Self Leadership in a VUCA World

Concluding the EMBA Journey

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Krakow School of Business

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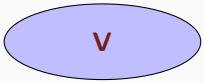
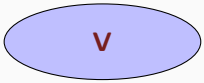
Introduction

The VUCA World



Volatile: Unstable, fast-changing, and unpredictable market or environmental dynamics.

The VUCA World



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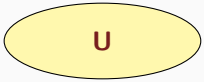

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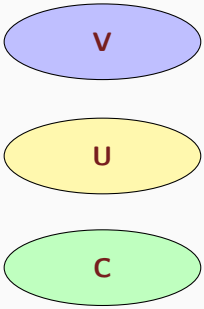

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Complex: An overwhelming number of interacting variables, causing chaos and confusion.

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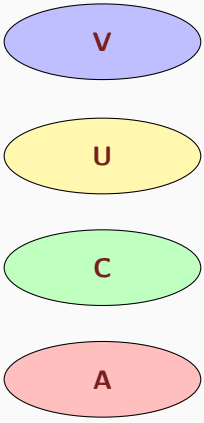

Volatile: Unstable, fast-changing, and unpredictable market or environmental dynamics.

Uncertain: Complex cause-and-effect relationships that result in a total lack of predictability.

Complex: An overwhelming number of interacting variables, causing chaos and confusion.

Ambiguous: Unknown outcomes with hazy operational meanings and a lack of historical precedents.

The VUCA World

Origin

U.S. Army War College (1987): Coined to describe the volatile, asymmetric geopolitical landscape at the end of the Cold War.

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Purpose

Asymmetric Warfare Strategy: Built to train leaders to reject rigid blueprints and embrace decentralized decision-making in fluid environments.

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Pivot

Corporate Consulting Tool: Migrated to business post-2008 to prove traditional 5-year plans are broken, shifting focus to agility.

Navigating the VUCA World

Volatile

Vision: Define a clear long-term direction to serve as a north star amidst rapid environmental shifts.

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Understanding: Actively listen, empathize, and analyze data to anticipate shifting patterns.

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Clarity: Cut through the chaos by simplifying messaging and focusing operational efforts.

Navigating the VUCA World

Volatile	**Vision**: Define a clear long-term direction to serve as a north star amidst rapid environmental shifts.
Uncertain	**Understanding**: Actively listen, empathize, and analyze data to anticipate shifting patterns.
Complex	**Clarity**: Cut through the chaos by simplifying messaging and focusing operational efforts.
Ambiguous	**Agility**: Build adaptive organizational structures that allow teams to pivot decisively.

Why that timeline

- discovery 1987
- use in post 2008

Understanding

The steam engine provides power for factories and fuelled unprecedented economic growth

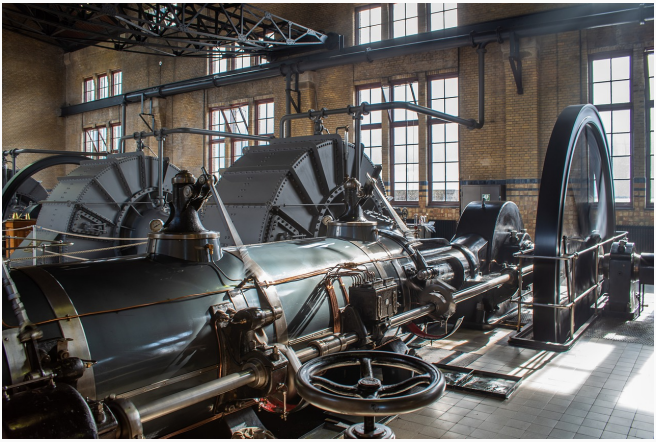

Figure 1: Steam Engine in factory — image by Kobus van Leer from `pixabay.com`

The Steam Engine

Prelude

- 1551 & 1629: Taqi al-Din and Giovanni Branca first ideas
- 1698: Thomas Savery invents the steam pump
- 1712: Thomas Newcomen builds a practical atmospheric engine

Spark

1765: James Watt innovates with the separate condenser

Growth

Explosive industrial and economic growth since the early 1800s, reshaping global labor markets

Exhaust

"The Panic of 1857", 1866, and "The Panic of 1873" which initiated the "Long Depression" – (Karl Marx writes "Das Kapital" in 1867)

The Train

Figure 2: The Train provided reliable mass transport — image Image by Erich Westendarp from pixabay.com

The Train

Prelude

- 1804: Richard Trevithick builds the first steam locomotive, pulling 25 tonnes of material and 70 people over 10 miles
- 1829: Stephenson's "The Rocket" wins the Rainhill Trials, reaching an unprecedented speed of nearly 48 km/h

Spark

1830s–1840s: The era of "Railway Mania" drives rapid, explosive expansion of rail networks across Europe and North America. Speeds reach up to 96 km/h

Growth

Further global railroad expansion stabilizes logistics; approximately 40% of the world's cargo still moves by train today due to its high efficiency.

Exhaust

Over-speculation leads to market crashes like "The Panic of 1901" and financial exhaustion leading up to WWI.

Figure 3: The internal combustion engine gave rise to reliable individual transport — image by S. Hermann & F. Richter from `pixabay.com`. Electricity and Magnetism provided lightbulbs, radio, and all kinds of powered appliances — image by PublicDomainPictures from `pixabay.com`

The Internal Combustion Engine, Electricity & Magnetism

Prelude

- 1805: Humphry Davy invents the "carbon arc" lamp
- 1832: William Sturgeon the first DC electric motor
- 1885: Karl Benz the first practical gasoline-powered automobile

Spark

1908: Henry Ford introduces the Model T, initiating the age of affordable mass motorization and assembly-line manufacturing.

Growth

Widespread electrification and mastery of electromagnetism drive rapid automation, transforming operations both at home and in the factory.

Exhaust

The "Wall Street Crash of 1929" triggers the global "Great Depression," setting off socioeconomic instability that ultimately culminates in WWII.

Automobiles and the Petro-Chemical Industry

Figure 4: The petro-chemical industry — image by Frauke Feind from pixabay.com

Automobiles and the Petro-Chemical Industry

Prelude

- 1600 BCE: Mesoamericans use natural rubber for artifacts
- 1850s: First modern oil wells and refineries (Łukasiewicz)
- 1856 & 1872: Inventions of man-made plastic and PVC

Spark

- 1933: Polyethylene discovered by ICI (Gibson and Fawcett)
- 1930s: Industrial manufacturing of Polystyrene and PVC

Growth

1940s–1950s: Post-war boom driven by PET (1941), Polypropylene, and Dow Chemical's polystyrene

Exhaust

The 1973–1974 Oil Shocks (OPEC oil crisis, brings an end to the era of cheap, unchecked petrochemical expansion)

The Electronic Computer

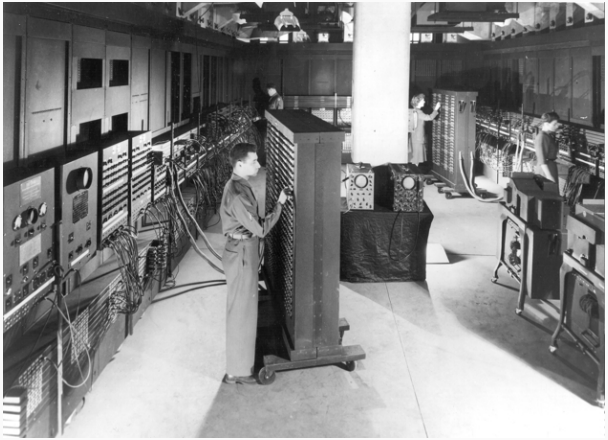

Figure 5: The ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) — image by Unidentified U.S. Army photographer - Public Domain

The Computer

Prelude

- 1843: Ada Lovelace writes the first machine algorithm for Babbage's Analytical Engine
- 1942–1946: digital computers such as ENIAC
- 1952–1953: IBM's commercial mainframes; first hard disk

Spark

- 1959: Atalla and Kahng invent the MOSFET transistor
- 1968–1977: ARPANET nodes open at UCLA

Growth

- 1973–1980: C language; Microsoft develops DOS
- 1989–1993: WWW at CERN; first smartphone (IBM)

Exhaust

Dot-Com Bubble of 2000, Global Meltdown of 2008.

Artificial Intelligence

Figure 6: Artificial Intelligence is the next industrial wave.

Artificial Intelligence

Prelude

- 1920: Karel Čapek introduces the word "robot"
- 1950: Alan Turing proposes the "Turing Test"
- 1956: The Dartmouth Workshop establishes AI as a research field
- 1966: first reasoning robot; ELIZA delivers early NLP
- 1997: IBM's Deep Blue defeats Garry Kasparov

Spark

- 2012: AlexNet wins ImageNet
- 2017: Google invents the Transformer architecture
- 2022: ChatGPT launches as the first mass-adopted LLM

Growth

- **TODAY**: exponential adoption
- **TOMORROW**: AGI, ASI, and the singularity

Exhaust

?

Vision

TODAY we live in the VUCA World

Labor

Asymmetric Job Displacement: Rapid automation surpassing baseline human capabilities, causing structural labor shocks.

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Capital

The Trillion-Dollar investments in AI: Global spending scaling from $1.75T (2025) to $2.52T (2026) to fund network infrastructure.

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Information Warfare & Distraction: Geopolitical flashpoints, synchronized global conflicts, and targeted media narrative cycles, lined with deepfakes.

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State

Erratic Hegemonic Decisions: The world's largest economies executing erratic, highly unpredictable foreign and domestic policies.

Clarity

TOMORROW we live in the AI World

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2022 – Level 1, **The Chatbot Era**: Fluent language synthesis, basic text manipulation, and high hallucinations (GPT-3.5).

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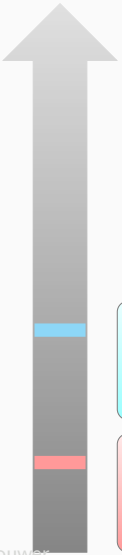

2024 – Level 2, **The Reasoner Era**: System 2 deep inference, multi-step logic. Surpassed human PhDs on graduate science exams (o1/o3).

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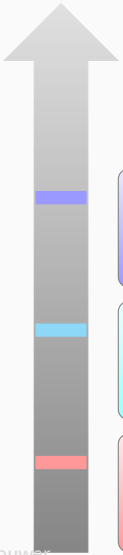

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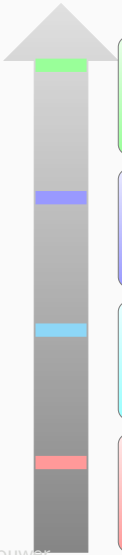

Future – Level 4, **The Innovator Era**: Direct scientific discovery, hypothesis generation, and autonomous technology invention (In Development).

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Are they really intelligent?

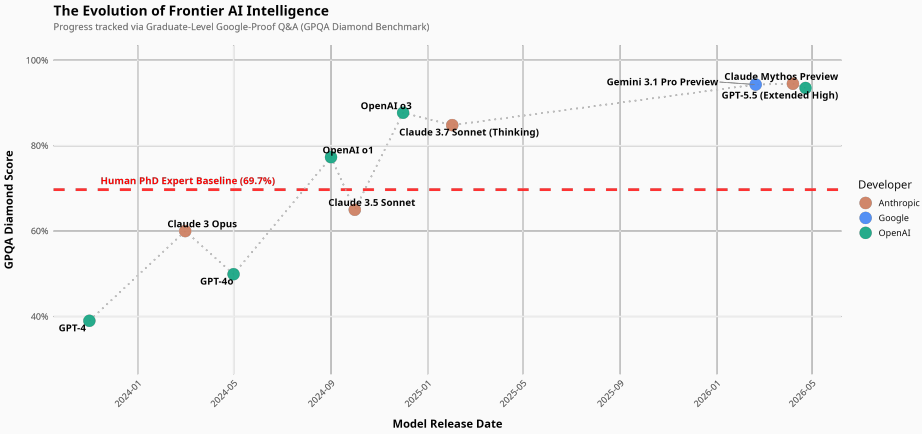


Figure 7: AI capability from 2023–2026 on the GPQA Diamond Score (Graduate-Level Google-Proof Q&A). Models converge, signaling benchmark saturation.

The Near-Term Future: AI Transition (1–10 Years)

Workforce & Automation

- **White-Collar Displacement:** ($\sim$10% annually) as agentic AI surpasses human proficiency in core cognitive tasks.
- **Blue-Collar Decoupling:** Physical labour remains insulated in the near term, bottlenecked by robotics-hardware integration.

Socio-Economic Shifts

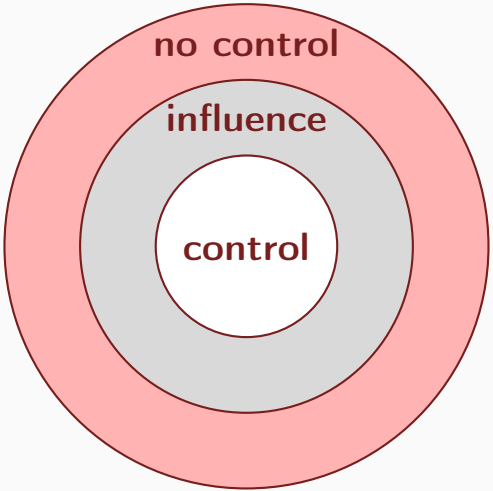
- **Junior Talent Crisis:** Rapid shifts job content
- **Emerging Ecosystems:** Creation of novel paradigms (e.g., AI Governance, Autonomy).
- **The Uncanny Valley:** New dilemmas such as rights for AI systems, accountability, . . . is it a human.

The Uncanny Valley

Figure 8: Robots will soon leave the uncanny valley. (The DroidUp Moya can be pre-ordered for $173K.)

Agility: What can you do?

Deep Dive: Control



- **Control**
  - Your own emotions and judgments
  - Your own decisions and actions
  - Your preparation and effort
- **Influence**
  - Reactions of others (communication)
  - Team motivation (example and leadership)
  - Information (asking good questions)
- **No control**: Accept with equanimity
  - Corporate strategy and reorganizations
  - Financial markets and economic conditions
  - Others' final decisions and career paths

Premeditatio Malorum

The Core Principle

The Stoic practice of mentally rehearsing potential hardships, career pivots, and technological shocks **before** they happen to eliminate the paralysis of surprise.

- **Inoculation Against Panic**
- **Anxiety Into Action**
- **Plan B is ready**

"He robs present ills of their power who has perceived their coming beforehand."

— Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam*

The Sailor in beautiful weather

Figure 9: Imagine that you are a sailor who prefers calm weather

The Sailor in a storm

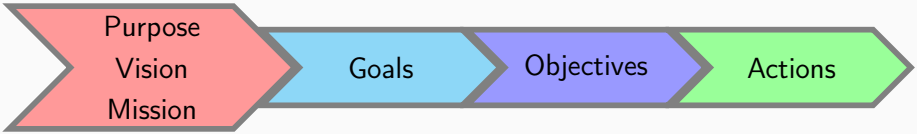
Figure 10: but today we are in a storm

The Way of the Ronin: find motivation within

Figure 11: Miyamoto Musashi: "You should not have a favourite weapon." and "Think lightly of yourself and deeply of the world."

Setting Milestones

Executing this



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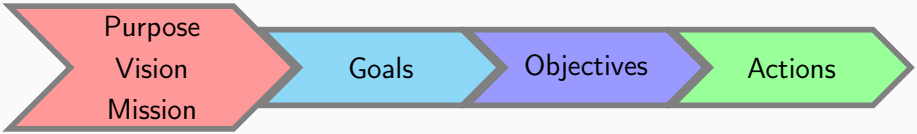
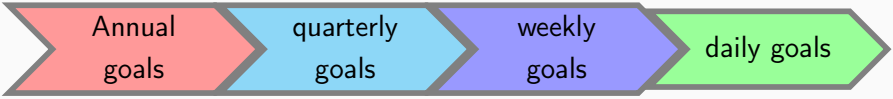
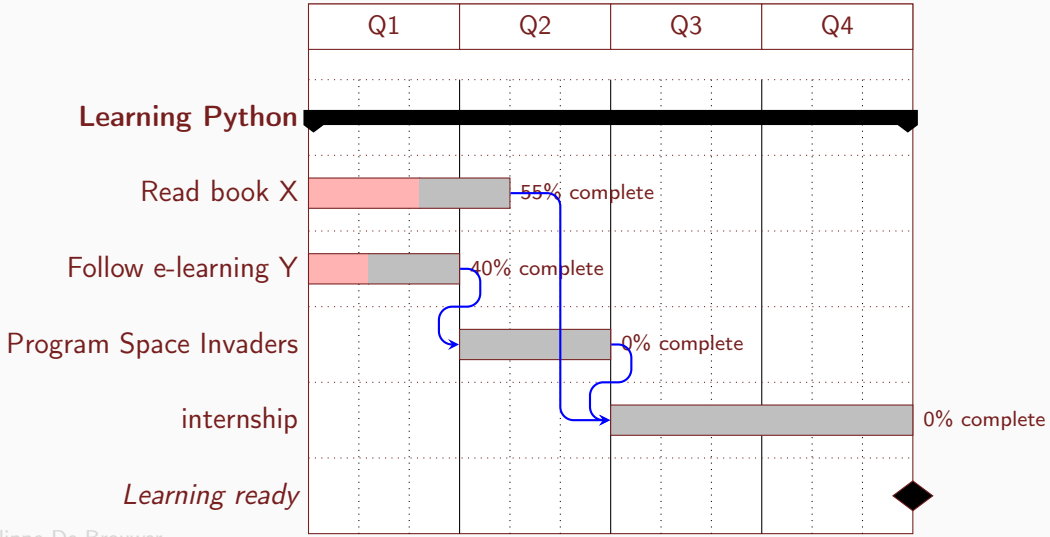


by breaking it down to this:



A quarterly plan



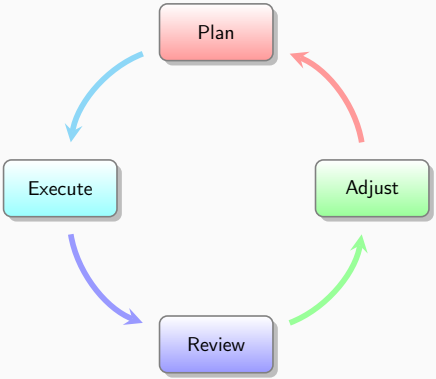
The Monthly and Weekly Plan

Set monthly goals to meet your quarterly goals, then set weekly goals to meet your monthly goals.

The weekly plan is then ready:

- set a weekly and daily goal
- plan recurrent meetings
- plan recovery time (e.g. lunch)
- group recurring activities (e.g. replying calls, emails, etc.)
- block time for reflection, planning, evaluating and uninterrupted focus on your goals

Working with a PDP: A Continuous Process

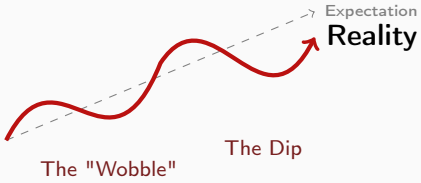


Getting started is 80% of the work.

The Psychology of Momentum

- **High Activation Energy:** The psychological friction is highest before the first action.
- **The Zeigarnik Effect:** Once a task is initiated, the human brain wants to finish it
- **Motivation Follows Action:** Momentum is built, not found.

The "Wobbly Line" Concept



Concept Source:
Helen Tupper & Sarah Ellis
(*The Squiggly Career*)

The "Wobbly Line" governs structural development across every layer of our environment:

- **Macro Scale (Capitalism):** Economic progress is never a linear line.
- **Micro Scale (Careers):** No career is a straight line.
- **Individual Rhythm:** Even the Roman gladiators had every four days a rest day.

Strategic Recovery: The Engine of Performance

Figure 12: Recovery is the key to growth.

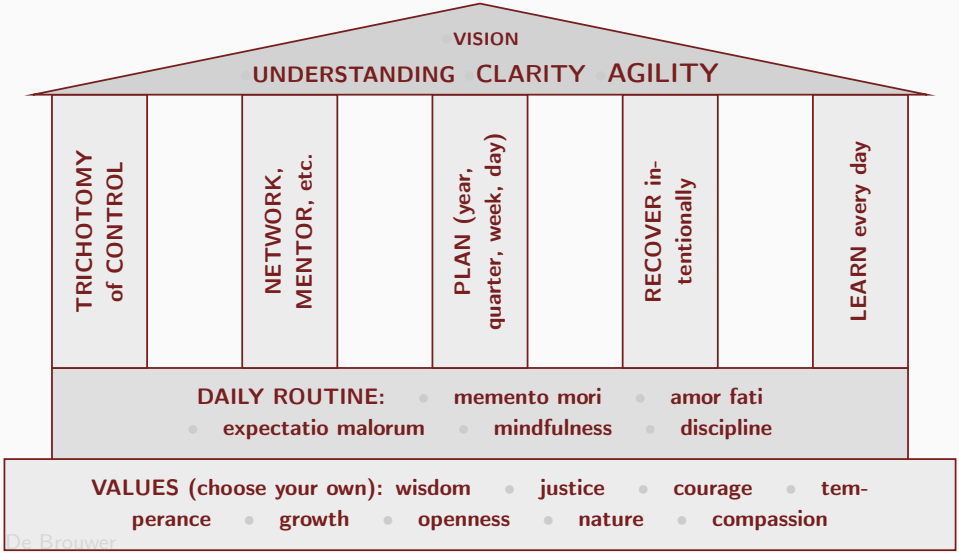
High performance is a rhythm between stress and recovery.

- **Drive Growth:** Minds and muscles grow during *rest*, not exertion (Supercompensation).
- **Prevent Burnout:** Planned downtime stops temporary wobbles from becoming downward spirals.
- **Extract Data:** Stepping back provides objective distance to map your strengths and limits.

Recovery Matters

Conclusions

Conclusion: VUCA



Thank you for your attention!

handouts

Philippe's business card