Chapter 26. Actors - apex and non-apex – their relative strengths and weaknesses demand co-operation

Introduction

The previous chapter set out eighteen pilots. This chapter asks the next practical question: who makes them happen?

There are six principal actors. They bring different things: frontier technology, public authority, insider knowledge, money and entrepreneurial energy, education, participation and ultimately human choice. None is interchangeable with another. All are needed.

Within those six actors, three roles sit at the apex of the AI problem: the AI labs, political leaders and the professional government executive. Together they have to build the overarching containment for increasingly capable AI. They have to establish legitimate aims, boundaries, control and correction at the levels where the consequences become national, international or civilisational. No one of the three can do that alone.

But the apex will take time. The technology is moving quickly. Governments move more slowly because legitimacy, law, consultation and accountability take time. AI labs move faster, but they cannot legitimately choose societal ends for everyone. The professional government executive can connect the two, but it cannot remove the difference in speed or authority.

That means everyone else must not wait. Educators, citizens, Pathfinders and Catalysts, AI Refugees and independent experts, companies, universities, communities and other institutions can start now on most of the eighteen pilots. They can build working mechanisms, make results visible, learn from failure, correct them and keep going until they work.

This is not a lower tier waiting for permission from the top. It is a second half of the same system. Distributed action creates evidence. Evidence creates understanding. Understanding creates public permission and legitimacy. That makes stronger apex action possible. Apex action, in turn, creates the boundaries, resources and institutional support that allow successful lower-level mechanisms to spread further.

The practical rule is therefore simple: act now where we legitimately can; build the higher-order containment as fast as we can; and keep the two learning from one another.

How this chapter unfolds

1. The six actors — establishes the six groups that have to make the architecture work and the different capabilities each brings.

2. The three apex roles — separates the AI labs, political leaders and professional government executive and explains why they must jointly carry the highest-order containment task.

3. Why the apex will take time — shows why frontier technical speed, political legitimacy and administrative process operate on different clocks.

4. The other actors must go now — identifies the work that can begin immediately without waiting for complete Apex settlement.

5. The eighteen pilots across the actors — shows that apex actors can engage in all eighteen pilots, while non-Apex actors can engage in most of them and help build the evidence and legitimacy for the remainder.

6. How apex and non-apex action reinforce one another — brings the two halves together as one recursive learning, permission and correction system.

7. What this means for humans — explains why citizens and other human actors are participants in the transition rather than recipients of it.

8. What this means for apex actors — sets out the immediate responsibility to build containment while actively enabling action beneath the apex.

9. What this means for AI — defines AI as a powerful instrument for visibility, learning, comparison and correction while human beings retain authority over ends and binding settlements.

1. The six actors

The six-actor frame remains useful because it tells us what kinds of capability the programme needs.

The six actors. Exhibit 26.1

Actor	Primary contribution	What they do
1. **AI Labs** — The Builders	Safety, frontier technology, technical knowledge, compute, engineering and rapid learning.	They build the systems and are closest to both capability and emerging risk.
2. **Government** — The Legitimate Boundary Setter	Political leadership, professional government executive, regulators, law and public authority.	Government can create binding public settlements and enforceable boundaries that private actors cannot.
3. **AI Refugees and Independent Experts** — The Witnesses	Insider knowledge, informed dissent, independent challenge and technical scrutiny.	They can expose blind spots and contribute frontier knowledge outside the immediate incentives of a lab.
4. **Pathfinders and Catalysts** — The Makers	Entrepreneurial energy, investment, philanthropy, universities, technology and organisational drive.	They turn the architecture into working mechanisms quickly and can carry successful mechanisms into new settings.
5. **Educators** — The Capability Builders	Brain literacy, truth-seeking, paradox literacy, permissions literacy and learning methods.	The rest of the architecture works only if humans can understand and use it.
6. **Citizens** — The Participants and Ultimate Principals	Participation, judgement, lived consequence and democratic legitimacy.	The ends toward which AI and institutions are used remain a matter of human choice.

The six groups are complementary. The AI labs possess extraordinary capability but cannot legitimately choose humanity's ends. Government possesses public authority but is further from the frontier and moves more slowly. Independent experts can challenge both but do not acquire public authority merely through expertise. Pathfinders can move rapidly but need permissions, hosts and boundaries. Educators build the human capability on which the tools depend. Citizens supply the participation and legitimacy that make the whole system human rather than merely technical.

2. The three apex roles

Inside the six-actor frame sits a narrower apex leadership problem. The highest-consequence AI questions require three distinct roles to work together: AI labs, political leaders and the professional government executive.

AI labs

The labs bring frontier knowledge, engineering capability, models, infrastructure, researchers and the fastest learning loops. They are major sensors at the technological frontier. Their weakness is legitimacy. Corporate authority can govern a company; it does not automatically confer authority to settle broad societal paradoxes or decide the long-term conditions under which citizens should live with AI.

Political leaders

Political leaders bring legitimate societal authority. They can set public aims, choose between competing goods, allocate public resources, make law and accept political accountability. Their weakness is distance from the frontier. Political selection does not primarily select for deep AI knowledge, and electoral and media cycles compress the time horizon.

The professional government executive

The government executive provides continuity, policy knowledge, administrative machinery, regulation, implementation, monitoring and institutional memory. It is the natural bridge between political authority and technical reality. Its processes are slower because legality, consistency, procedural fairness and accountability matter.

The conclusion is structural, not optional: the three roles have to become sufficiently coupled that frontier evidence, public judgement, lawful authority, implementation and correction can move between them. Together they form the beginning of an apex control-and-correction system.

3. Why the apex will take time

The apex problem contains a built-in speed mismatch. AI capability can change materially within months. Legislation, regulation, judicial interpretation, international agreement and institutional redesign often operate over years. When the correction mechanism moves more slowly than the system it is meant to correct, the difficulty is not simply bad policy. The control loop itself is too slow.

There are also different incentives. Labs face commercial and geopolitical competition. Political leaders face elections, public pressure and party competition. The government executive faces legal process, accountability and administrative continuity. Each clock is rational inside its own institution, but the clocks do not naturally align.

The answer is not to remove legitimacy in the name of speed. Nor is it to freeze capability until public institutions have caught up. The answer is to make the apex learn and correct faster while preserving the things that make public authority legitimate.

That is difficult work. It will not all be settled before the rest of society acts. Waiting for a perfect apex architecture would therefore be a mistake.

4. The other actors must go now

The majority of the eighteen pilots can begin now in voluntary, bounded and legitimate settings. They do not require a civilisation-wide settlement before anyone can use them.

Primitives Literacy can be taught now. Permissions can be built now. Personal and Group Visibility Mirrors can be used now with genuine consent. Periodic Tables and Abacuses can be applied now as diagnostic instruments. Truth Verification can be used now. The Solvable Problem Process can be used now. Early Warning for Human Failure Modes can be developed now. Turbo-Charging Democracy can begin as a local or municipal pilot without pretending that it has already replaced lawful budgeting or elections.

The same is true of many bounded forms of higher-level pilots. A National Visibility Mirror can be built provisionally from public evidence. A Control and Correction system can be used inside a company, agency or project. Paradox Settlement can be practised inside a group that has legitimate authority over its own decisions. Candidate civilisation-level constraints can be developed, challenged and improved before they become binding law.

The rule is not “apex or non-apex”. The rule is consequence and authority. Build and use the mechanism at the level where the actor has legitimate permission to act. When the mechanism begins to bind people outside that authority, move the settlement upward.

The other actors therefore do not wait. They make things work. When something fails, they learn why, correct it and go again. Their speed is an asset so long as it remains inside legitimate boundaries.

5. The eighteen pilots across the actors

The eighteen pilots are not owned by eighteen different organisations. Most can be worked on by several actors at once. In particular, the AI labs are capable of participating in the whole portfolio. They have the technical people, resources and infrastructure to build visibility tools, truth systems, early-warning systems, problem-solving tools, democratic interfaces and high-level safety mechanisms. Their apex responsibilities add to that opportunity; they do not narrow it.

Non-apex actors can also carry most of the portfolio. Their limitation is not capability in principle. It is authority at the point where a pilot becomes a binding public settlement or a civilisation-level constraint.

Pilots and actor authority. Exhibit 26.2

Pilot group	What can move now	Where apex authority becomes essential
Orientation and shared language	More Mores for More; Primitives Literacy.	Only if a shared aim becomes a binding public settlement.
Agency and visibility	Permissions; Biomarkers; Personal, Group and National/Transnational Visibility Mirrors in bounded forms.	Binding privacy rules, official national use or compulsory public architecture.
Diagnosis, truth, control and safety	Periodic Tables; Abacus; Truth Verification; Control & Correction at local/institutional level; Human Failure Early Warning; Pilot Must-Not-Do.	National/civilisational control, enforceable must-not-do boundaries, AI civilization must-not-do, and major rights implications.
Solving, settling and deciding together	Solvable Problem Process; local Paradox Settlement; USA-China preparatory visibility work; local Turbo Democracy.	Binding national settlements, international commitments and formal changes to public authority.

This means the portfolio should move on two tracks at once. Track one builds the high-order containment. Track two makes as many of the eighteen mechanisms work as possible in the places where legitimate action is already available. The second track should not be treated as secondary. It supplies the evidence and legitimacy on which the first track will increasingly depend.

6. How apex and non-apex action reinforce one another

The relationship between apex and non-apex action is recursive.

Distributed actors build working mechanisms. A school uses Primitives Literacy. A company uses a Group Visibility Mirror. A community runs a Turbo Democracy pilot. A Pathfinder develops a Human Failure Early Warning system. A research group applies an Abacus to a contested public issue. Each produces visible experience rather than abstract argument.

That experience creates evidence. People can see what worked, what failed, what had to be corrected and what the mechanism actually changed. Evidence then creates understanding. Understanding makes it easier for citizens, media, political leaders and public officials to judge the mechanism on its merits rather than as an unfamiliar theory.

From there comes permission and legitimacy. Political leaders can act more confidently when citizens have seen and used a mechanism. Regulators can design

better rules when bounded versions have exposed the real failure modes. Government executives can implement more effectively when working models already exist. AI labs can participate in higher-order cooperation when they can point to practical architectures rather than only principles.

The flow also runs downward. Apex action can establish common permissions, fund public infrastructure, create legal boundaries, protect rights, require transparency, coordinate international arrangements and make proven mechanisms available at scale.

So the system is not top-down or bottom-up. It is both. Distributed action increases the sensing and learning field. Apex action provides legitimate containment. The two continuously correct one another.

Apex-distributed reinforcement. Exhibit 26.3

Distributed action	Apex action
Builds and improves mechanisms	Creates legitimate boundaries and public authority
Produces visible evidence	Uses evidence to improve law, policy and coordination
Builds citizen understanding and permission	Protects rights and sets limits on compulsory use
Shows what is practical	Provides scale, resources and institutional continuity
Surfaces failure modes early	Corrects system-wide risks and cross-border consequences

7. What this means for humans

Humans are not waiting at the end of this process to receive whatever governments and AI laboratories decide. They are participants in building it.

Citizens can use the visibility tools. Teams can improve how they solve problems. Communities can make trade-offs visible. Educators can build the literacy needed to use the tools well. Entrepreneurs and institutions can turn the architecture into things people can actually use. Independent experts can challenge claims and expose failure modes.

Participation also changes capability. A person who has used a Personal Visibility Mirror understands self-observation differently from someone who has only read about it. A citizen who has allocated positive and negative dollars across a real public budget understands trade-offs differently from someone who has only demanded more spending. A team that has used an Abacus can see paradox differently from a team that has only argued across binary positions.

That learning is itself part of civilisational development. The objective is not simply better tools. It is humans becoming better able to see, choose, correct and cooperate while remaining human.

8. What this means for apex actors

Apex actors have two responsibilities at the same time.

The first is to build the containment. AI labs, political leaders and the government executive must create the arrangements through which high-consequence AI is bounded, observed, corrected and, where necessary, constrained across organisations and borders. They cannot leave that job to voluntary local action.

The second is not to make everyone else wait. The apex should actively enable the pilots that can move now. It should make data available where appropriate, provide technical support, create safe permissions, fund useful infrastructure, open channels for evidence to reach decision-makers and avoid unnecessary barriers to legitimate voluntary action.

AI labs have a particularly large opportunity. They can participate across all eighteen pilots while also helping build the apex containment. Doing so would improve their own understanding of human systems, reveal where their technology strengthens or weakens those systems, and give governments practical mechanisms with which to work.

The apex therefore should not view distributed action as competition for authority. It should view it as the sensing, learning and legitimacy field that makes better authority possible.

9. What this means for AI

AI has a large role in this architecture, but it remains an instrument inside a humanly chosen system.

AI can lower the cost of visibility. It can help people see patterns in themselves, groups and institutions. It can compare evidence, preserve memory, surface contradictions, run diagnostics, support problem solving, show paradox positions, identify early warning signals and connect learning across many pilots.

That makes AI potentially central to both halves of the system. It can help distributed actors move faster and learn better. It can also help apex actors sense a complex system, compare reality with intention, identify deviations and correct earlier.

But capability is not authority. AI can help construct an Abacus; it does not choose the societal settlement. It can show the consequences of different budget allocations; it does not acquire the right to allocate the public budget. It can identify

a possible civilisation-level danger; it does not independently create the law that binds humanity.

The most useful role for AI is therefore to make the whole human system more visible, more informed, more connected and more correctable while humans retain responsibility for aims, permissions, boundaries and final choice.

That is how the six actors, the apex roles and the eighteen pilots become one operating system rather than three separate lists.