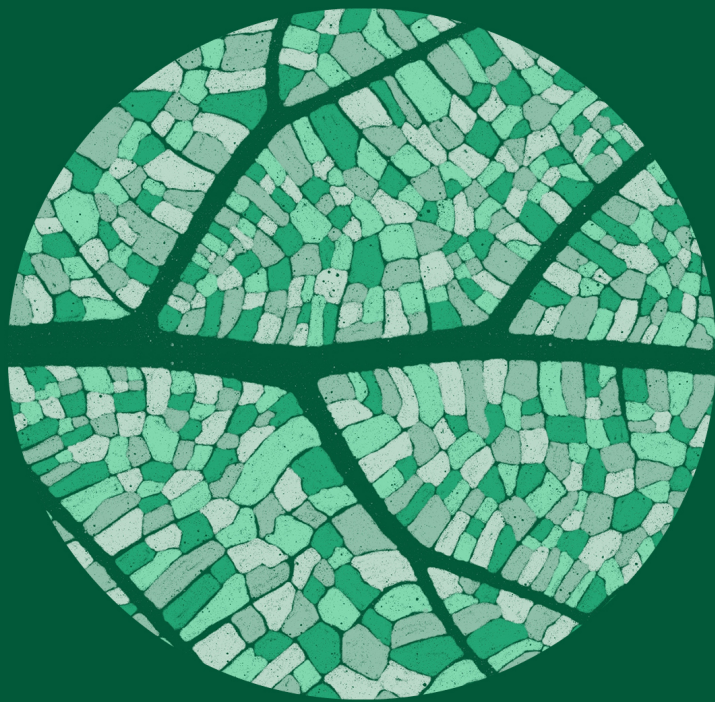


# Think *Scale*



A CURATION OF IDEAS TO HELP YOU  
DESIGN FOR SCALE

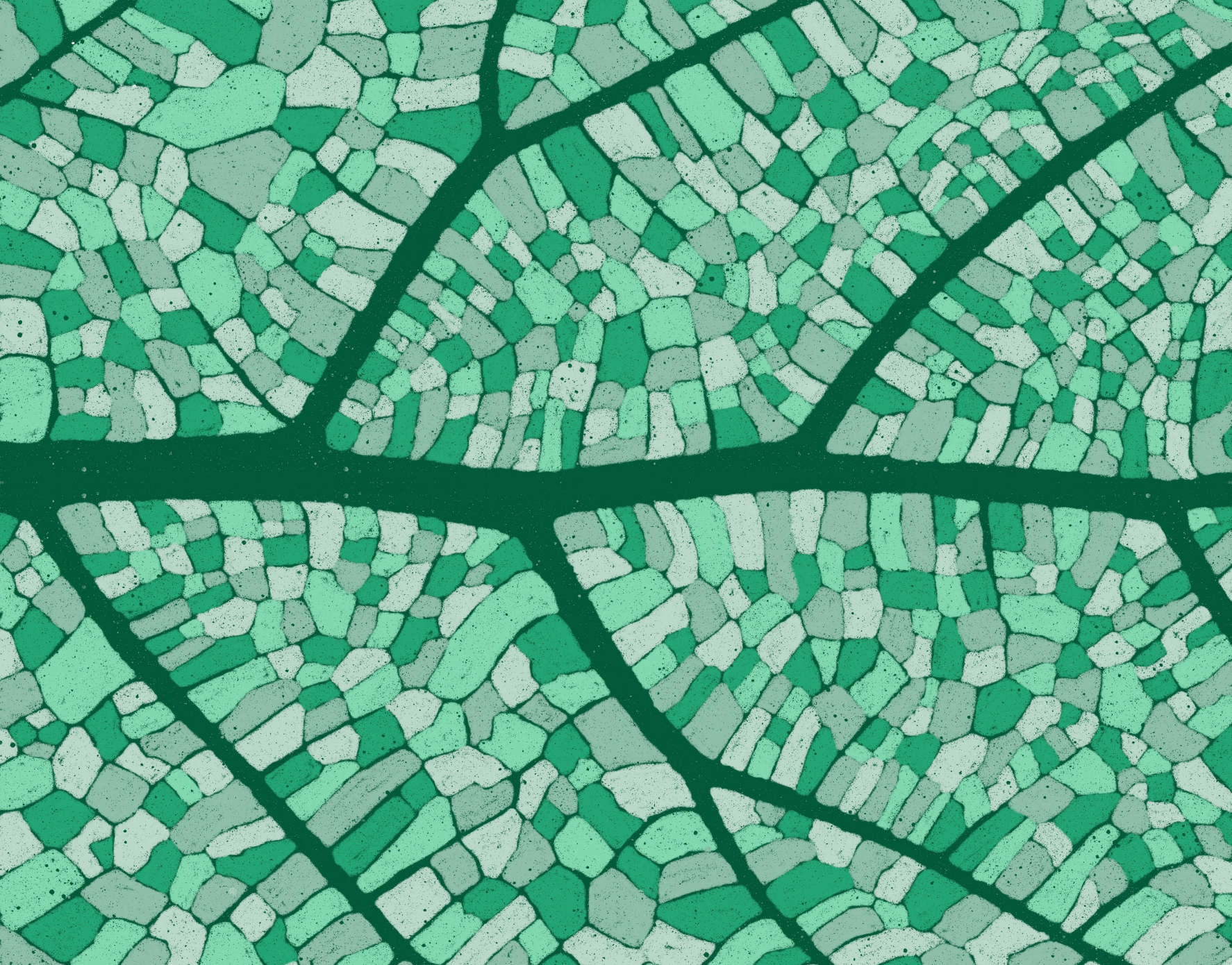
## THINK SCALE

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THINK SCALE

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THINK SCALE

THINK SCALE

*For*

*Societal Leaders*

*The Unreasonable Restless Pioneers*

*Who do not accept where we are*

*Who disagree with the pace of change*

*Who lead us towards where we all wish to be*

*Together.*

# Contents

## Introduction

Scale is *not a synonym* of growth.

What works, *may not work at scale*.

Scale is a journey of *mindset shifts*.

*Scale emerges*. It can't be imposed.

Scale design is *not an afterthought*.

Complexity lingers, *simplicity scales*.

*Agency fuels scale*, and vice versa.

*Diversity* makes scale more relevant.

Set solutions grow, *shared ideas scale*.

*Together we scale*, divided we stall.

Societal Thinking

Pause to Reflect

Acknowledgements

References

# Scale

/skeɪl/

## SCALE | NOUN

The size or level of something, especially when it is large.

## SCALE | VERB

To climb to or over the top of something high and/or steep.

## SCALE | NOUN

A set of marks, lines or numbers, used for measuring something.





THINK SCALE

*In the beginner's  
mind there are many  
possibilities, but in the  
expert's there are few.*

— SHUNRYU SUZUKI

# Introduction

---

If the Milky Way, our galaxy, was 5 million miles in diameter, then Earth, the only place we can live for now, would be equal to a grain of salt. Human biomass is about 0.01% of this grain of salt. However, even after 500 years of intense technological and economic advancements, we still find it hard to grasp and visualise the scale of our societal problems and improve the lives of all people on our grain.

This brings up a few important questions about scale. Is it that we don't have a good framework to perceive the scale of our problems? Is it that we don't have tested methods to scale over steep challenges? Is it that we don't have a relevant scale to measure and monitor our progress? Considering many such daunting questions, we need to think about scale in more ways than we do today and not allow it to be buried under the comfort of what is considered pragmatic.


Think Scale is designed as an opportunity to, well, think. It is a curation of ideas and prompts to provoke reimagination. It does not provide answers, nor could it. You may want to pick it up while designing for scale, or while navigating a difficult uncertainty, or just to imagine possibilities.

Please keep some writing material at hand to capture musings or make a doodle or draw a mind-map.

Before we begin the journey, let us visualise a few other scenarios where this book could be useful. A healthy debate on trade-offs? A workshop to rethink strategy? Conversation starters? A collective reading session? A team game or a collage-making experience? We get infinite possibilities when we combine thinking with reimagination.

I believe that in the midst of the uncertainties unfolding around us, we need to pause for a moment, reimagine what will work at scale, explore alternatives, and raise the aspiration to move forward on a journey of exponential change.

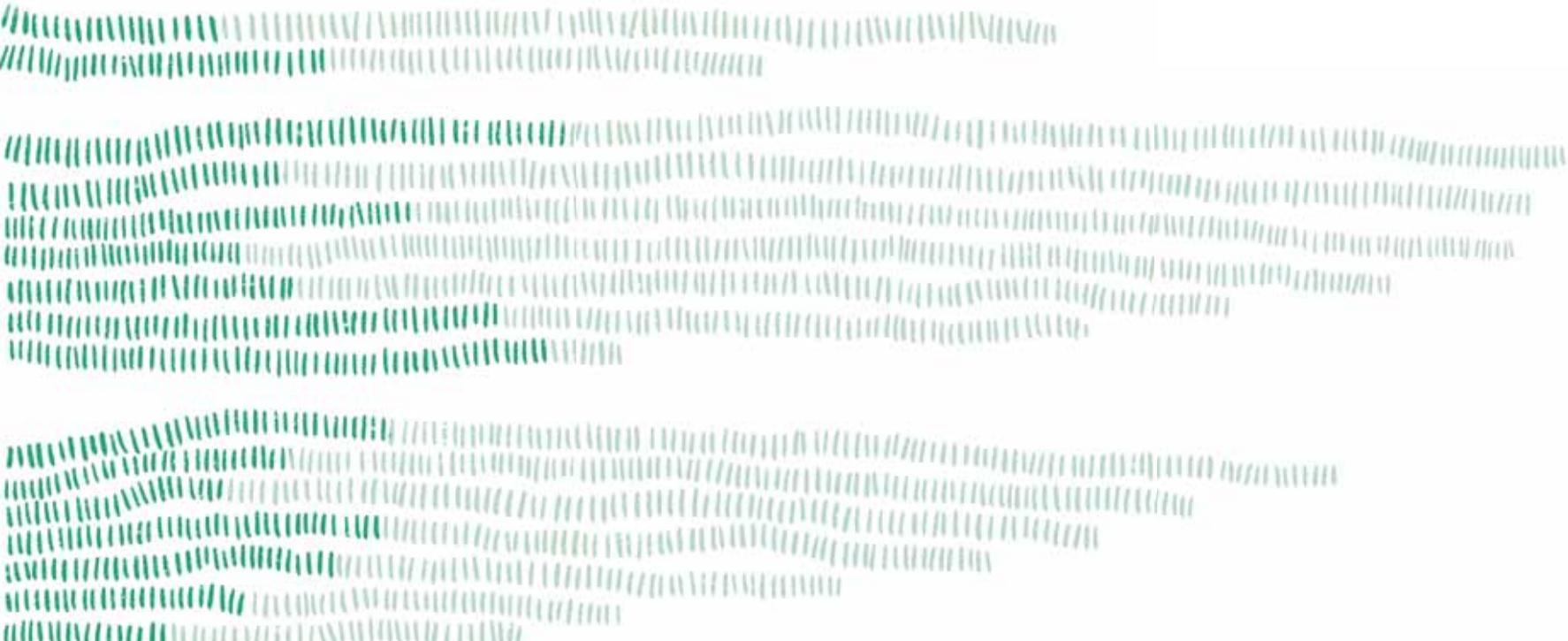
— Sanjay Purohit, Chief Curator, Societal Thinking



Scale is *not*  
a synonym  
of growth.

Growth is relative to past results. Scale is relative to the total size of the problem yet to be addressed.

First we train 5,000 farmers. Then we plan for 25,000. We are thinking growth. But if 50 million farmers still need to be trained, how can we reimagine and design the training ecosystem for 100%? Could we prototype with 2.5%, then enable 10% and then more? Are we now thinking scale?



*More is different.*

—PHILIP ANDERSON

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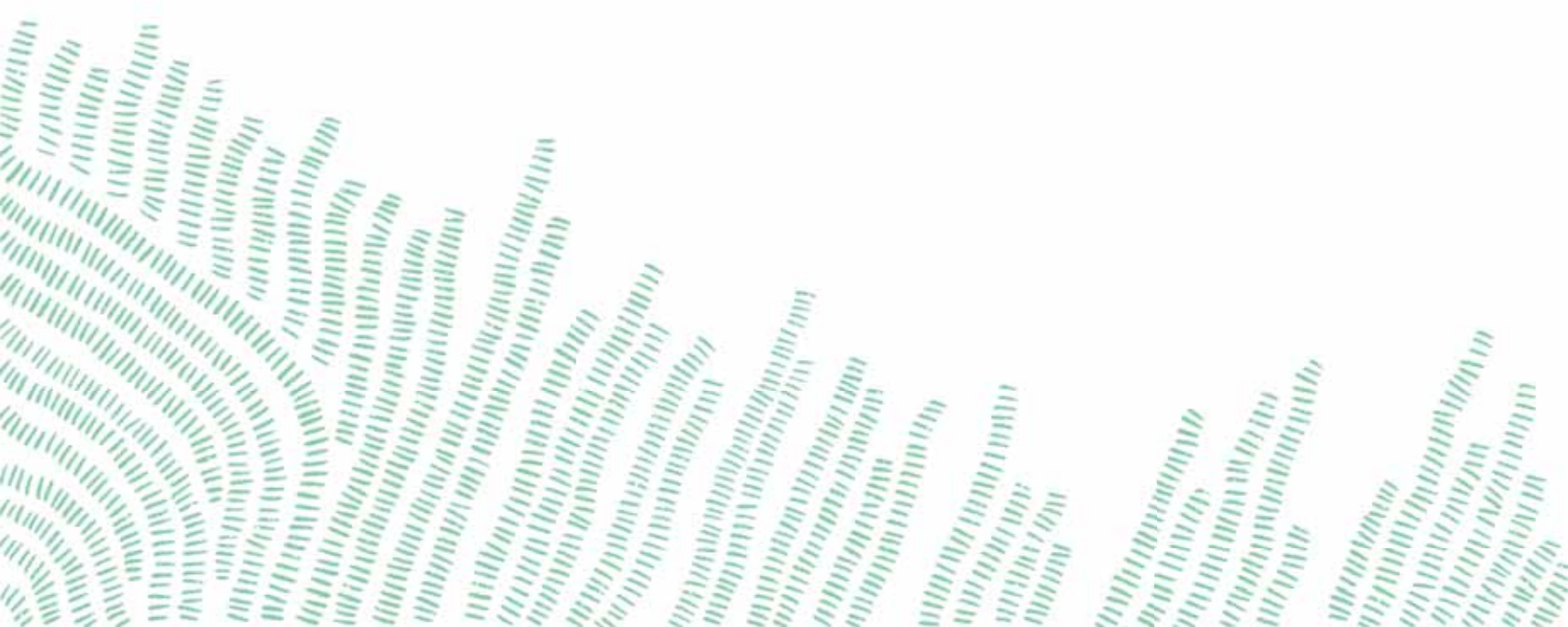
Take up a real world problem and set audacious goals. Audacious goals invite us to explore alternative pathways and help us think how to achieve them.

What success would look like at scale needs to be visualised with reference to the size of the challenge.

---

*I think that if we want to move the needle; if we really want to make an impact; if we want more development; if we want to actually change the lives of people, we have to think at scale because just having a small solution which works in a little pilot is not going to change anybody.*

— NANDAN NILEKANI



*Some of the biggest challenges faced by computers and human minds alike: how to manage finite space, finite time, limited attention, unknown unknowns, incomplete information, and an unforeseeable future; how to do so with grace and confidence; and how to do so in a community with others who are all simultaneously trying to do the same.*

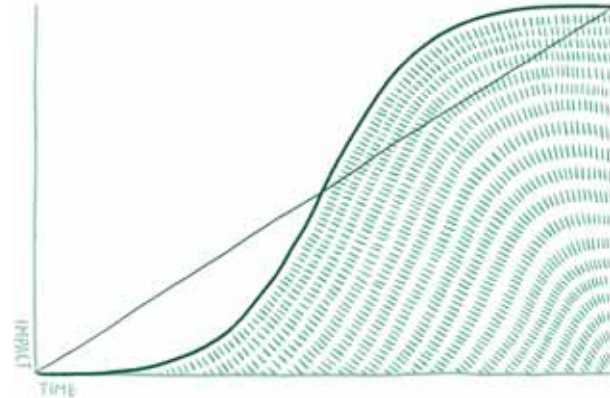
— BRIAN CHRISTIAN & TOM GRIFFITHS

---

It is daunting to conceive of a change at scale with the assumption that we will have to shoulder everything. Seek that small change which can spark more and rapid change.

*The world is nonlinear. Trying to make it linear for our mathematical or administrative convenience is not usually a good idea even when feasible, and it is rarely feasible.*

— DONELLA MEADOWS



*If we can really understand the problem, the answer will come out of it, because the answer is not separate from the problem.*

— JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

---


Let us scale the impact, scale the ideas, but not expect any one organisation to scale to the size of the problem. Such an endeavour becomes an inspiring journey, a connecting fibre, a relentless effort.

When solving a problem for billions, the effort of coordination must grow linearly and the engagement of the ecosystem must scale exponentially.



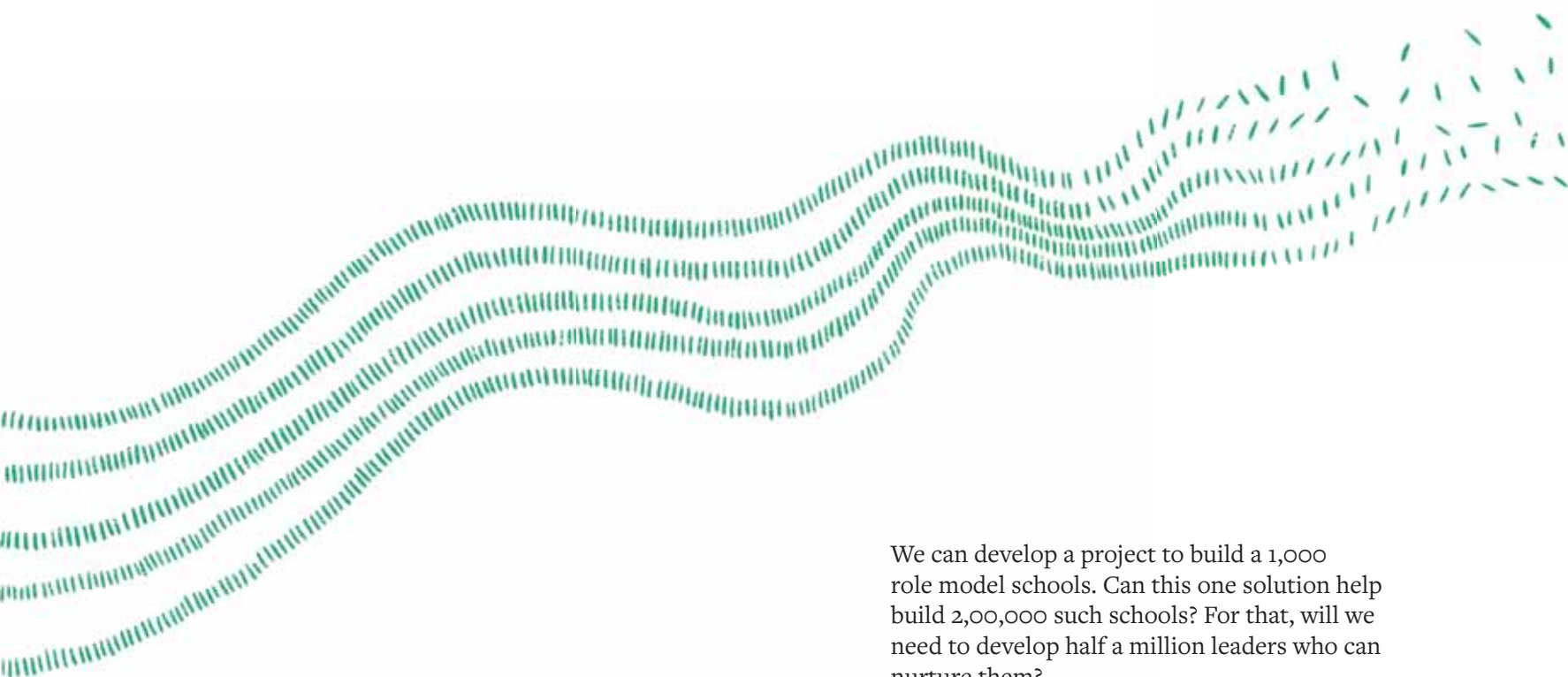






What works,  
*may not work*  
*at scale.*

A solution may be proved in one context. This does not mean it will work across all contexts.



We can develop a project to build a 1,000 role model schools. Can this one solution help build 2,00,000 such schools? For that, will we need to develop half a million leaders who can nurture them?

The word ‘works’ in ‘what works at scale’ signifies quality because if a design does not work, what is the point of scaling it?

---

*Unfortunately, our existing traditional thinking habits insist that you must attack something and show it to be bad before you can suggest a change. It is more difficult to acknowledge that something is excellent and then to ask for change because although it is excellent, it is not enough.*

— EDWARD DE BONO

The sincere answer to what works at scale is ‘I don’t know’. Once we accept this answer, we recognise that solving for scale is a mindset before it is an action.




*Questioning ourselves makes the world more unpredictable. It requires us to admit that the facts may have changed, that what was once right may now be wrong.*

— ADAM GRANT

---

Once we have an ambitious mission and accept that we do not know how to go about it, we begin to figure out what will work at scale.



*First life, then spaces, then buildings – the other way around never works.*

— JAN GEHL

What works at scale is different from scaling what works. While pilots often succeed, their scale-up often fails when the context changes.

---

*Perhaps it is we who have not yet learned to look at it from just the right point of view, one that would reveal its hidden simplicity.*

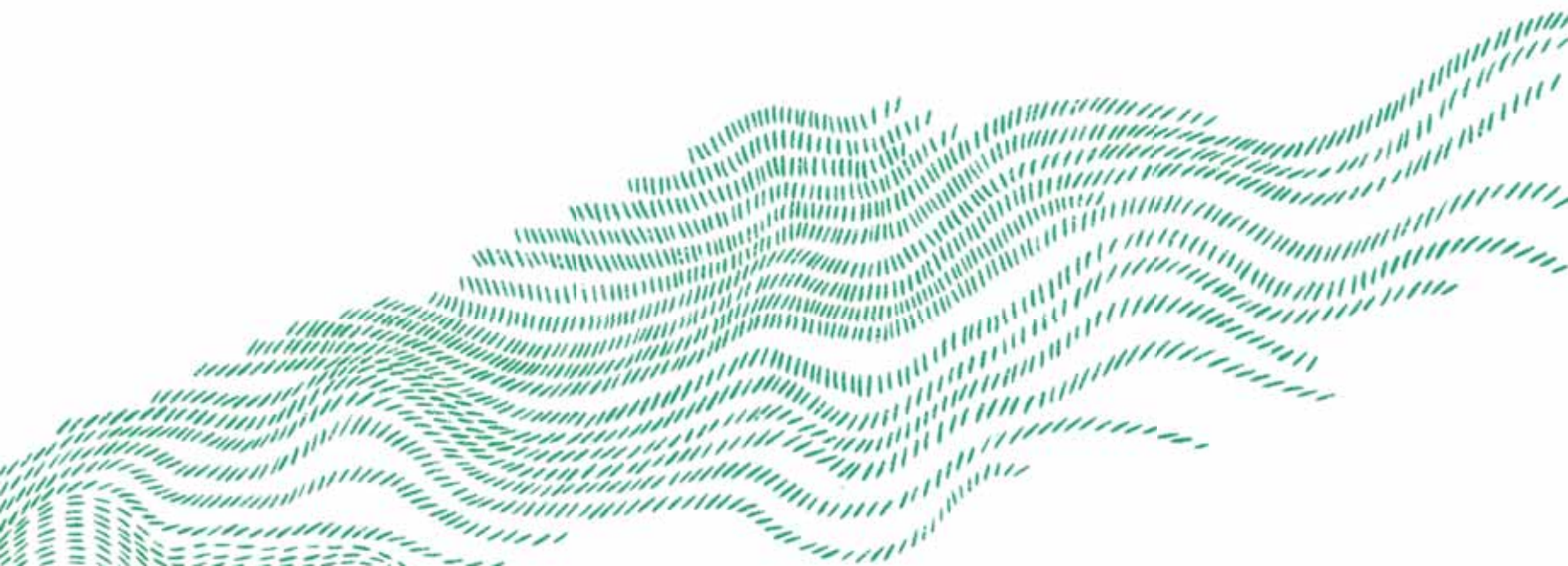
— CARLO ROVELLI

Do not provide solutions and assume that they will be adopted easily. Instead, enable an environment that helps individuals solve problems in their unique context and enables institutions to respond with agility.

---

*We looked at more than 1,000 firms and discovered that those with relatively ambitious targets relating to climate change invested more than their peers, made significant operating changes, and, in the process, drove innovation.*

— GEORGE SERAFEIM



NOTES

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*Why think about scale now?*

NOTES

A series of 15 horizontal lines, evenly spaced, intended for writing notes. The lines are light gray and span the width of the page.

*Why think about scale now?*



Scale is a  
journey of  
*mindset shifts.*

The path to scale is marked by adoption milestones. Each of them an opportunity to rethink and relearn.

To extend timely justice to 100 million people, we need to reimagine the milestones of our journey and get ready to try-fail-try. Can we prototype till we reach 2.5%, identify relevant ideas at 10% and strive for scale after 30% adoption?





Each milestone on the journey to scale leads to a shift in mindset. It requires profound changes in leadership, team, operations and ecosystem.

---

*For change to become transformational, our change in mindset must manifest in our actions.*

— CHRISTIANA FIGUERES & TOM RIVETT-CARNAC

*It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.*

— EPICETUS

---

The first obvious solution defines the problem. It does not solve the problem. Experimenting with many ideas is a reliable way to get past the symptoms and get to the problem, and then the problem with the problem.

*If 2% of a population takes coordinated action, it makes a difference. If 5% do, it can change everything.*

— SETH GODIN

*Scale isn't a number, it's a curve. To 'scale' is to achieve sustained non-linear growth of impact and an increasing momentum that persuades us that something really big—the achievement of its full potential—may well happen.*

— KEVIN STARR

We declare success too soon. Unless the change is visible in at least 10% of society, it is not even relevant. To be significant, a change needs to be visible in at least 30% of society. Then we are onto something.

2.5% WE ARE PROTOTYPING

10% CHANGE IS RELEVANT

30% CHANGE IS SIGNIFICANT

60% ADOPTED AS STANDARD

80% CHANGE IS ASSIMILATED

Till we get to 2.5% of the population we must maintain that we are prototyping. We still have a lot to learn from our failures.

*It is hard to let old beliefs go. They are familiar. We are comfortable with them and have spent years building systems and developing habits that depend on them. Like a man who has worn eyeglasses so long that he forgets he has them on, we forget that the world looks to us the way it does because we have become used to seeing it that way through a particular set of lenses. Today, however, we need new lenses. And we need to throw the old ones away.*


— KENICHI OHMAE

---

From implementing programmes to mentoring many partners and maturing as an orchestrator of the network — that is a leader's journey to scale.



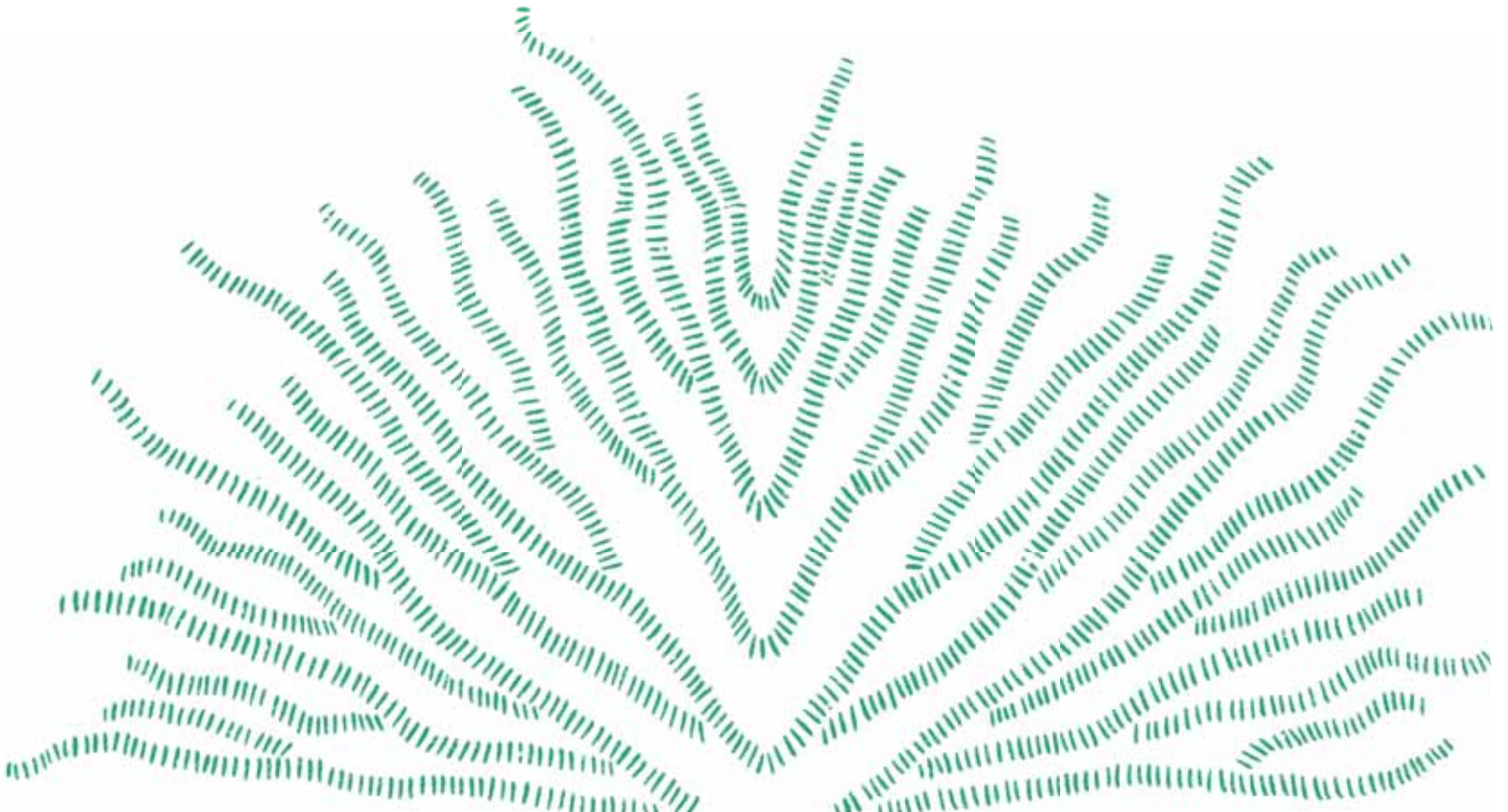


A complex, fractal-like pattern of white lines on a dark green background. The pattern consists of numerous small, curved segments that branch out from a central point, creating a tree-like or star-like structure. The lines are densely packed and follow a similar curved path, giving the overall shape a sense of organic growth and self-similarity. The background is a solid, dark green color with a subtle texture.

*Scale emerges.  
It can't  
be imposed.*

Ideas scale as they respond to context with repeated use. They are adopted and not implemented.

Community Health Workers know why it is difficult to follow new practices. They need time to try, learn and modify current habits to suit their context. Can we create tools for them to do so?

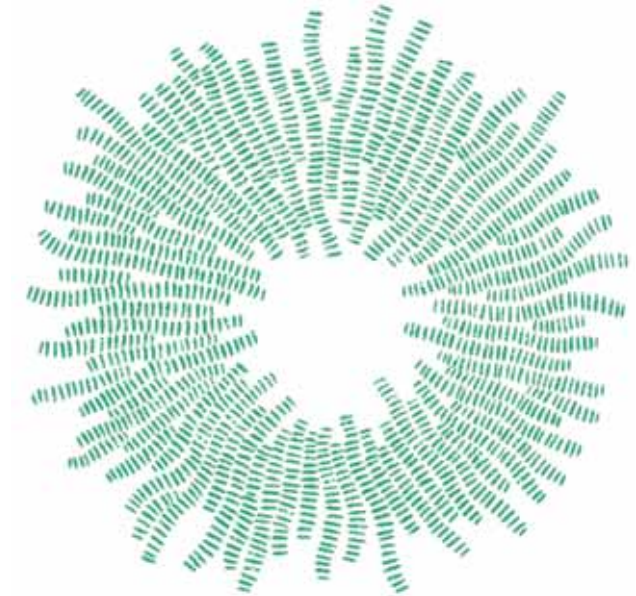
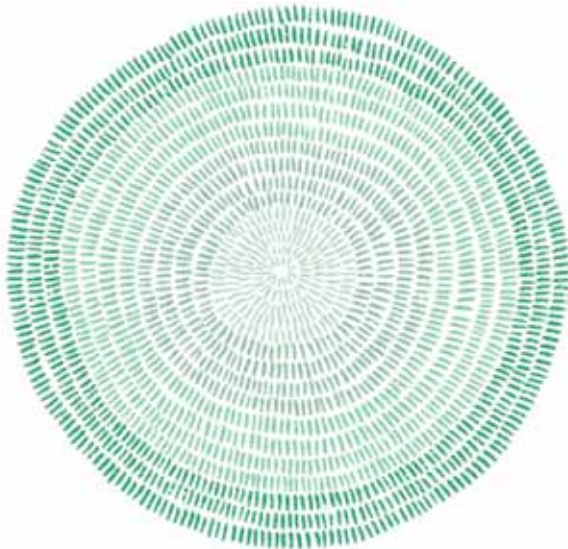


Meet people where they are. Don't force a solution onto them. Look for ways to enable them to solve their problems. This will build commitment in the network.

---

*In open organisations, a catalyst is the person who initiates a circle and then fades away into the background.*

— ORI BRAFMAN & ROD BECKSTROM



*Get the ongoing process right and it will keep generating ongoing benefits. In our new era, processes trump products.*

— KEVIN KELLY

---

Everyone has to develop their own solutions. Once we get to population scale, there can be no single process to solve the wide variety of problems.

Scale in iterative cycles. Solve one simple problem at the point of friction. Enable the ecosystem to adapt at scale. Repeat for the next simple problem.

*Build-Measure-Learn. The fundamental activity of a startup is to turn ideas into products, measure how customers respond and then learn whether to pivot or persevere. All successful startup processes should be geared to accelerate that feedback loop.*

—ERIC RIES

---

To solve at scale, we have to distribute the ability to solve. However, first, we have to distribute the ability to see.





*Change in the societies at the very bottom must come predominantly from within; we cannot impose it on them.*

— PAUL COLLIER

*We do not make the growth occur. The best we can do is provide the right environment and provide the necessary friction so people can choose to change and to grow.*

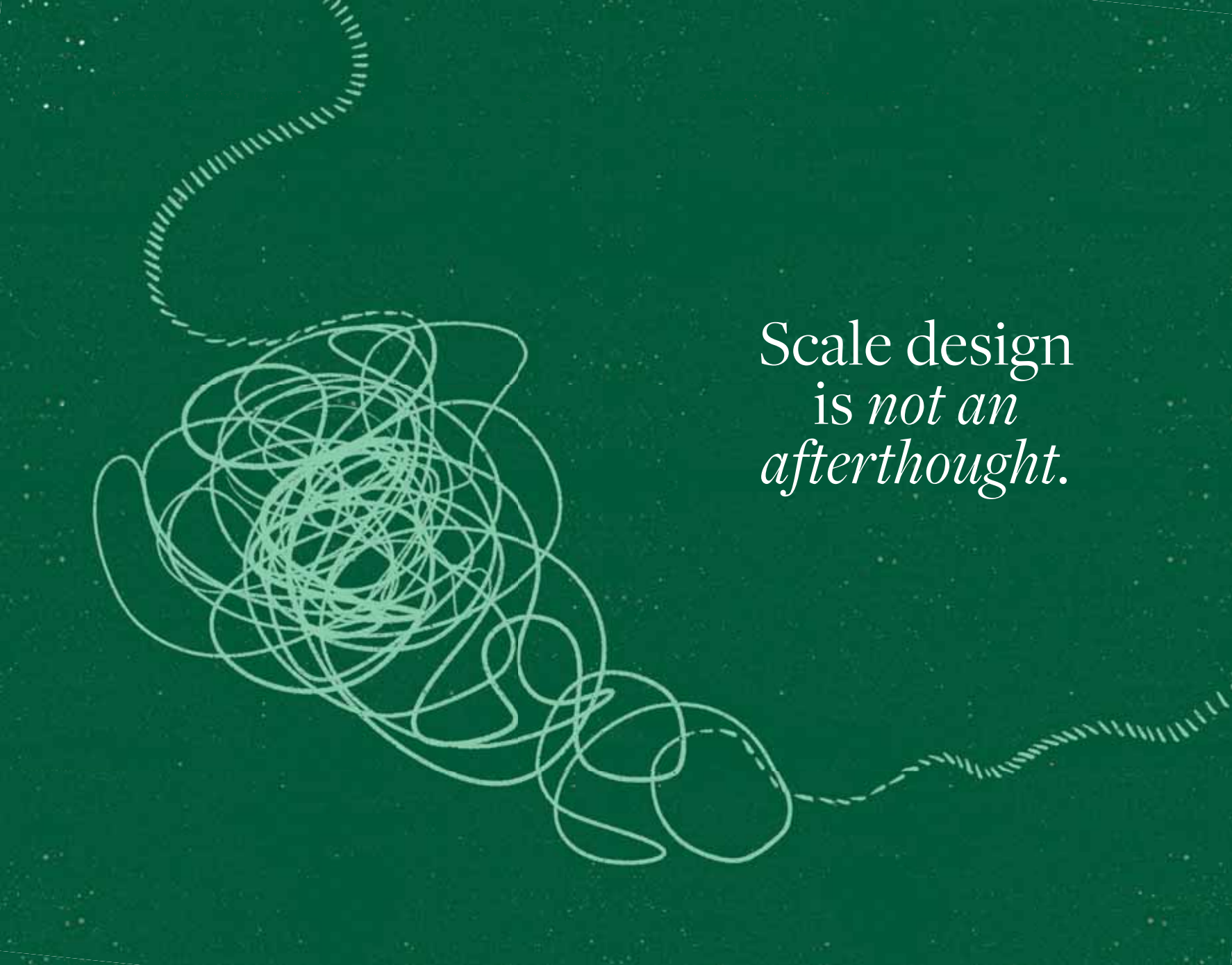
— JAMES HUNTER

---

Once an open digital infrastructure is created to match the scale and diversity of a country, it allows us to think of different types of solutions that can be co-created on top of it. It opens opportunities to work with civil society organisations, government and businesses.







Scale design  
is *not an*  
*afterthought.*

An elephant is not a big mouse. How an idea will scale is not a question to be pondered later.

As the norm, we design, test and prove how a 100 families will recycle water before thinking about how a 100 million families will do so. Can we begin by designing how a 100 million families will recycle water and prove that?



If we assemble 2,000 mice, they still wouldn't make an elephant. If we want an elephant, we will have to make that design decision at the embryonic stage. It is too late to think about scale after we implement a design.

---

*I think if scaling impacts were easy, we'd all be much better at it than we are. But if you design from the beginning with an idea that how this, whatever your solution is, can be scaled and whether that's through the government, whether that's markets or whether that's through philanthropy, having that vision from day one helps you build a model that works.*

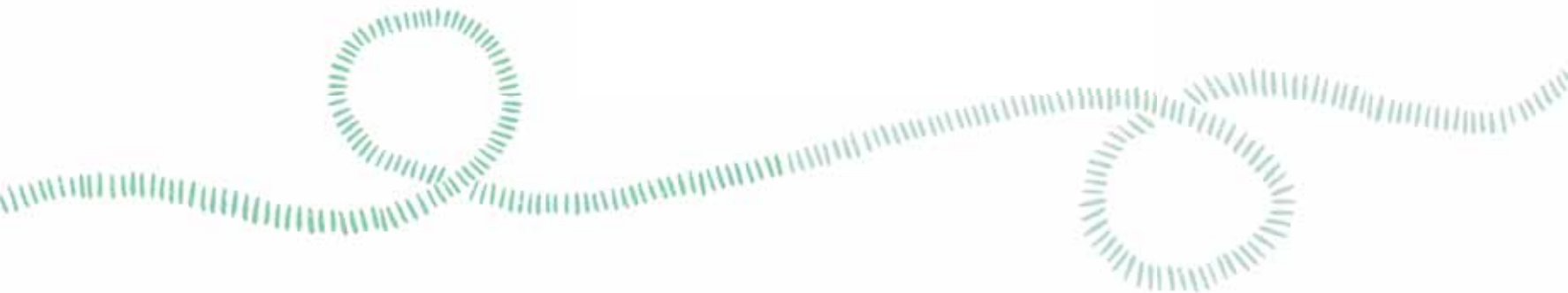
— DON GIPS

*If we can imagine something, there is a good chance that it will happen. If we don't imagine it, there is almost no chance of it happening.*

— MUHAMMAD YUNUS

---

We have to design for both capital adequacy and capital efficiency when we start to design for scale. These are serious questions that must be addressed first.





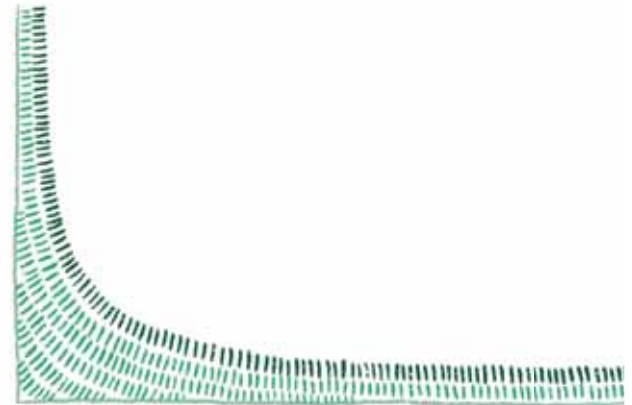
*Sometimes you need to change to scale. The assumption that you first innovate and then scale can be misleading since scaling also requires ingenuity and creative thinking. Scaling is about transforming your solution, to grow and have more impact.*

— CYRIL BOUQUET, JEAN-LOUIS BARSOUX & MICHAEL WADE

We will not be able to secure adequate resources or capacity in time as we start to scale if we did not anticipate and plan for them from the beginning. We must account for the time it takes to find and align like-minded leaders who share the ambition to scale.

*The greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn; the bird waits in the egg; and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs. Dreams are the seedlings of realities.*

— JAMES ALLEN



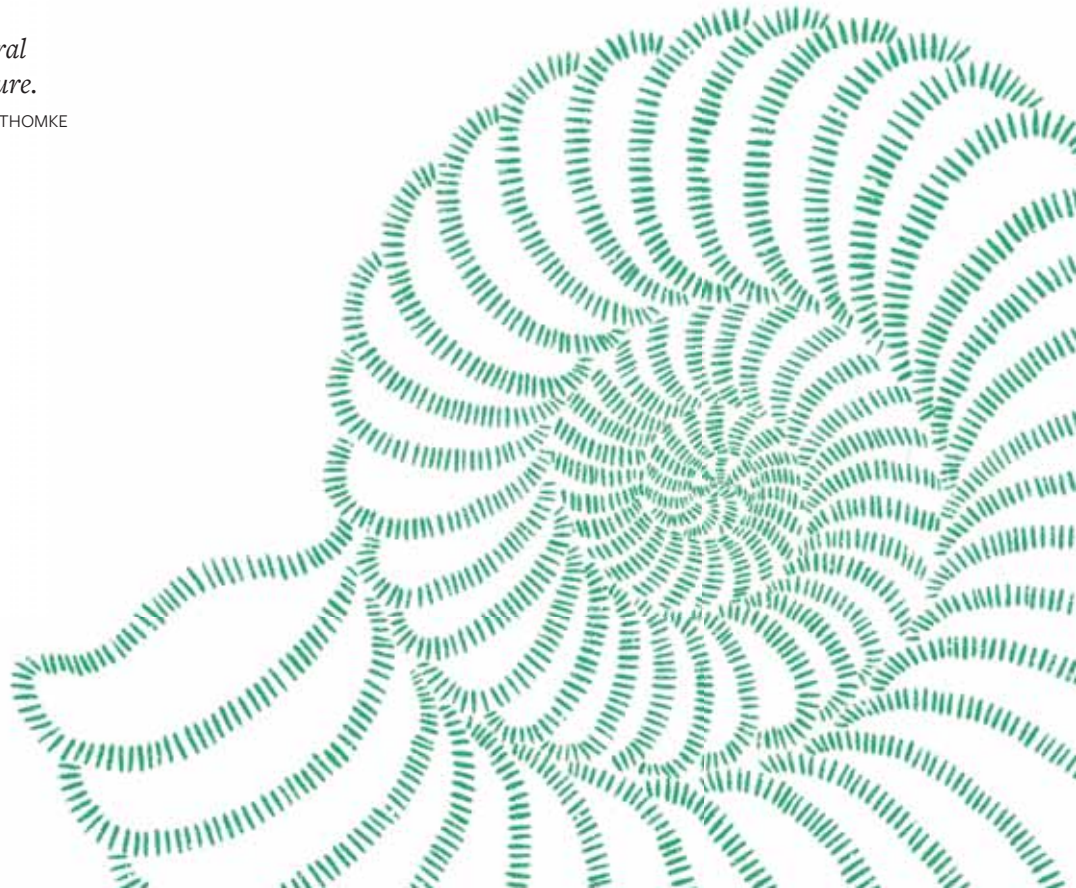
Scale is not about designing specific apps or solutions — they vary based on context, and contexts change. It is about designing infrastructure that can be configured to meet new demands across emerging contexts.

---

*If testing is so valuable, why don't companies do it more? After examining this question for several years, I can tell you that the central reason is culture.*

— STEFAN THOMKE

98% of the planet means well. There will always be 2% who will try to mess things deliberately. First design for the 98% who mean well and help them do things easily. Then add checks and balances to limit the undesirable behaviour of the 2%.





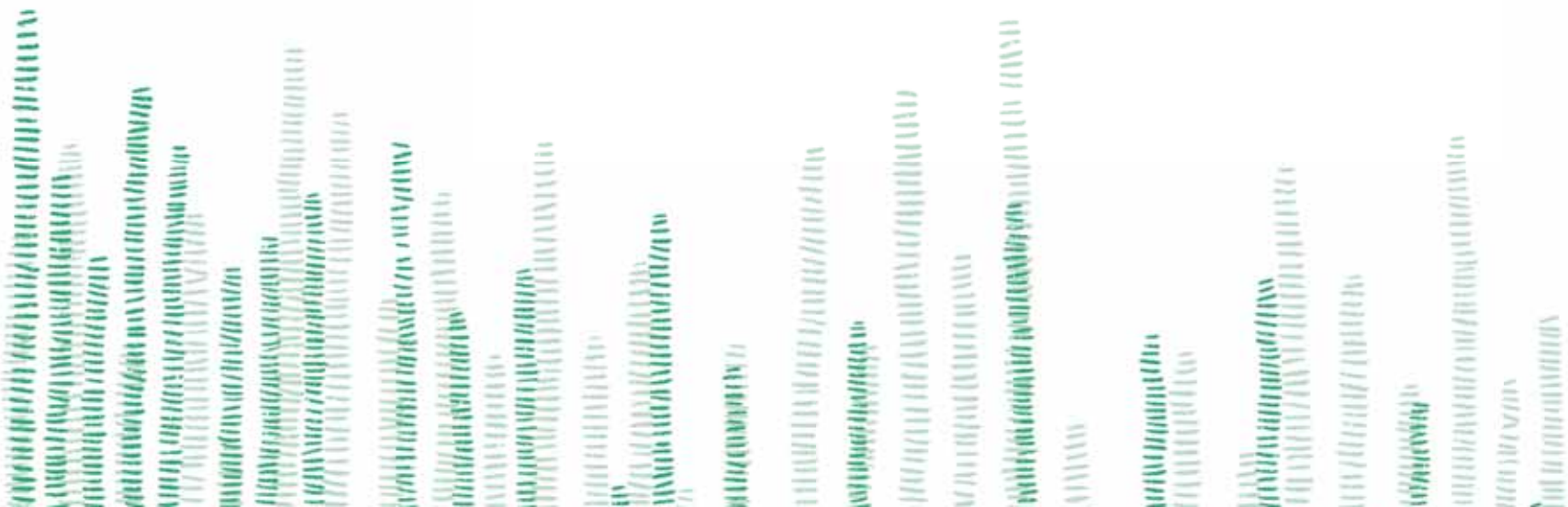




Complexity  
lingers,  
*simplicity*  
*scales.*

Complex solutions aim to tackle all problems for few. Disruptive ideas scale small changes for all.

We sample learning levels of a few children annually and rush to narrow the widening gap. What would be different if every teacher could measure the change every week and close the gap?



When the ability to scale is severely constrained, it prompts simplicity in thinking and imagination.

---

*Turning something from an idea into a reality can make it seem smaller. It changes from unearthly to earthly. The imagination has no limits. The physical world does. The work exists in both.*

— RICK RUBIN

*If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable.*

---

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

Micro is the new mega. Do small things at scale.



*In the end, creativity isn't just the things we choose to put in, it's the things we choose to leave out. Choose wisely.*

— AUSTIN KLEON

---

Anyone should be able to create or realise value in a few steps. The more we use a service, the more valuable it should become.

*We must design for the way people behave, not for how we would wish them to behave.*

— DONALD NORMAN



Moments that bring forward the generosity in people are the moments that we should design for at scale.

---

*Resistance to simplification is based on the belief that every additional feature, part and function represents an improvement.*

— DAN WARD

Keep it minimal.



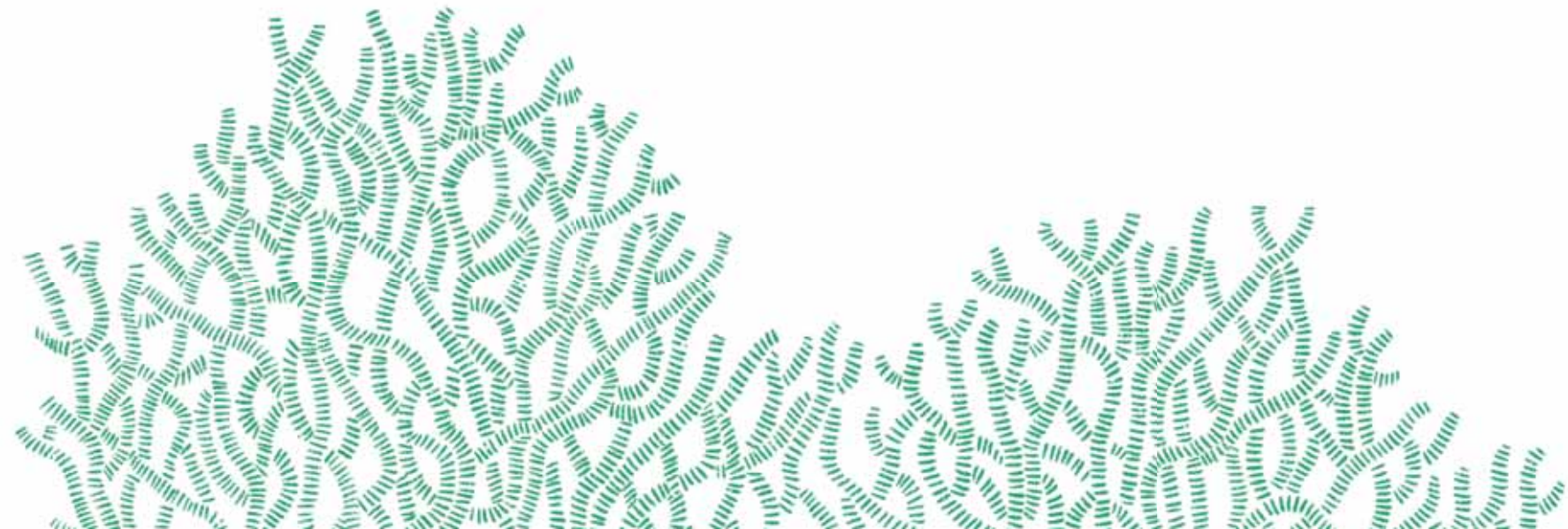




*Agency fuels  
scale, and  
vice versa.*

Everyone harbours a latent ability to solve problems. Unlocking it induces exponential change.

Once we employ 1,00,000 Farm Extension Workers, we need to unleash their ability to serve. Armed with data and knowledge, can this brigade of active agents be the foundation for scale?





The real driver of scale in the development sector is the agency of participants in the system.

---

*Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency.*

— AMARTYA SEN

We need to look at the agency of the formal system, say, the judicial system and then at the enabling role it plays in restoring the agency of society at large.

---

*It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that society is huge and the individual is less than nothing. But the truth is individuals make the future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different.*

— NEIL GAIMAN



Building digital infrastructure is about retaining choice — freedoms such that different things are possible. This ensures that solutions are designed by people closest to the context.

---

*The most valuable businesses of coming decades will be built by entrepreneurs who seek to empower people rather than try to make them obsolete.*

— PETER THIEL

*Between stimulus and response there is a space.  
In that space is our power to choose our response.  
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*

— VIKTOR FRANKL

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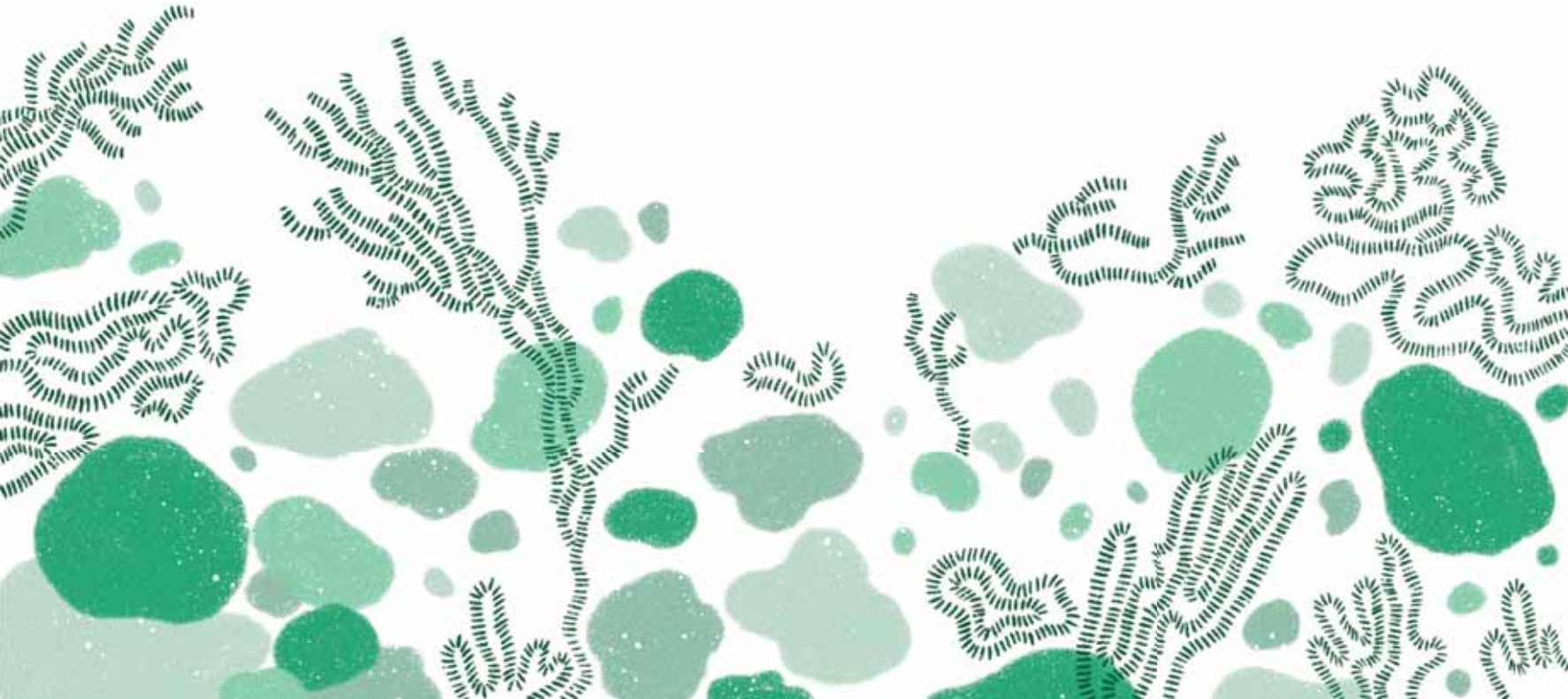
To restore agency, nurture dignity and enable choice, take the services to where people are instead of asking them to come to a platform, shop or website.



*Every day, perhaps naively, I try to find and build the world I want to live in.*

— ROBIN CHASE

If people see value being delivered to their circle of compassion, the people they care about — self, family, community, nation and society — they do not need monetary incentives to engage.





The image features a dark green background with a complex, abstract pattern of wavy, undulating lines in various shades of green and white. The pattern resembles a textured surface or a series of overlapping, flowing layers. The lines are composed of small, repeating geometric shapes, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is a rich, layered visual texture.

*Diversity*  
makes scale  
more relevant.

Potential for scale gets unlocked when the diversity of solutions matches the diversity of contexts.

Everyone has different water needs. Everyone has different access to water. Would people save more water if they could modify best practices in line with their diverse daily routines?



If we understand how to serve diverse individuals, institutions and ecosystems, we will figure out how to scale, not the other way around.

---

*Diversity and independence are important because the best collective decisions are the product of disagreement and contest, not consensus or compromise.*

—JAMES SUROWIECKI

*But living with diversity means getting comfortable with people who might not always think like you, people who don't have the same experience or perspectives. That process can be challenging. But it might also be an opportunity to expand your horizons and examine your own buried bias.*

— JENNIFER EBERHARDT

---

We can design infrastructure that is built to perform at scale but when it interfaces with diverse people it has to evolve and change. Diversity enables scale when scale embraces diversity.



*A diverse ecosystem will be resilient, because it contains many species with overlapping ecological functions that can partially replace one another. In other words, the more complex the network is, the richer is its pattern of interconnections, and the more resilient it will be.*

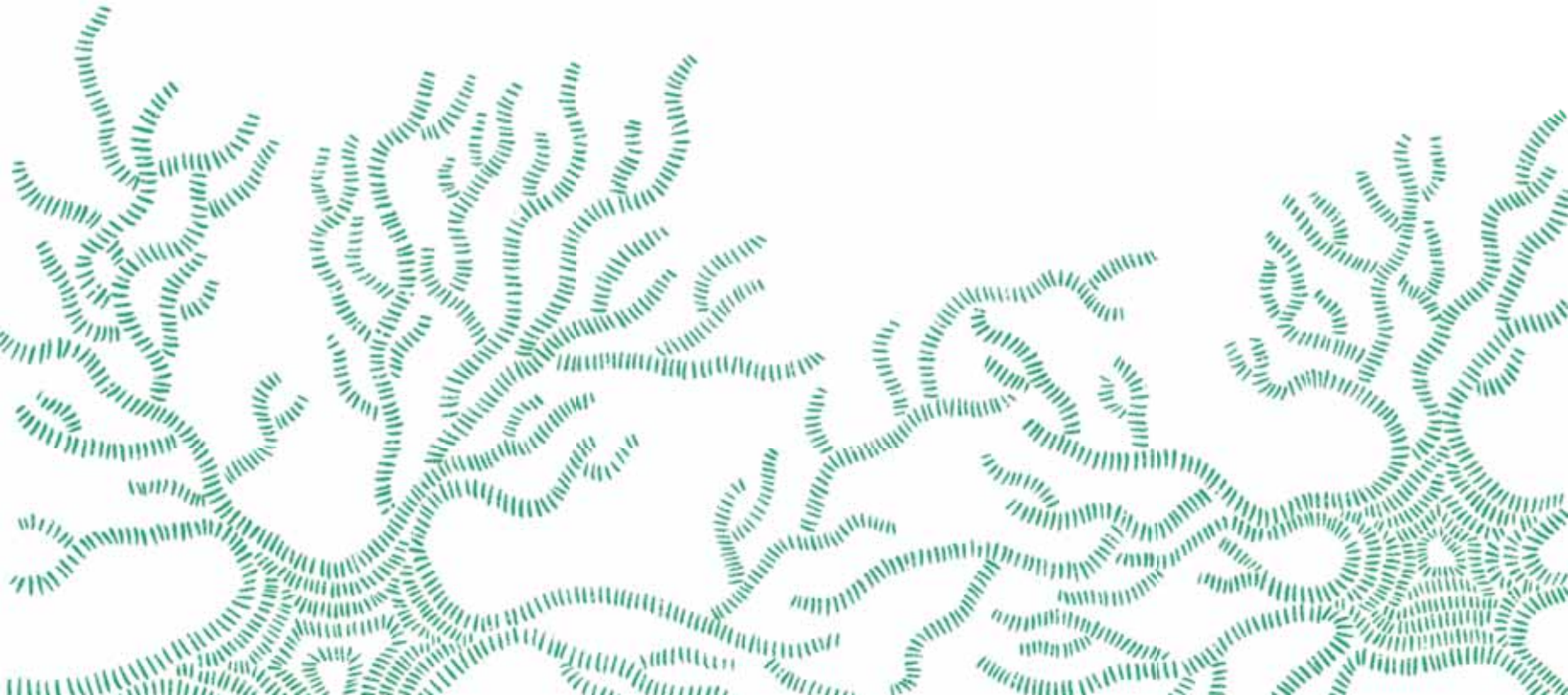
— FRITJOF CAPRA & PIER LUIGI LUISI

Ensure that we design small deconstructed micro-services. They can be recombined with ease to create different services for diverse groups.

---

*People are diverse, we are socially influenced, we are error-prone, we are purposive, and we learn. In addition, people possess agency – we have the capacity to act.*

— SCOTT PAGE





Open protocols, akin to our languages, connect diverse systems, expand possibilities and fuel scale. We need to unify diverse responses to diverse needs rather than expect everyone to respond in a uniform way.

---

*Disagreement can make solutions to our most difficult problems hard to see. But with practical tools and a shift in mindset, diverse groups can create new realities.*

— ADAM KAHANE

We don't know what works at scale because we deal with a million small (micro) problems. We must design such that people can solve micro problems in their context. Our job is to restore their agency to solve.







Set solutions  
grow, *shared*  
*ideas scale.*

Fixed solutions depend on resources to grow.  
Open ideas scale as the ecosystem improvises.

A micro-lending product cannot secure enough capital to meet the needs of 75 million families. Can an ecosystem of 1,000 partners share trust and data to extend micro-lending to 75,000 families each?



*Ideas are never merely ideas. We are what we believe. We find what we go looking for. And what we predict, comes to pass.*

— RUTGER BREGMAN

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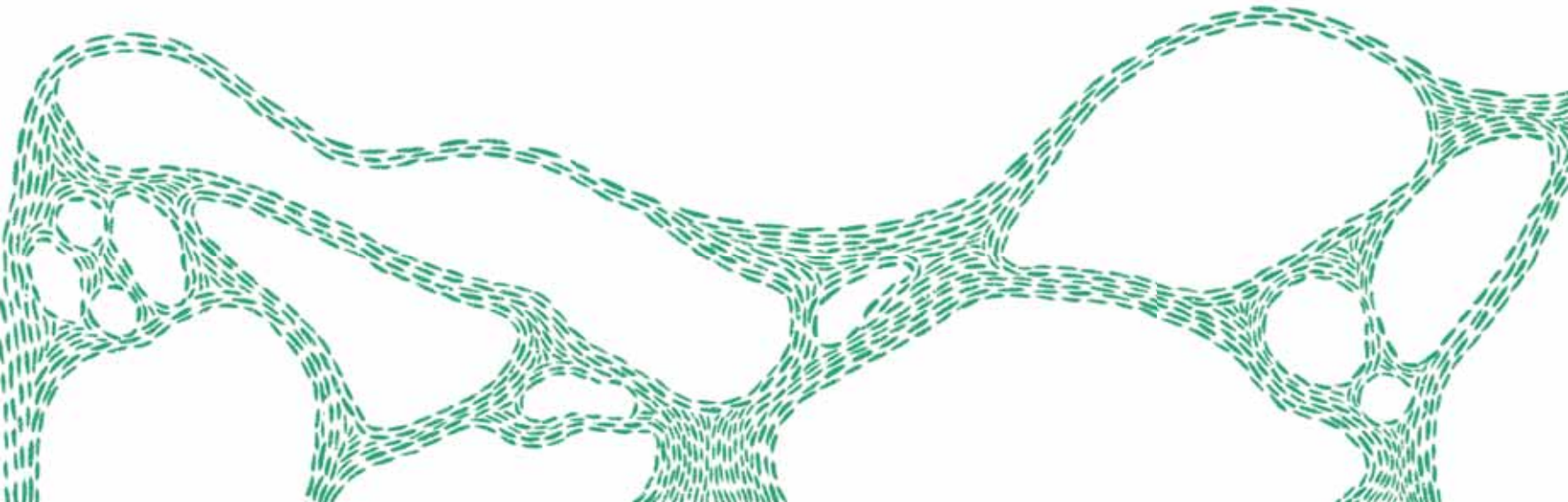
What does it take to create change at scale? A deep understanding of what we don't know.

The more the things we keep within our organisations, the less scalable our organisations become.

---

*If ideas do not determine history, inventions do; and inventions are determined by ideas.*

— WILL DURANT



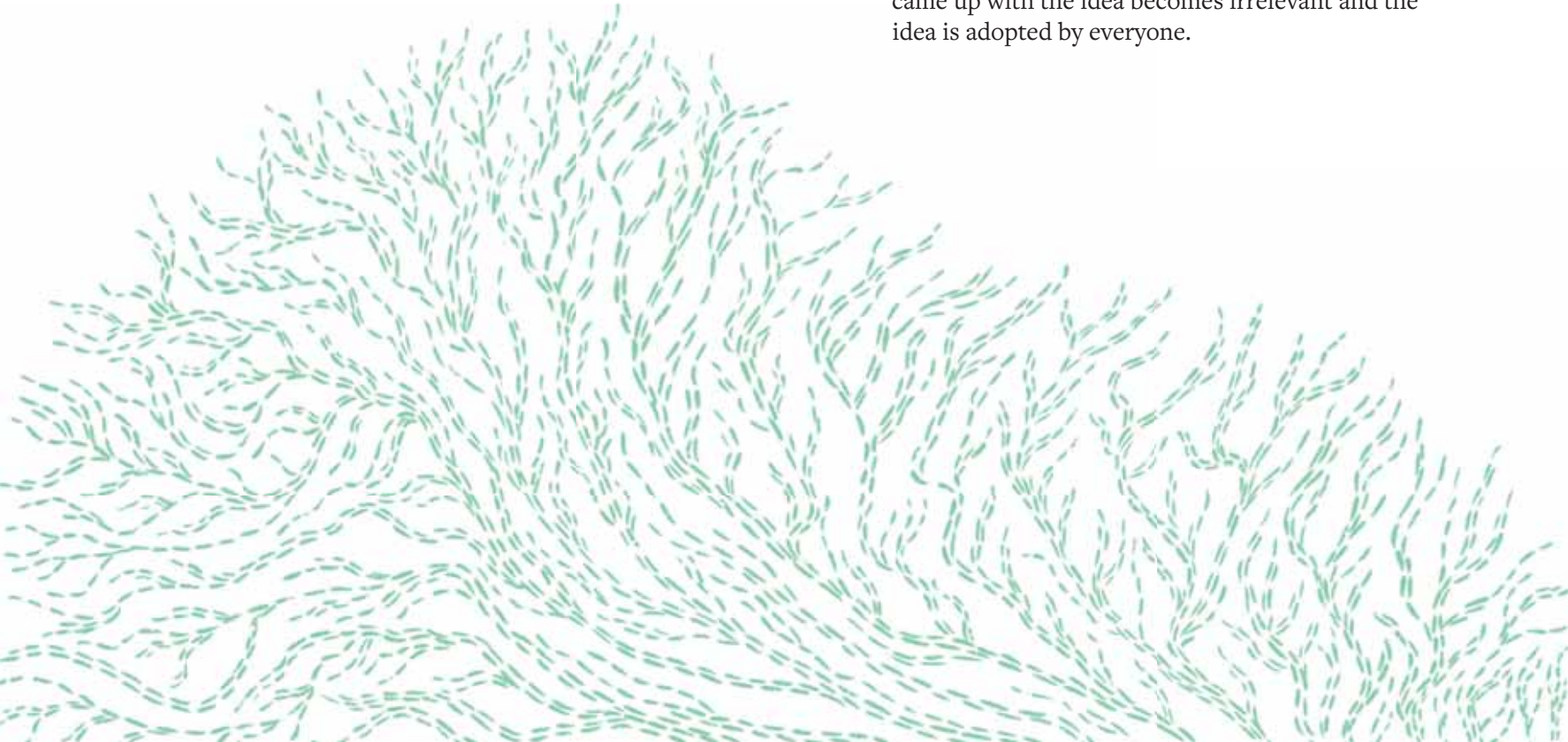
Let us surround ourselves with diverse competencies. Then we can figure out, align and leverage what is complementary to our strengths.

*This is not the wisdom of the crowd, but the wisdom of someone in the crowd. It's not that the network itself is smart; it's that the individuals get smarter because they're connected to the network.*

— STEVEN JOHNSON

---

We can get to scale when the organisation that came up with the idea becomes irrelevant and the idea is adopted by everyone.



*In the absence of reliable solutions, or when new or changing contexts reduce the reliability of existing solutions, scaling depends on innovation. Innovation encompasses the entire path to scale, starting with ideas that hold promise and culminating in impacts that matter.*

— JOHN GARGANI & ROBERT McLEAN

---

Latent leadership potential in communities and networks stays undiscovered. It is the key to unlock the capacity of various actors and innovate by going beyond the belief that the State will solve all problems.

*Let me start with a fundamental observation: most people don't know what they want unless they see it in context. Everything is relative, and that's the point.*

— DAN ARIELY





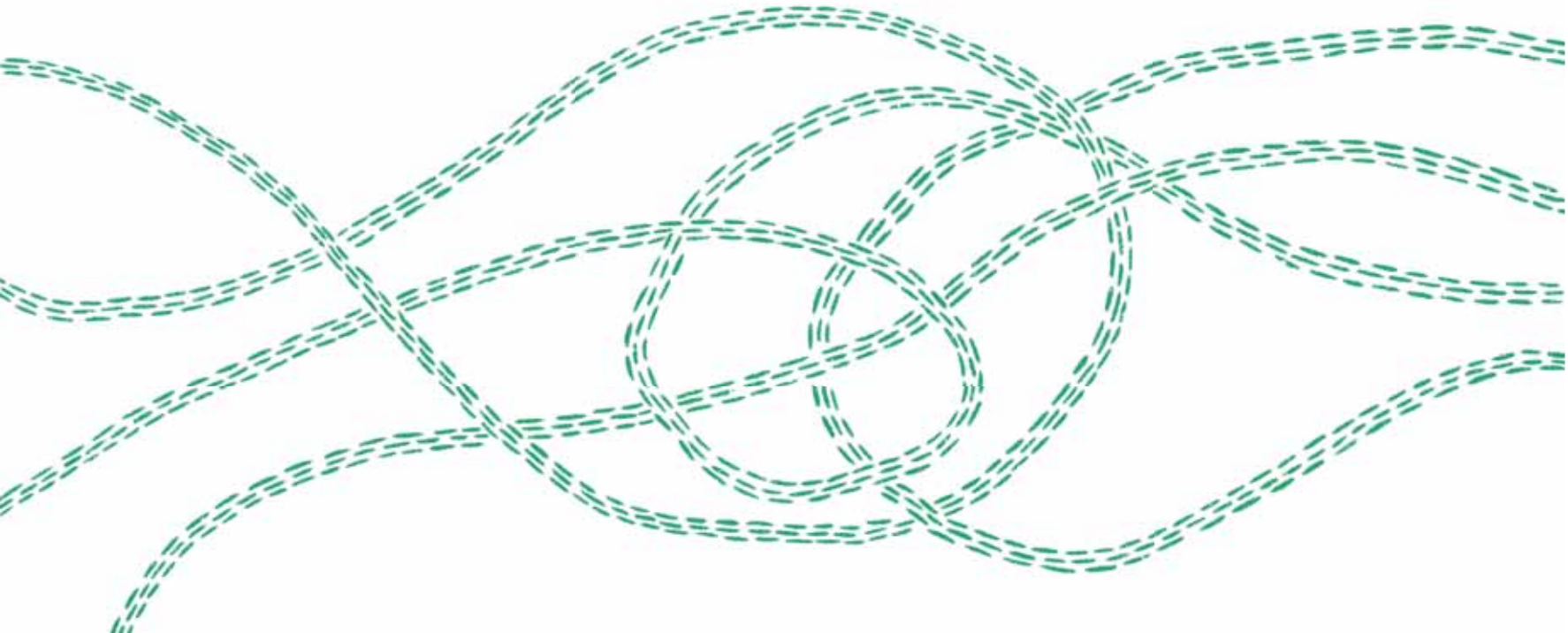




*Together we  
scale, divided  
we stall.*

If we walk in our backyards, our fences limit our reach. When we step out and align our actions and resources, we scale.

Challenges at societal scale can be solved at the intersection of civil society, government and markets. It takes the passion and might of all actors to move a 100 million families out of abject poverty.



People are attracted to audacious goals. Serving a 100 million people individually or as an organisation is very hard, but collectively, it carries a sense of possibility.

---

*The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.*

— JOHN KANIA & MARK KRAMER

*If you want people or organisations to take part in your ecosystem, then you shouldn't compete with them.*

---

— GUY KAWASAKI

Speaking multiple languages — of boardrooms, of community organisations, of governments, and of the private sector — is a leadership quality that is essential to engage the ecosystem at scale.



*When we exclude half of humanity from the production of knowledge we lose out on potentially transformative insights.*

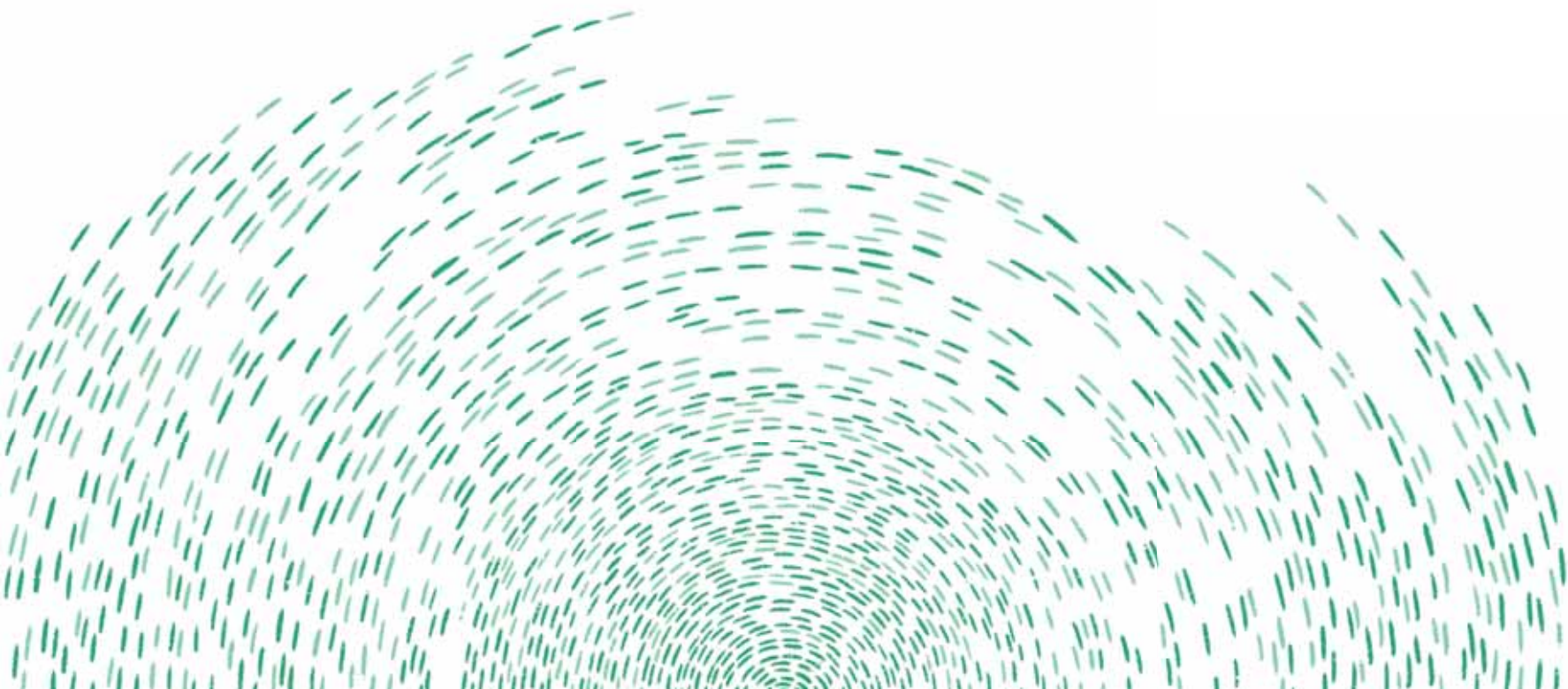
— CAROLINE CRIADO PÉREZ

*It's always helpful to learn from those who have already been where you're about to go.*

— VERNE HARNISH

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Successful orchestration happens when we create spaces where ecosystem actors exercise their agency and feel that they participated in, contributed to and were recognised for effective decision-making.



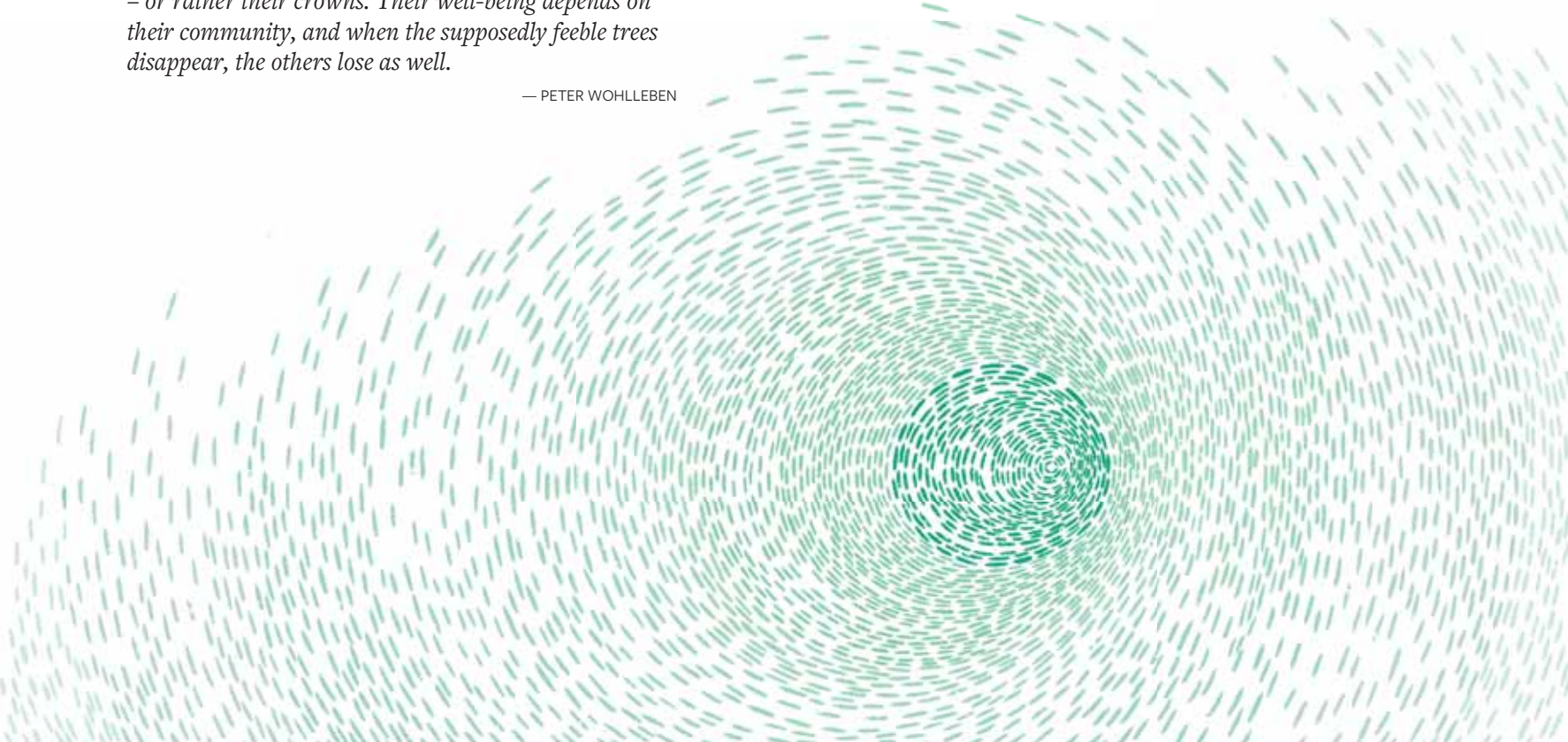
If governance is immersed in a culture of innovation and enough leaders emerge across different intersections, the chances of adopting innovations improve.

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*But isn't that how evolution works? you ask. The survival of the fittest? Trees would just shake their heads – or rather their crowns. Their well-being depends on their community, and when the supposedly feeble trees disappear, the others lose as well.*

— PETER WOHLLEBEN

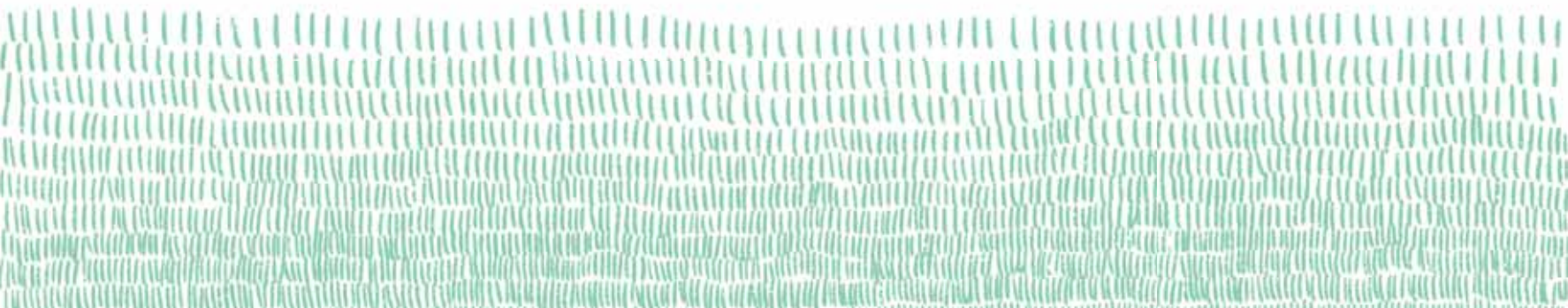
An orchestrator is an organisation that is on a mission to deliver impact at scale but does not offer any services of its own. Instead, it places trust in the ecosystem to steer the idea to scale.





*Most of the wonderful  
places in the world were  
not made by architects  
but by the people.*

— CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER



**PAUSE TO REFLECT**

*What does scale mean?*

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*Why think about scale now?*

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*What are some current scale limitations?*

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*What are some key milestones on the path to scale?*

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*How to enable others to build new solutions for scale?*

*What is a simple disruptive change that can scale?*

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*How to unlock collective agency to solve at scale?*

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*How to leverage diversity to solve at scale?*

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*How to engage other civil society, government and market actors?*

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*Where to begin? When to begin?*





# Societal Thinking

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We live in a complex world where social problems multiply. For example, more children join schools before we can remedy the learning losses of the ones graduating. At scale, our unpredictable and diverse environments make it hard to estimate the impact our solutions will have on learning levels. Meanwhile, like the virus that had upended our lives, learning problems mutate across generations before we can scale new ideas.

In dynamic situations, for impact at scale, change efforts must recognise and restore the agency of people and institutions across civil society, government and markets. To outpace problems that multiply and mutate, we must respond with an approach whose effects also multiply and evolve. Exponential problems can be countered with exponential change.

Societal Thinking is one such systemic approach to apply a set of Core Values and design principles to induce exponential change. It focuses on 3 areas: How to help key societal actors align their programmes and deliver impact? How to nurture a diverse ecosystem of change leaders who can co-create relevant solutions? How to connect

everyone with a shared digital backbone to deliver impact at scale, with speed, sustainably?

This is an invitation to think and design for exponential societal change.

*[www.societalthinking.org](http://www.societalthinking.org)*



*All glory comes from  
daring to begin.*

— RUSKIN BOND

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*We sincerely hope this book nudged you to think about impact at scale.*

— Anjali Hans, Naveen Varshan and Sanjay Purohit

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Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what scale means.



Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what speed means.



Where we create the opportunity to reflect on what it means to sustain.

Social problems are large. In our efforts to address the size of these problems, we often grapple with scale. How do we perceive the scale of the problems we're trying to solve? How do we design for scale? How do we monitor progress?

Think Scale is an opportunity to pause and reflect on how to solve at scale. It is a window into the thoughts and experiences of change leaders, thinkers and funders on a journey to enable impact at scale.

