It's Not the AI – It's Us!

Ten Commandments for the Wise & Responsible use of AI

Barbara Steffen[1], Edward A. Lee[2], Moshe Y. Vardi[3], and Bernhard Steffen[4]

[1]METAFrame Technologies GmbH, Dortmund, Germany
barbara.steffen@metaframe.de

[2]UC Berkeley, Berkeley, USA
eal@berkeley.edu

[3]Rice University, Houston, USA
vardi@rice.edu

[4]TU Dortmund University, Dortmund, Germany
steffen@cs.tu-dortmund.de

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic idea - it is a daily companion embedded in and impacting our daily lives from education, work, to culture. Yet while AI appears to make life easier, its rise also initiates fundamental questions about who we are as humans. We believe that AI does not think, feel, or desire, but rather learns from our behavior, mirroring our collective values, biases, and aspirations. Thus, the issue is not what AI is becoming, but what we are becoming through AI. As the European Union's Apply AI Strategy (2025) and the Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism (2019) emphasize, technology must serve human dignity, social well-being, and democratic accountability. We argue that the responsible use of AI begins not with code or law, but with conscient use - across individuals, families, and organizations. Here we propose the Ten Commandments for the Wise and Responsible Use of AI. This framework aligns closely with Floridi and Cowls (2019), who propose five guiding principles for AI in society - beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice, and explicability - which underpin the ten commandments.

AI's Double-Edged Sword

AI addresses - and amplifies - human weaknesses. Considering human's bounded rationality, and today's pervasive information overload and rapid change, it is not surprising that we prefer ease, pursue simple solutions, delegate to technology, and resist uncertainty. These dispositions make AI compelling - and leave us vulnerable to the very systems we create. We become both its eager adopters and its unintended casualties.

The love of convenience drives people to embrace AI's efficiency and instant accessibility. In an age where productivity and speed are rewarded, this affection for convenience can become a trap: we allow systems to think for us, mistaking comfort for competence. Carr (2010) warns that this very convenience erodes our capacity for deep reflection, echoing Steffen et al. (2024, Impressions and Thoughts After 30 Interviews), who caution that delegating cognitive effort to AI gradually undermines human autonomy and intellectual resilience.

Convenience becomes corrosive when it dulls our willingness to question or to engage in slow, effortful thought.

Our aversion to uncertainty reflects a deep discomfort with ambiguity. Kahneman (2011) and Taleb (2010) show that people prefer a misleading certainty over an honest unknown. AI caters to this weakness by delivering confident answers, soothing our anxiety even when its outputs are merely probabilistic guesses. The interviews in Steffen et al. (2024, Impressions and Thoughts After 30 Interviews) highlight the risk that this craving for certainty promotes blind trust in AI tools, displacing critical dialogue and human oversight. Early evidence shows lower brain engagement when people write with ChatGPT versus unaided work (MIT Media Lab, 2025). In offices, this fuels "workslop" - polished but low-value output that drags productivity (Niederhoffer, K. et al., 2025). Even worse O'Neil (2016) warns, for non-experts, distinguishing between what sounds right and what is right becomes nearly impossible.

Together, these two tendencies form what Steffen et al. (2024, How Hot is the Water) calls the "boiling frog" syndrome: a metaphor for the gradual, almost imperceptible loss of critical awareness. A frog placed in cold water that is slowly heated fails to perceive the creeping danger until it is too late. In much the same way, we risk complacency: convenience and certainty can quietly erode curiosity, discernment, and moral agency. The immediate danger lies not in a sudden technological overthrow but in a slow degradation of vigilance and responsibility.

Families: Establishing the Foundations of Digital Wisdom

Ideally, children should first master the basics - talking, reading, writing, thinking, reflecting, debating - as the foundation for a balanced relationship with technology. It is families, especially parents, who have the responsibility to lay the foundation. Today, children encounter AI daily - in voice assistants, recommendation systems, and educational tools – well before they had the chance to establish their own competences and to understand what they might miss. Kasneci et al. (2023) show that AI can enhance learning when used to stimulate inquiry rather than deliver fixed answers. Without guidance, however, children risk becoming passive consumers of algorithmic output. Parents therefore need to model reflective AI use: talk through when to trust a digital source, how bias creeps in, and how to navigate tools built on statistical prediction. Such conversations build metacognition - the capacity to reflect about one's own thinking. Schools can reinforce it by teaching not only technical skills but also media, moral, and civic literacy. Luckin et al. (2023) argue, the aim in the AI era is to cultivate digital wisdom: using AI to extend curiosity, not replace it. The future of digital wisdom begins at kitchen tables and playgrounds, where children learn to balance trust with healthy skepticism.

Organizations: Establishing a Culture of Responsibility

While families shape habits of mind, organizations build the structures in which those habits operate. The European Commission's Apply AI Strategy (2025) calls for human-centric, trustworthy AI that weaves ethics into innovation, promotes responsible adoption and

invests in AI literacy - grounded in transparency and accountability. Organizations should adopt AI consciously: they must educate employees on what AI is, which tools are safe, what uses are permitted, and how to use them well. The current AI hype implies that "more AI is always better," yet failed pilots and growing workslop show that AI is a tool with strengths and limits. Conscious use is therefore both an economic necessity and a prerequisite for safety and ethics. Moving beyond compliance means turning responsibility into a capability: establish interdisciplinary AI governance boards, audit systems for bias and impact, and reward ethical awareness. In education and health care, responsible practice protects not only personal data but dignity; in business, it builds trust and long-term resilience. Ultimately, organizational maturity in AI ethics mirrors human maturity: it grows through reflection, humility, and shared values. And algorithmic-audit debates remind us that technical checks are not accountability - continuous, independent oversight remains essential.

Ten Commandments for the Wise and Responsible Use of AI

The ten commandments outlined below translate ethical reflection into action. They are not laws but deontological commitments - habits of duty, awareness, and integrity that guide AI use across contexts: From the individual to the family, and organizations. Together, they operationalize the vision of the EU Apply AI Strategy by embedding human-centered values into everyday practice.

1. Adopt AI Consciously and Deliberately
Use AI with intention: Why is it needed? What does it enable and/or replace? Does it truly act in the interest of humans?

2. Protect Human Capabilities
Preserve critical thinking, empathy, and creativity through continuous learning and reflective practice, resisting the comfort of outsourcing to AI too much too fast. Striving for convenience risks reducing our curiosity and independent thought.

3. Foster Human Development Through Early and Mindful AI Engagement
Engage with AI intentionally from an early stage - exploring, questioning, and creating together - to cultivate curiosity, empathy, and digital literacy. Technology shall support and strengthen humanity.

4. Leverage AI as a Learning Partner
Treat AI as a collaborator in thought, not a source of authority. Use it to think deeper, pose better questions, not just to get faster answers.

5. Clarify Responsibility and Validate Before Acting
Keep accountability human. Treat every AI output as a proposal, not a decision. Validate its reasoning, context, and ethical implications before implementation, ensuring that human judgment remains the ultimate authority.

6. Make the Use of AI Visible and Discussable

Clarify the role of AI in any decision or creation. Openness strengthens fairness and public trust.

7. Prioritize Meaning over Efficiency
Value insight and understanding over speed and productivity: the fastest solution is rarely the best.

8. Promote Fairness and Inclusivity
Recognize and correct biases to ensure that AI benefits all members of society.

9. Safeguard Privacy and Data Security
Protect personal data, particularly that of vulnerable groups. Consent, confidentiality, and protection are moral imperatives.

10. Commit to Oversight and Continuous Learning
Evaluate AI's impact regularly and adapt practices as understanding grows. Responsible AI evolves with human wisdom.

Integrating Human Scales

These commandments gain strength when understood as interdependent. Individuals must cultivate critical awareness; families must nurture moral reflection; and organizations must institutionalize accountability. Each dimension reinforces the others (see Figure 1). An individual raised in a reflective home brings ethical sensitivity to the workplace. An organization that values transparency empowers employees and thus families to trust technology. The European Commission's Apply AI Strategy (2025) aims to scale this interdependence by building ecosystems of trust - where innovation and ethics evolve together. Thus, responsible AI is not a technical endpoint but a cultural process. It depends on cooperation among citizens, educators, leaders, and policymakers to ensure that progress remains human-centered.

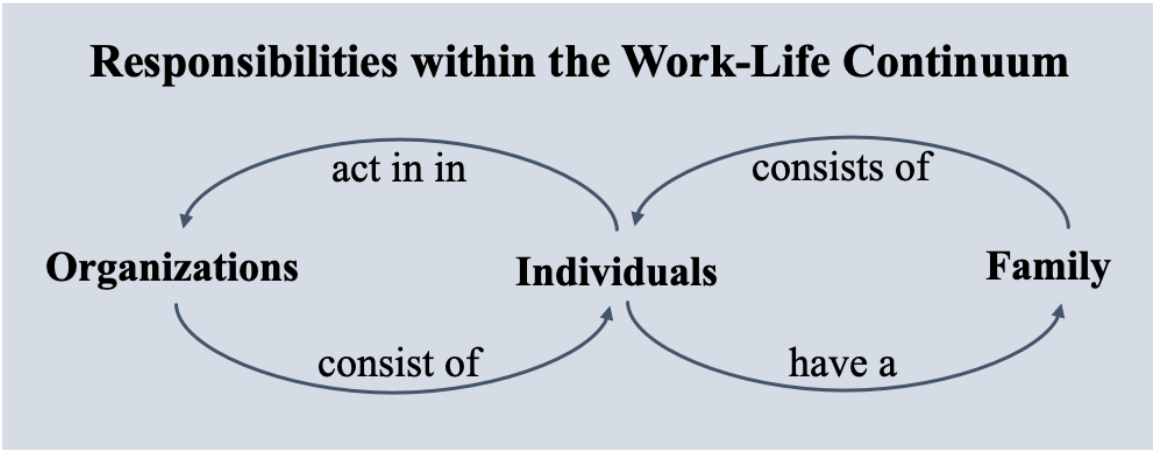

Figure 1. Reinforcement Loops of the Dimensions.

Of course, the prospect of a superintelligent AI escaping human control - explored by Bostrom (2014) and the Center for AI Safety (2023) - remains a serious concern. Bostrom warns that "once unfriendly superintelligence exists, it would prevent us from replacing it or changing its preferences." The Center for AI Safety echoes this concern, urging that the mitigation of extinction risks from AI be treated as a global priority - alongside pandemics and nuclear war. Such threats cannot be ignored.

While a utilitarian approach to AI ethics would leave us wondering what we can do to prevent such outcomes, our ten commandments offer an actionable, deontological framework: Whatever one's estimate of these risks, even when confronting distant and uncertain threats, the ten commandments remind us that consciousness, responsibility, transparency, openness, collaboration, and human oversight are not optional virtues but essential safeguards against both present and future dangers.

Conclusions

AI mirrors the society that builds it. It can illuminate human creativity or amplify our complacency. The Ten Commandments for the Wise and Responsible Use of AI provide a framework that connects the individual integrity, family's responsibility, and organizational intent. They align closely with the European Commission (2025, Apply AI Strategy), which envisions a future of trustworthy, inclusive, and ethical technology. Ultimately, it's not up to the AI, it's up to us – our established, lived, and protected level of conscious AI use.

References

Bostrom, N. (2014). *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies.* Oxford University Press.

Carr, N. (2010). *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains.* W. W. Norton.

Center for AI Safety. (2023, May 30). *Statement on AI Risk.* https://www.safe.ai/statement-on-ai-risk

European Commission. (2025). *Apply AI Strategy.*

Floridi, L., & Cowls, J. (2019). *A Unified Framework of Five Principles for AI in Society.* Harvard Data Science Review.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

MIT Media Lab, (2025). *Your Brain on ChatGPT. *

Niederhoffer, K. et al., (2025). *AI-Generated 'Workslop' Is Destroying Productivity. * Harvard Business Review.

O'Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of Math Destruction.* Crown.

Steffen, B., Lee, E. A., & Steffen, B. (Eds.). (2024). *Let's Talk AI: Interdisciplinarity Is a Must.* Springer Nature.

Taleb, N. N. (2010). *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable.* Random House.

Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism. (2019). *TU Wien Informatics.* https://dighum.ec.tuwien.ac.at/vienna-manifesto/