

Swanvesha

JULY 2026

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“ટીપે ટીપે સરોવર ભરાય”

A lake is filled drop by drop

–Gojarati Proverb



WELCOME TO SWANVESHA

Swanvesha (Swa-Anvesha, Sanskrit for *Self-Inquiry*) offers insights, stories, and actionable strategies to help leaders grow and adapt in an ever-changing world. Stay informed, inspired, and lead with purpose.

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WELCOME NOTES

Its birthday time in North America. Canada and US celebrated it in July. The World cup is also hitting higher notes with great matches and the buzz that it brings in every 4 years. But for July, I am choosing to go with Cats as a theme. I don't know how it came about. As I went about writing the stories, it developed on those lines. Under **Musings**, I share a zen story about and connect it with Levis jeans and question, purpose in a different light. In **Novella**, Schrödinger's cat appears both in quantum physics and decision making. Finally, in **Corporate Culture**, the fable about 2 cats and a monkey who ate their roti. But this time the spotlight is on the chaos and not the moral.

I am an Executive and Leadership Coach. Connect with me on my website www.swanvesha.com for more resources or write to me at swanvesha@gmail.com. Happy reading.

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Musings



CATS, POCKETS, FENCES

In a Zen monastery, a cat used to disturb morning meditation. The master instructed the monks to tie the cat outside before practice.

It solved the problem.

Years later, after the cat and master are gone, new cats are tied up before meditation because "that's how it's done." Over time, even scholars began attributing spiritual meaning to it. No one remembered the original reason. The ritual survived but the reason disappeared.

But not every practice that outlives its original purpose suffers the same fate. Sometimes, the purpose simply evolves. Take the example of the small **watch pocket** on Levi's jeans (often called the **fob pocket** or **watch pocket**) was originally designed in the late 19th century to hold a pocket watch. Today, almost no one uses it for that purpose, some put loose change in it and now it remains on most pairs of jeans as nostalgia.

These two stories show two different aspects of purpose:

- **The Zen cat** = the purpose is forgotten, yet the practice continues unquestioned.
- **The Levi's watch pocket** = the original purpose is largely obsolete, **but it is retained consciously** because it has become part of the brand's heritage and identity.

Leaders often make one of two mistakes. They either preserve practices without remembering why they exist, or they remove them without understanding what they have become.

Great leaders, however, know the difference. They don't preserve the past blindly. They don't discard it casually. They understand its purpose before deciding its future. To distinguish between a 'cat' and a 'watch pocket' in your own organization, apply these three diagnostic tests:

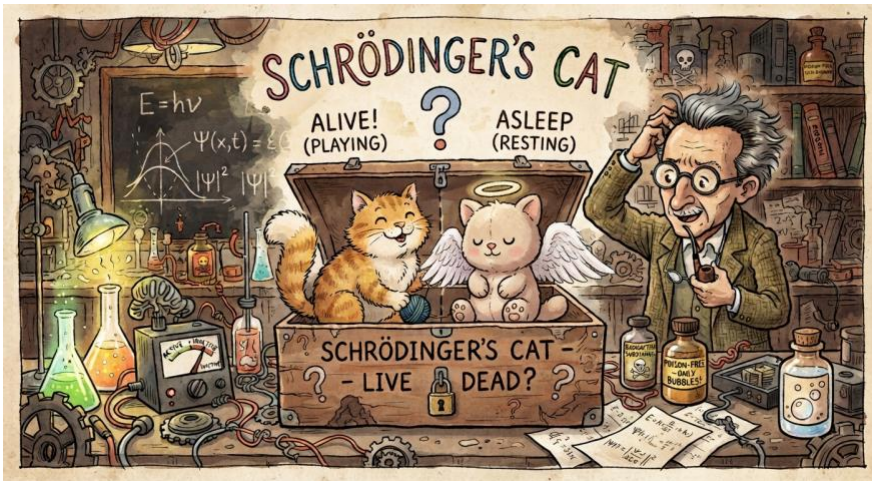
- **The 'Why' Test:** Can anyone explain the *original* intended outcome of this process?
- **The 'Value' Test:** Does this practice currently solve a real problem, or does it merely maintain historical comfort?
- **The 'Identity' Test:** If we removed this tomorrow, would it damage our culture, or would it simply free up time?

If you are still unsure, remember **Chesterton's Fence**. The principle states that you should never tear down a fence until you understand why it was put up in the first place. Some 'cats' are just bad habits, but some 'watch pockets'—or even seemingly outdated fences—exist for reasons that aren't immediately obvious. Before you modernize, iterate, or delete, you must first understand the purpose it was designed to serve."



In 1935, physicist Erwin Schrödinger proposed a thought experiment: a cat is placed in a sealed box with a radioactive mechanism that has a 50/50 chance of triggering and releasing poison.

According to quantum mechanics, until the box is opened and observed, the cat is simultaneously both alive and dead in a state of 'superposition'. The outcome only resolves into a single reality the moment you open the box and look.



This is a perfect metaphor for navigating organizational complexity and the devaluation of certainty. Leaders often freeze, demanding more data, more reports, and 100% guarantees before making a decision.

However, they often fall into a false binary. They believe they must either force an immediate outcome or remain paralyzed in fear. **There is a third path: the mastery of observation.** Great leaders understand that sometimes, the most strategic act is to observe the 'box'—to monitor the market signals, the team's morale, and the emerging trends—without forcing a premature resolution. They don't ignore the box, nor do they rush to open it; they let the situation reach its own natural maturity. They recognize that rushing the observation is just as destructive as delaying the decision."

- If you want the "cat to be alive"—meaning a thriving project or a successful launch—you make the decisions that build that reality.
- If you want the "cat to be dead"—meaning you need to sunset a legacy product to free up capital, kill a non-performing initiative to stop resource drain, or exit a market that no longer aligns with your core strategy—you make the cold, calculated decision to pull the plug, effectively choosing to end that reality to make room for a new one.
- If you choose to observe—meaning the market is volatile, the data is noisy, or the path forward isn't yet mature—you resist the urge to force an outcome. You treat the "box" as a living laboratory, gathering insight from the ongoing flux until the timing is right to act.

Optimal decisions are not born from infinite data; they are born from the courage to act with what you have, at the right time. You must stop waiting for the uncertainty to clear and start deciding which reality you are going to create.

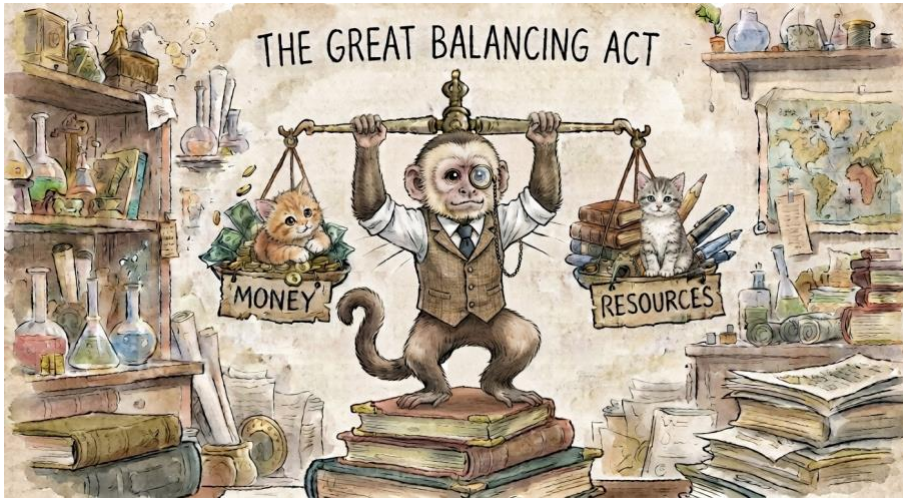
The next time you find yourself stuck in analysis paralysis, know this. The box does not hold the answer, you do

Image created by Gemini AI

Corporate Culture



CATASTROPHIC CONTROL



All of us know the fable about the two cats fighting over a piece of roti are tricked by a clever monkey, who offers to divide it using a scale. The monkey, however, intentionally keeps eating from the larger side to make the pieces equal, leaving the cats with nothing. In the end, the crafty monkey consumes the entire roti. The cats are left with nothing, and the lesson is usually, "Resolve your own conflicts."

But look closer at the monkey. What if the monkey isn't an intruder? What if the monkey is the leader?

In organizational leadership, stagnation is often a bigger threat than conflict. When two teams operate in the same space, they frequently become territorial, comfortable, and bloated. They stop innovating because they are too busy guarding their own piece of the pie. They become convinced that their current resources, costs, and processes are "essential" to their survival.

This is where a master leader introduces **controlled chaos**.

Consider a scenario where two regional sales teams are competing for the same market, each insisting they need a full suite of dedicated administrative support to function. Both teams regularly escalate their grievances to leadership, demanding a "fair" distribution of headcount and budget. Instead of stepping in to "solve" the conflict and restore peace, the leader adopts the strategy of the monkey. By tightening resources, introducing ambiguity, and refusing to hand down a final judgment, the leader forces the teams into a state of friction. Each "bite" the leader takes—a budget cut here, a process constraint there—is not an act of malice; it is a catalyst for fitness.

The teams complain, they fight, and they scramble. They are forced to rethink how they operate because they no longer have the luxury of waste. They are pushed to innovate, to streamline, and to find creative solutions to survive. Without realizing it, they are evolving. By the time they stabilize, they are leaner, more effective, and more competitive than they were when the *roti* was whole and easy to access. Sometimes leadership is also letting things be grey and chaos to ensue. By waiting for things to settle and interjecting just enough to control the chaos and not let it get out of control, you bring in innovation, alignment and focus.

When the Apollo 13 oxygen tank exploded, the mission shifted from a planned scientific expedition to a race for survival. NASA's engineers were handed a box of mismatched parts—hoses, plastic bags, and tape—and told they had to make a CO2 filter fit a square hole into a round one. The result was that teams had to abandon their "prestige" roles and compete to provide the most viable survival solution under extreme pressure. By stripping away every non-essential protocol, they achieved a breakthrough in collaborative engineering that saved the lives of the crew. They didn't just solve a problem; they fundamentally rewrote the manual for emergency crisis management. The next time there is a friction, maybe let it play out.

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Hasta Luego



THANK YOU

Thank you very much for reading my newsletter. I hope you enjoyed it. This month's "cat phrase" is

Why did the cat get promoted to Senior Management? Because he already knows how to take 16-hour naps during the workday and still act like it was a "high-level strategic retreat".

Cat ch you later.

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