



A Leadership Pipeline

Why every organisation needs a leadership succession plan

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The Imperative

What happens, or would happen, in some imaginary world, if we were simply to put people into positions of leadership based on their technical skills alone before giving them any leadership training? Unfortunately, this is an all-too-common situation. I visualise the impact that such individuals can have on an organisation in terms of a sliding scale.

At the extreme right-hand side of the scale, in the rarest of cases, those very few inexperienced yet naturally talented, empathetic individuals may actually add some limited value through their behaviours. Sliding left towards the centre of the slider we more commonly find that the person has a neutral effect, adding no leadership value, whilst doing no direct harm. Finally, if we dial the slide all the way over to the left, we will experience clumsy leadership behaviours and interventions that do actual harm to team cohesion, morale and capability.

Doing Harm  **Adding no value**  **Limited Value**

Preparing the individuals within your organisation from the day they enter until the end of their career to be effective leaders is probably the most powerful single thing you can do for organisational performance. Leadership development should be viewed more like a **career-long apprenticeship**, where people are constantly engaged in a cyclical process of learning, acting, then reflecting on their actions.

It takes us time to absorb and understand the spectrum and prioritization of values that bind an organisation together. It also takes time to really get to know the multitude of overt and covert knowledge, skills and attitudes that your coworkers possess. But most importantly it takes time for others to **choose to follow you**. For others to decide that your personal self-leadership is exemplary and that your default setting is to help or 'serve' others.

Albert Einstein once purportedly declared that "Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it, earns it ... he who doesn't ... pays it." [1] I took a long time to find a suitable analogy to begin this article on the importance of having a leadership pipeline and why every organisation needs a leadership succession plan. This quote from Albert Einstein seems to my mind to perfectly sum up the exponential benefits associated with taking such an approach.

Investing in depth or investing continuously over time in our people's leadership development is something that most organisations, if they are being honest with themselves, would consider 'desirable, but just too costly at the moment, and something to maybe consider for next year.' It is true that the cost in time and money, if leadership training is divorced from day-to-day work activities and not 'operationalised' as it is being learned, can appear prohibitive with very little return on investment for the organisation.

Exponential growth over time is the essence of compound interest. When we first begin to invest, the benefits appear tiny compared to the investment we have made and to be fair, as with the investment world, the first foray or the beginnings of developing positive leadership behaviours is usually more associated with creating a positive habit, rather than realising any noticeable returns on our investment.

As we begin investing in the most junior members of our workforce, the tiny changes in their leadership behaviour and their limited effect throughout such a large organisation can also superficially appear to deliver no real or tangible benefits. However, this is to err. The very scaling-effect of imbuing all of your lower-level employees with sound Self-leadership, Servant leadership and Values-based leadership concepts, serves not only to prepare them and the organisation to deal with future challenges, but **delivers real results** in the present.

Maintaining our investment analogy a little longer, any sound investment adviser will always encourage the idea of having a diversified investment portfolio. Such portfolios are composed of different asset classes with different 'behavioural' characteristics.

Some fixed income assets are seen as safe havens during **high volatility**. Other funds will take a **higher risk / reward approach** and seek to deliver 'better than market expectation' results. Yet other financial wrappers such as pension funds, seek to deliver a stable long-term investment with a future **regular guaranteed return**, and finally there are funds that seek to **exploit emerging markets** or technologies that could have the potential to deliver really great returns for those bold enough to invest in them.

So, what does a diverse investment portfolio have to do with a leadership pipeline. Well, at a strategic level, two things actually. Both are concerned with realising **growth over time** regardless of what is happening in the market and both **leverage diversity**.

In the case of leadership, I am referring to unlocking the diversity of knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) within your people and harnessing their creativity for the benefit of the organisation. This of course can only be achieved if the current leadership begin the process of investing in depth and allow those that demonstrate the right leadership behaviours the freedom of action to exploit their abilities.

Secondly, developing nascent leadership behaviours in your people will give your organisation a real advantage in dealing with the following: market volatility, being more capable of taking a considered higher risk / reward approach, ensuring that the organisation continues to receive a regular guaranteed return on its investments in time and capital and finally, giving your team or organisation the potential and freedom of action to exploit emerging markets or technologies.

Fixed income assets. These investments allow for smooth regular returns on your organisation's human capital with enough people able and willing to act as leader, when their skill sets allow, you will see daily return on your investment in small symbiotic acts that add real value. The energy input for this uptick in performance comes from these self and servant leaders whose behaviour you are actively encouraging.

High risk / high reward. Having great leaders and followers at every level means that you can leverage the diversity of KSAs and the freedom of thought and action you grant your people and allow for calculated experimentation in changing the 'how' and 'what' you do to achieve your organisational '**why**'. Instead of always relying on the one 'superstar' employee, allowing others to leverage their diverse KSA and by encouraging them through mentoring will give you many more potential high risk / high reward options to choose from.

Pension funds. Your primary objective as the current leader is to act as the team or organisation's **custodian**, with the aim of leaving the team or organisation in a better condition than when you joined it. Ensuring that the organisation's values and purpose remain intact and ensuring that the organisation remains adaptable in how and what it does to achieve its purpose can only be successfully achieved if you spend real time investing in developing new leadership growth at every level of the organisation.

Emerging Market Funds. Change is the biggest challenge for any individual or organisation. It could also be our greatest opportunity. Simply reacting to change isn't sufficient. Bringing the future to the present, realising the value from emerging ideas, or technologies is something that very few organisations can successfully achieve.

One common bond unites all those really successful organisations that do manage this most difficult of achievements and that is that they manage to leverage the talents of the entire organisation in a non-hierarchical and highly adaptive way. In simpler terms, they transform themselves from an organisation to a more **organism-like** form. This is more commonly referred to as a learning organisation.

Key Leadership Insight:

Developing a leadership pipeline will deliver an organisation that is capable of not just surviving but prospering within an environment of accelerating social and technological change. Your return on investment is the compounded effects of allowing people to develop and practice their leadership over many years. These people, who are the very essence of your organisation, will act as the energy source that your organisation needs to keep morphing and adapting itself over time.

Introduction: Clinging Onto Past Ideas

Battlefield commanders from the First World War, French, German, British and Russian alike, have all universally been criticised for doubling down on the same attritional strategies and tactics that had served Generals so well in the age of pre-industrial warfare. These strategies effectively treated the men of their armies (they were predominantly men) like machines, expecting no other output than the exact orders they had been given.

Leaders at lower levels only served to cascade down and enforce the orders from above. They added little to no advantage or benefit to the likely success of each assault. Even in the face of the horrific carnage that soldiers were regularly subjected to during this war, the arrogance of class and the belief in a natural born right to lead was maintained despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. These attitudes to leadership appeared to be hard-wired into our collective consciousness.

This hierarchical and patriarchal approach to leadership is as old as mankind itself. Some 12,000 years ago, during the agricultural revolution as we moved to develop larger political societies, this top-down approach to leadership was extremely effective. The tasks such as growing and harvesting crops were relatively simple to coordinate and effectively meant treating those doing the work as '**non-thinking units**' or parts of a machine. In short, this attitude and behaviour existed all the way up to the first and second industrial revolutions where with machine-like inputs we only ever expected and required machine like outputs.

Of course, this system was a limited one and only really viable in a relatively simple world. Most of the knowledge and decisions on which crops to plant where, and when to harvest, were made by a very few individuals and social mobility or the ability to move up through the hierarchy was extremely limited.

With the growth in learning and wider access to education between the mid-18th centuries and the early 20th century, we eventually entered the 1st and 2nd Industrial revolutions, and the world began to get far more complex. Now the main effort went into exploiting science and technology to find practical and profitable applications for the growing number of new machines.

However, mankind being mankind, we didn't see any purpose in changing our traditional hierarchical leadership structures. Interestingly it was during this period that we see growing discontent and a real move for social reform throughout many of these developing countries. People were tired of being treated like machines and accepting their lot in life, they needed their higher-level needs satisfied not just their lower-level needs such as food and shelter.

This change in attitude to how people were being led really changed dramatically after the Second World War, with tens of millions of people dead, many countries suffering from devastated infrastructure and with a new Cold War emerging, it suddenly became more important than ever to be able to attract the best human capital and allow them more opportunity to exploit the country's technology to try and gain a competitive advantage.

In our attempt to cling fruitlessly on to our strongly hierarchical leadership structures and in an attempt to harness and understand emerging technologies, such as computers, rockets, satellites and much later the internet, we simply **doubled down** and expanded the size of the 'C' Suite. We refocused and reinforced our energy on hiring and attracting a few individuals at the top whose job it was to lead us. Janet Sherlock writing for Business Insider on their website states that.

"Instead of reworking and rewiring organizations, companies have often thrown leaders and people at problems." [2]

Sherlock, herself a former Chief Digital and Technology Officer, recognised that we, collectively, had missed a trick. It wasn't that leadership wasn't more important than ever, it was simply that how and where leadership functioned in an organisation had to be adjusted, or in her words '**rewired**'.

At last count, I counted nearly **30 'C' suite positions** in addition to the standard trio of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO). Among the more abstract, I found were Chief Culture Officer, Chief Wellness Officer, Chief Growth Officer and Chief Customer-Experience Officer.

Now don't misunderstand me. I agree that these responsibilities are important, however they can all justifiably fall under the purview of any of the main trio of 'C' Suite executives, or maybe, just as well they can become organisational responsibilities which are supported, developed and exploited by the different strata of leaders that percolate and inspire across the length and breadth of the organisation.

In 1995 a Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christenson christened the term 'disruptive innovation'[3], he was referring to any technology that causes a '**relevant change**' and abruptly interrupts the way in which companies, industries, and consumers operate.

The issue we face some 20 years after this term was coined is that these disruptive technologies, those that have the potential to cause relevant change are interrupting at an increasing speed and scale. This leads to the problem that Alison Taylor, a clinical Associate Professor at NYU Stern School of Business, highlighted in a 2024 BBC News article.

"Today's businesses are so global and diffuse, and the challenges they face so complex and unpredictable, that no CEO – no matter how personally impressive – should make judgment calls in isolation"[4]

My opinion, and the strongest argument for developing a leadership pipeline, is quite simply that we are living in an age of accelerating change and disruption and no one, ten, or even thirty individuals, can cope with this amount of change and disruption. I agree with Janet Sherlock; we need to fundamentally decentralise and rewire our leadership and decision-making functions if we are going to grow organisations capable of morphing their form and function to be able to prosper in today's world.

Now don't misunderstand me. I am not advocating for the dissolution of the 'C' Suite. An appropriate analogy to describe the role of the 'C' Suite in the future should be that of a gifted and experienced symphony conductor. Producing no sound itself, yet capable of corralling the individual talents of 80+ individual specialists who, after years of practice and playing together, are all united in the same vision, in trying to achieve the absolute best experience they possibly can.

The 'C' Suite will find themselves both looking from the **outside in** and the **inside out**. Keenly aware of the team dynamic and capabilities, whilst also being fixed on navigating the path and leading their team towards the joint vision.

Like the conductor, their task is to measure the mood of the audience, to feel the reverberations of the acoustic effects of their efforts and in line with everybody's strategic goals to encourage, moderate and coax both the individual and the group simultaneously.

However, they should be equally confident to allow the orchestra to '**follow**' any given soloist, allowing the soloist to navigate their own way forward, providing support and doing everything possible to allow the soloist to be successful. Creating harmonies within and between different sections of the orchestra.

Using my analogy of the soloists above, real effective leadership, the engine room if you like, should be middle and lower management. These soloists, experts in their own right, once given the freedom of action can act as super-nodes within your organisation, capable of transmitting new ideas and knowledge about change efficiently across the breadth and height of the organisation.

With their daily access to more granular information, their proximity to the 'C' Suite and their **super-connectivity** they will be the architects of the gradual and constant '**rewiring**' of the organisation.

These middle manager soloists don't just appear fully formed and fully capable. They begin their leadership lives the same way the soloists in an orchestra do. They begin practicing their craft in lower positions initially adding harmony and rhythm before they are given the freedom of action to lead and dictate the pace and direction of part, or indeed, the entire orchestra.

So, if we follow this argument logically it becomes imperative that we are constantly looking for new potential leaders at the very earliest stages of their careers. These nascent leaders require nurturing and opportunity.

If we are brave enough to consider flipping the organisation on its head occasionally and considering that those with the most up-to-date knowledge on the latest techniques, science and technology in any given field are more likely to be those graduates who are just entering your organisation, then maybe a more productive way to lead the company would be to begin by outlining the strategic vision, then allowing these young, fertile minds the opportunity to begin their leadership journey.

Naturally, guidance, support, coaching and mentoring will be invaluable not just in achieving short-term project success, but moreover in ensuring that the organisation has the right human leadership capital to ensure long-term success.

The remainder of this article will look at how we achieve these short and long term aims by outlining:

- How leadership pipelines strengthen resilience / antifragility
- Building the Pipeline

Strengthening Resilience: Achieving Antifragility?

It's relatively easy to prepare your organisation for a known future, you develop a forecast and simply incrementally improve on what you are doing. But how do you prepare for a volatile fast-changing future?

We need to do two things, firstly, make ourselves less fragile and vulnerable to shocks and volatility and then where possible, we need to try and ensure that we grow stronger because of the very volatility, stresses or shocks which are affecting others.

Fragility

Adaptiveness

Resilience

Anti-Fragility

To achieve this most difficult of states. To achieve a state of anti-fragility[5], just like in our investing analogy we need a diversified strategy, this delivers **adaptiveness** or **agility**. Adaptiveness is the first step away from fragility, it gives the organisation the ability to emphasize or reinforce one area of investment over another.

For example, we might decide to invest more of our capital in government and corporate bonds instead of regular stocks and shares during a bear market or economic downturn. But this approach only gets us so far. It limits our profits and allows us to weather the storm and might even make us stronger relative to others who followed a different strategy, but it doesn't get us to true anti-fragility.

Having access to diverse multi-strata set of leaders able to act as super-nodes in your organisation capable of switching resources and information in an agile manner around the organisation and most importantly with the **confidence, support** and **freedom of action** to make decisions, is how a leadership pipeline allows us to convey agility or adaptiveness within our organisations.

Fragility

Adaptiveness

Resilience

Anti-Fragility

The next step in our strategy might be to make the organisation more **resilient** or **robust**. Pension funds deliver this because they capitalise on time. Simply having the knowledge that you have incrementally been investing in the future wealth of the organisation delivers a degree of peace of mind and security and creates more resilience because you have the knowledge that however bad things get in the short term, you will not lose everything and all of your investments so far, will continue to appreciate in the long term, ready to be used at some more suitable time in the future.

Investing in depth in your leadership pipeline, means having this future security. Knowing that the fate of the organisation doesn't rely solely on one superstar rather it relies on the many median members of each team across the length and breadth of the organisation is what delivers the same resilience as our pension analogy.

You are cultivating leaders all capable of stepping up and assuming the leadership responsibilities of those **one or even two levels above them**. Ready to be deployed in the case of a sudden shock, or quietly developing themselves ready for future roles.

"Systems or organisms can be defined as antifragile if they derive benefit from systemic variability, volatility, randomness, or disorder resilience and antifragility" [6]

Emerging Markets and new breakthrough technologies can be viewed in two ways, as a threat or as an opportunity. It isn't only mindset that decides which way we look at this situation it is, to a large degree, the state and condition of the organisation when these events occur that determines how we react.

If we have been incrementally investing in our people and making the organisation more agile and more resilient than we will find ourselves in a far better starting position to consider the challenges of emerging markets or new breakthrough technologies as an opportunity to strengthen the organisation or become anti-fragile.

Fragility

Adaptiveness

Resilience

Anti-Fragility

So where do we begin preparing our organisation? Firstly, consider the form and function of your organisation. Make sure we have an organic structure that is capable of morphing, an organisation that possesses plasticity, and is well enough connected to allow for efficient rerouting of information flows. For this we need many super-nodes throughout the scale-free system to accelerate this communication of ideas, motivation, purpose and knowledge. These super-nodes of course are your leaders.

Not being in debt. You cannot take advantage of an investment opportunity or hedge against a certain future outcome if you do not have the capital to play with. Equally, returning to the form and function of our organisation, we can never allow ourselves to have a **leader deficit** or debt, otherwise the scale-free organic network that is your company or organisation becomes a rigid poorly adaptable structure with many limiting points, or areas of poor information flow, and you will not have the leadership capital to take advantage of the volatility around you.

Constant growth of leaders who are not just capable of leading in their current role but are capable of leading in a position one or two positions higher. The best metaphor for showing how this makes an organisation antifragile is that of the mythological Greek monster we know as the Hydra. The Hydra was a multi-headed creature with one defining feature. If you cut one of its heads off, two more would grow in its place.

This made the Hydra antifragile in the very truest sense. It also made the creature immortal. Now I highlight the Hydra because its ability to regenerate two heads for every one that is cut off is something inherent in the creature itself, something in its very DNA. It isn't some magical power bestowed upon it by an external force in the time of greatest stress.

In the British Army every leader from Lance Corporal to General is evaluated on a 6-monthly basis as to their ability to lead and function both one and two ranks higher than their current ability. This necessity is obvious if you consider the brutal and dynamic way kinetic warfare works.

When events around you are at their most volatile there is no time to go to HR and ask them to invite candidates to present their CVs for a series of interview rounds. In times of violence and volatility you create antifragility by already having a pipeline of known leaders in place and ready to step up immediately.

Exercise stress, appropriately managed, makes us stronger. Continually developing leadership in others, presenting our developing leaders with leadership opportunities and challenges and pushing our future leaders to act as leaders themselves at every opportunity means that they are better prepared for the future volatility and stress when it comes.

More leaders = more points of articulation. All really successful organisations, and there are relatively few of them, share two common characteristics; firstly, they have an '**infinite mindset**'. They don't consider themselves to be involved in a limited time or event-based competition. They aim to still be around in a hundred years or more.

Critical to this, is the unifying reason '**Why**' they are all working so hard to do what they do. The Just Cause, a term made famous by Simon Sinek [7], is an organisation's '**Why**'. '**What**' the company does and '**How**' it does it, will change and indeed must be changed and adapted to suit our ever-evolving world. However, the '**Why**' will always remain constant.

The second reason is that having more leaders growing and embedded in your organisation, allows the DNA of your organisation, the reason '**Why**' to grow and strengthen within the organisation whilst still allowing plenty of opportunity for diversity of ideas and approaches. A leadership pipeline delivers more points of articulation. It

grants you access to a more diverse set of inputs and energy all unified not just in solving your common or current problems but in owning these problems as **'their'** problems.

Key Leadership Insight:

To summarise, leadership development is not a one-off event, or download, rather the culmination of years of development and behaviour. The philosophy of a leadership pipeline should be in the very DNA of what makes your organisation so focussed on pursuing its **'Why'**.

Building the Pipeline: Eliciting Greatness

Should we indeed be **training** the specific leadership skills for immediate application, or should we be **educating** our future leaders in a broader knowledge base and understanding? Perhaps we should be **coaching**, or **mentoring**, or simply **facilitating** their growth?

It might all sound like semantics but how we grow and develop tomorrow's leaders is almost as important as why we should develop them. Personally, I share John Buchan's point of view. In training our people to become better leaders I believe we should be drawing on the full spectrum of the approaches above to **elicit** the sort of leadership behaviours we want from our people, just as we would like these leaders in turn to be eliciting the very best out of their people.

"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there." [8]

Exercise Stress. Sometimes, when we go for a run or go to the gym we don't really put in enough effort, and we stress our bodies too little. When this happens no growth or adaptation occurs. Conversely, when we go to the gym and try and make up for a year's worth of sofa dinners and TV binging in one go and create too much stress, then we cause injuries and generate a state of helplessness and failure. The reality is that most people, professional athletes included, need a coach to help them navigate these two extremes.

As well as having someone skilled in coaching or mentoring to guide us, finding the sweet spot in between growth and injury / failure requires some sort of plan and a degree of experimentation, it also requires continual regular practice or training with periods of rest or reflection in-between.

This basic framework of an overarching leadership development strategy, delivered regularly throughout the lifetime of an employee, with knowledge being drip-fed as and when required, and a coach or mentor always on hand to help unlock those problems that appear to be just a stretch too far for us, is exactly the approach we need to adopt when deciding how to develop our leadership pipeline and how to begin training tomorrow's leaders.

Translating theory and learned behaviours into practice is our goal. For this reason, we need to begin viewing leadership activities and behaviours as something that occupies a key part of our daily working lives and not simply something that is a 'nice to have' when time allows.

Leadership has no effect unless it is experienced. It is a verb as well as a noun. As a verb, it is the charge of energy, or the very behaviour that creates the desired leadership effect, such as encouraging, motivating, inspiring, or enabling others.

As a noun, it is a symbiotic networked relationship, some elements are formal, having been designed and implemented by the organisation. Other elements are the fruits borne of individuals within the organisation creating useful informal symbiotic relationships with other individuals, internal to, or external to the organisation.

Let's just remind ourselves why we are developing a leadership pipeline. Indeed, why we should be investing any time at all into improving how we lead. The answer is relatively straight forward but often misunderstood. The whole point of leadership is to enable others. This ultimately means increasing team or organisational performance. The main actor, or benefactor, the object that is our **sole focus** from any leadership behaviour is always the organisation.

The approach I take to building effective organisations through leadership development is to focus on **removing frictions** between the component parts of the organisation. Making each element or person in an organisation accept **joint ownership** of any particular task or problem given to their leader or their team and encouraging **proactivity**.

Following this approach the logical first three effects we want to see, as early on as possible from our leaders is that their behaviours encourage good self-leadership in their team members. This essentially helps to smooth out some of the **frictions** that are generated as a result of people lacking good self-leadership.

Motivated people, with a life-plan who understand where they are going, what skills they have, what potential areas of development lay ahead of them are a great starting point to begin removing frictions and barriers to really effective teams.

Next, we need to encourage **joint ownership** of a team's task. We need people to understand that the organisation has achieved absolutely zero, nothing, zilch, until the product leaves the organisation on time at the right quality and is useful for the customer. This 'team' thinking is termed **Followership** by the British military. Developing good Followership is about encouraging collaboration and learning to support others.

Proactivity comes from having the mental reserves to be able to glance up and look across at someone else in the team and ask yourself; How can I help them? How can I make their task that little bit easier today? This is known as Servant leadership and is a well-studied idea in leadership circles.

However, I believe we might be missing the point somewhat. Let's try considering how our organisation could be functioning if we encouraged this attitude or behaviour in all of our people, rather than just considering it to be the leader's responsibility. Now that is what I call a force multiplier.

To achieve some of the organisational effects I have outlined above we need our leadership pipeline training to mimic other successful ways that adults learn. We need first to teach or convey some principles, ideas or information on each leadership behaviour, then allow a soak period where the adult learner reflects on their own life experiences and contrasts and compares this new knowledge with their own ideas and experiences. Finally,

we need the adult learner to begin applying these ideas. Optimally, they would be supported, guided, challenged and encouraged by a more experienced leader.

Time for another quick analogy. If you began learning how to play a musical instrument, I am relatively certain you would follow a similar process as above. I am also relatively sure that your first few efforts at producing a sound and playing simple pieces of music would maybe not be considered virtuoso performances.

However, if you persist in applying what you have learned and continue to practice under guidance on a daily basis you will most certainly reach a standard where those around you begin to acknowledge your talents. I.e. where your application of talent begins to have an emotional effect on those around you.

It is for this very reason why your organisation needs a leadership pipeline. It needs a semi-structured environment to facilitate the development of your leadership talents over time. The organisation needs a tool that will elicit your leadership greatness or at least allow each person within to achieve their own leadership ceiling.

Recognising that we are all simultaneously leading and being led is pivotal to the structure of an organisation's leadership pipeline. Understanding that our organisation is ideally composed of ever decreasing fractals of the whole. Each fractal represents a functioning group.

Each group contains, or should contain, the same company ethos, values and shared goals, whilst also being slightly more specialist in one of the functions of the organisation. This is to my mind a great way to view not just how you can make your organisation more organic in nature but also to view the co-dependency's of each part of the organisation.

This organisational viewpoint allows us to visualise the necessity for so many vertical and horizontal opportunities for people to express their leadership. For our leadership pipeline it tells us that we need to ensure that all of our people, regardless to which fractal element they belong need to be infused with common leadership ideas and principles whilst simultaneously requiring a degree of specificity according to the role of each fractal.

The repeated similarity in fractals means that with a strong leadership pipeline in place we should be able to begin devolving the many extraneous 'C' Suite functions that have sprung up over the past ten years. and rewiring the organisation to begin functioning in a more energy efficient and proactive decentralised manner.

A light touch symphony conductor's touch will still be required by the 'C' Suite to set the tone and give strategic guidance, however the energy required, the actual work, will be absorbed by the growing numbers of self-leaders, strong Followers and Servant leaders within each fractal team.

Once we accept this fractal view and achieve this state of organisation, we free up a lot of critical thinking time for those people in an organisation who have been gifted the increasingly rare opportunity of having leadership of individuals, teams and the whole organisation as a **full-time task**. Like the soloist in my earlier music analogy. These people don't simply appear fully formed, rather they have spent time practicing their craft, learning from others and generating their own experiences.

It is these people who ideally should sit as key super nodes in your organisational network spaced throughout to be able to deliver effect vertically and horizontally that will really begin to allow the organisation to reap its rewards from investing in their leadership pipeline. These people will have the time to understand how to best manage the tricky balance and focus between the **Task, Team** and **Individual**, optimising the achievement of the task whilst maintaining team cohesion and developing individuals. This is a full-time job in itself.

Key Leadership Insight:

These same people can turn their attention to inspiring and motivating others creating a working environment that people enjoy being in. Most importantly these products of your leadership pipeline, each a mini fractal of the entire organisation, are the most suited people to begin understanding how the organisation can react to change. How its new decentralised form can become more plastic and capable of morphing, indeed, how it can become more anti-fragile.

Summary

The development of a leadership pipeline is not a luxury or a box-ticking exercise; it is a **strategic imperative** for any organisation seeking to thrive amidst accelerating change and complexity. Building leadership from the earliest stages of a person's career—grounded in self-leadership, servant leadership, and values-based behaviours, allows organisations to create not just more leaders, but better prepared leaders. These individuals form the energetic nodes of an adaptive, resilient system capable of evolving organically over time.

To become truly resilient, or even anti-fragile, organisations must move beyond reactive leadership models and adopt structures that enable proactive, decentralised decision-making. This requires intentional investments in leadership development that mimic the discipline of physical training: regular practice, deliberate challenge, supported reflection, and space for growth. When viewed as a compound investment, this process yields exponential returns, not just in crisis response, but in daily performance, innovation, and employee engagement.

The leadership pipeline is, ultimately, a **distributed network of capability** and culture. Like a fractal, each part of the organisation mirrors the whole in values and purpose while contributing its own specialised strengths. Empowering leaders at all levels to act with autonomy and alignment transforms the organisation from a rigid hierarchy into a living, learning organism, one that is capable of morphing in response to its environment, rather than being overwhelmed by it.

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