

ESSAY

Fragility of Technology

by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



In the mid-1980s when computer-aided automation was coming of age, technology loomed large on my mind. I switched to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and made a recognizable contribution to the Factory of the Future projects. Now retired, I still keep myself aware of leading-edge marvels such as the Internet of Things, BlockChain, cloud computing, and Internet coding languages.

Despite my fascination with technology, I worry about its fragility. I don't think that the Internet technology has yet achieved the Six Sigma status that it must have in order to be 99.9997% perfect or to achieve a failure rate of 3.4 parts per million.

My wife teaches college-level courses online. Very often she faces system outages for hours either related to the fault of our Internet provider or due to the crash of the university's network. This occurs at least two times a week, a far cry from Six Sigma.

Problems with technology are not limited to online schooling; it occurs quite often in banking, hospital records, insurance companies, automobile factories, power grids, social media to name a few. Yesterday I was in an optical shop for new glasses. They couldn't access my electronic prescription and insurance information because their system was down.

The fragility of technology leaks into the physical world as well. Once I was inside the Costco stores when I had to use their toilet. While washing my hands, the faucet suddenly stopped working. I looked for the old-fashioned faucet handles. There was none there. Their entire hydraulic system including the flush was controlled electronically. They don't work when the system stops working.

Approximately, two years ago, I purchased a state-of-the-art computer that also works as a tablet. Due to my fascination with technology, I decided to use biometric identification instead of using a traditional

password. Every time I turned on the computer, I gazed at the camera. It refused to recognize me.

I realize, based on my experiences, that we shouldn't depend on technology entirely. I cannot do any mental math anymore. I double-check simple additions with the help of a calculator. I am totally rudderless without a global positioning system (GPS). I worry about dementia quite often because I hardly exercise my faculties for day-to-day functions. I also worry about what will happen to us if our satellites are destroyed by our enemies or are damaged by a sudden burst of the solar storm? We would certainly go back to the early nineteenth century. The problem is that we are no longer cognitively and physically equipped to lead an archaic life. Will our grandchildren be able to function without electronic gadgets? These thoughts worry me.

The problems are more far-reaching than that. Imagine, our first responders will not have access to their location systems. Delays in the ground and air traffic will begin to develop. Systems that depend on GPS time stamps — ATMs, power grids, computer-data, and cell-phone networks — will begin to fail; our planes and ships will go astray. We'll lose the capability to defend ourselves and operate drones against our enemies. The internet will collapse. We'll be crippled and will not know how to follow daily routines.

Yes, we must embrace technology, but in a manageable way. We must have a backup system that should include learning math the old-fashioned way, being skilled enough to switch to the analog system, and learn basic survival skills. We should always keep in mind that technology, after all, is fragile.

***Give love a chance
By Ashokkumar Lal***

***Russia and Ukraine
Israel and Palestine,
Make love,
War is not fine.***

***Drop bullets and guns,
Raise toast with wine,
Share nature's bounty,
Enjoy the sunshine.***

***Nothing is your,
Nothing is mine,
Children of God,
Do not whine.***

***So, stop killing,
Follow the line,
Hatred is folly,
Love is divine.***