. Rehabilitation remains present, but is secondary to punitive and coercive responses.

Denmark

Russia

The paradox abacus can be read in two complementary ways. **Horizontally**, each paradox pair can be examined on its own: where does a country sit on that tension, why does it sit there, and how does its settlement compare with another country? **Vertically**, the rows can then be read together to reveal the broader pattern of settlement within each country and the way different paradoxes may reinforce or weaken one another. Used in this way, the abacus produces both **individual insights about particular tensions** and **comparative insights about the architecture of the whole system**.

The horizontal comparison of Denmark and Russia is revealing precisely because neither country occupies the centre on every paradox. Denmark commonly adopts a discernible leaning while continuing to protect the countervailing good: cooperation can lead without extinguishing competition; equality can lead without eliminating contribution; and strong boundaries can coexist with substantial inclusion. On tensions such as **Exclusion and Inclusion, Control and Freedom, Secrecy and Transparency, and Indifference and Compassion**, the Danish settlement generally retains significant room for both poles.

Russia under Putin also displays distinctive settlements rather than simply occupying one end of every scale, but several of its positions move much closer to destructive dominance. Personal authority at the apex overwhelms the institutional *We*; privileged access becomes detached from contribution; Control heavily constrains Freedom; Secrecy overwhelms Transparency; and National advantage overwhelms Global restraint. Other Russian positions—such as Competition and Cooperation, Exclusion and Inclusion, and Innovation and Sclerosis—show more complicated mixtures and therefore provide useful insights that would be lost in a simple label such as “authoritarian”.

The **vertical comparison is more powerful still**, because it asks whether these individual settlements combine into a coherent and self-correcting whole. In Denmark, the pattern is broadly mutually reinforcing. A relatively strong *We* supports cooperation and collective provision; cooperation helps sustain equality while leaving room for contribution; institutionalised Control provides the dependable rules within which substantial Freedom can operate; Government Transparency exposes authority to challenge; and the continuing availability of Truth helps the system identify and correct excesses elsewhere. The result is not a perfectly balanced society, but a system in which most paradoxes remain inside a viable range and in which the countervailing pole remains available as a corrective when one side begins to go too far.

Russia shows a contrasting recursive pattern. Concentrated personal authority weakens independent institutions; weaker institutions reduce genuine competition and challenge; reduced Government Transparency makes correction more difficult; dominant Control increases the cost of dissent. Those effects can then reinforce the concentration of authority with which the cycle began.

The larger lesson is therefore not simply that **Denmark performs better and Russia performs worse**. The abacus shows *how* two different political settlements are produced. Denmark's individual leanings generally remain bounded by countervailing goods and are supported by institutions capable of correction; Russia's more extreme settlements increasingly interact in ways that reinforce concentration, opacity and reduced correction. A user of the paradox abacus can therefore move from asking **“Where does this country sit on this particular tension?”**, to **“How does it compare with another country?”**, and finally to the more important systems question: **“What happens when all of these settlements operate together?”** That ability to move from individual paradoxes to comparative patterns and then to the architecture of the whole is the principal diagnostic value of the paradox abacus.

10. What this means for humans

Our brains animate us through competition, cooperation, fear, belonging, status, reflection and restraint. Society repurposes our predispositions. We live inside nested holons. Those systems have to remain viable. We act through felt truths that can help us see reality or hide it from us. We need control and correction to detect drift. We need clear aims so we solve the right problem at the right level. At the highest levels, many of those problems become paradoxes.

That changes the human task. We cannot treat every high-level disagreement as a problem with one correct answer. Freedom and order, competition and cooperation, national interest and global restraint, innovation and safety all carry necessary goods. The work is to keep both goods visible and prevent either side from becoming destructive.

This also explains why legitimacy matters. A paradox settlement creates winners and losers. People accept restraint more readily when the process is fair, the evidence can be challenged, the reasons are visible and the settlement remains open to correction. Truth-seeking, control, correction and paradox settlement therefore belong together.

The brain makes this difficult. Under threat, we narrow the We, shorten the time horizon and defend felt truths more fiercely. Brain literacy and self-observation give us more room to notice that shift before reaction becomes policy, law or institutional behaviour.

The practical implication is strong. Humans need better ways to see the whole system, locate the level of the problem, separate solvable problems from paradoxes, make competing truths visible, test settlements and re-settle them when reality changes. That is part of the architecture required for More Mores for More.

11. What this means for AI

AI must help create the abundance that makes difficult settlements easier. More productivity creates more room for transition, compensation, public goods and wider inclusion.

AI enters nested human systems. A solution that works at one level can damage another. AI therefore has to see the parts and the whole, not simply optimise the nearest task.

AI enters a brain-mediated world. It can inflame fear, certainty and tribal felt truths, or it can act as a mirror that helps people see assumptions, evidence, consequences and competing views.

AI can strengthen truth-seeking and control. It can gather evidence, compare claims, model consequences, detect drift and show when a settlement is moving outside its viable range.

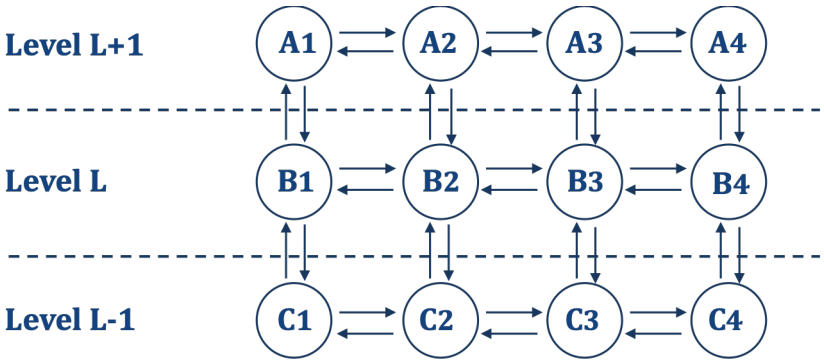
Aims still come first. AI can optimise powerfully once an aim is given, but it should not quietly choose the human aim or redefine the values being held.

AI can clarify paradox but it cannot make paradox disappear. More computation can show trade-offs and consequences. It cannot make one necessary human good cease to matter.

AI should support settlement, not claim legitimacy. It can help people deliberate, compare positions and monitor consequences, but humans must remain responsible for settlements that allocate rights, costs, benefits, restraint and loss.

AI itself must sit inside reciprocal constraints. Government, labs, users, markets and independent institutions must constrain one another, and the AI system must not become the sole judge of whether its own behaviour is acceptable.

Reciprocal constraints within levels – 8+1 model. Exhibit 7.7



Alignment therefore includes paradox-holding. AI should not optimise one pole until the other disappears. It should make the tension visible, strengthen evidence and correction, and help humans act before either side becomes destructive. That is its role in building More Mores for More.