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# 5 reasons “fractional leadership” is the antidote to leader burnout

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Top calibre individuals with extensive knowledge and experience have left traditional corporate roles to gain more flexibility.
- The sole purpose of these “fractional leaders” is to support — not replace — senior executives.
- Engagement with fractional leadership brings stressed executives the extra bandwidth they need.

In 2022 Deloitte reported that from a [comprehensive study of 2,100 employees and C-level executives](#) across USA, UK, Canada, and Australia, nearly 70 per cent of the C-suite were seriously thinking about leaving their current position in favor of one that better supported their well-being. Roll on to 2024 and not much has changed. In fact, it's got worse. The [2024 Global Talent Trends](#) report by Mercer of 12,000 participants including 845 C-suite leaders and 1,900 HR leaders reveals that more than 80% of employees are at risk of burnout.

Fractional leadership is a practical, alternative vision of the future of work for senior executives (aka "CxOs") that might hold a solution to leadership burnout. For leaders at risk of burnout engaging with fractional leadership brings the extra bandwidth they need in terms of skills, capacity, and knowledge... and fast.

Fractional Leadership is starting to gain significant interest and is being adopted by businesses globally. It disrupts and challenges the traditional full-time employment model providing firms with access to the functional, emotional, and collective intelligence they need by moving positions from the 'pay-roll' to an 'access-role'. Operating across the disciplines of finance, marketing, people, technology, and beyond, these top calibre individuals with extensive knowledge and experience have left traditional corporate roles to gain more flexibility, variety, and control over their lives. They have chosen to become self-employed and work with a portfolio of growing entrepreneurial businesses or larger organizations, each on a flexible fractional basis, for example one day per week or two days a month. Crucially fractional leaders can also dial their time up and down to fit the profile of the work to be done, making it even more attractive to those that need help.

Here are 5 reasons leaders should consider fractional leadership to be their superpower.

### **"If only there was another one of me"**

If you're an employed senior executive and find yourself saying this, then consider hiring a fractional leader. They have sat in your shoes in large global corporates for many years. They've been there, seen it, and done it, so can bring you the support of skills, knowledge, and decades of wisdom and

experience to help you navigate your way forward. You can ask them to do all the things on your never-ending to-do list which you just haven't got round to but which you can't train others to do.

The best bit about these fractional leaders is that they aren't looking to replace you: Their sole purpose is to support you and make you shine. That, combined with the ability to draw on several fractional leaders simultaneously to support you across a range of issues means you get the right specialist, doing the right work, for the right amount of time, in the right place, and you can trust them to get the job done. They're the professionals who have done these roles before, so don't need hand-holding. Suddenly your to-do list is a lot shorter, and you are feeling a lot lighter.

**“There's just not enough hours in the day — I'm burning out working all hours scaling my growing business”**

Bringing in fractional leaders can help relieve pressure on SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprise) owners who may not need — or cannot afford — a full-time C-Suite team. These business owners often start their firms to gain freedom but fall into the trap of overseeing everything and working day and night to stay on top of things — burnout is a real risk.

Bringing in a team of fractional leaders, working either sequentially or in tandem, helps relieve the workload, and provides a sounding board at the owner's level to share worries and concerns. The fractional C-level talent will be beside the business owner every step of the way, offering guidance, encouragement and appropriately challenging them.

The coordinated efforts of fractional leaders across marketing, technology, and talent strategies mean that all areas are properly funded, phased, and coordinated — reducing risk and increasing certainty in outcomes. Other tangible benefits cited by SMEs are that fractional talent brings easy access to a wider network for sector and function, industry insights, and benchmarking. All these things will help ease the pressure on the business owner in an affordable and flexible way, but the best bit is that they will likely begin to enjoy their business again and sleep more soundly.

**“It's not just me who is at risk of burnout, it's my team too”**

One of the reasons fractional leaders choose to work in the access economy is to “give back.” Having navigated the growth path of larger organizations multiple times, fractional leaders are the perfect mentors: After all, they have trodden this path before. They have accumulated so much knowledge and experience over the years that can be of benefit to others who are starting out or grappling with issues they have faced many times before.

Understanding that fractional talent can be accessed to provide mentoring and coaching to emerging leaders is a way to ease the burden on incumbents, who just haven’t the time to devote to this activity, and at the same time to provide up-and-coming workers with the support they need to progress in a way that doesn’t involve them overworking either. They will have someone who cares about their development and who they can talk to about how to prioritize and manage their workloads, and save time by regularly tapping into the fractional leader’s experience and knowledge.

The result will be layers of talent who are ready and able to take on more responsibility and advanced levels of work and share the load with their bosses, reducing pressure all round.

### **“I need support from a like-minded community”**

Another way that fractional leadership can reduce stress and burnout is by providing a community of like-minded individuals for those they work with. As humans we like to “have a place” or a particular territory where we feel at home, somewhere which gives us a sense of belonging and where we can be part of a group of like-minded people. The more our work gives us these feelings of belonging, the more meaningful it will be, and the less chance we will move into burnout. The very nature of fractional leadership means that these practitioners are particularly exposed to many more organizations and their issues than if working for just one business.

**If corporate life has put you at the risk of burnout, or left you disillusioned, becoming a fractional leader could be an ideal alternative.**

For the employed group CxOs, fractional leaders who have moved away from those positions are a source of support as a community and sounding board. For business owners scaling their own organizations they can tap into the network of other entrepreneurs also using fractional leaders. Fractional CxOs work with portfolios of organizations and as such they are in touch with many professionals simultaneously. By connecting the dots and bringing these Group CxOs and business owners together, to share problems and compare issues, many will begin to feel more supported and able to learn from each other about how to best deal with overwhelm.

**“Perhaps my route to avoiding burnout is to become a fractional leader?”**

If corporate life has put you at the risk of burnout, or left you disillusioned, becoming a fractional leader could be an ideal alternative. Many CxOs join this privileged end of the gig economy after climbing the ranks and devoting their lives to their employers. Yes, they’ve developed the rigor and professionalism needed to do their jobs, but their corporate roles have become relentless. Constant travel, long hours to meet the next corporate imperative, unable to have a family holiday without interruption, and getting caught up in office politics mean they are getting further away from doing the parts of the role they love and the sharp end of business.

They want to give back, feel appreciated, and valued. Their personal lives are suffering from extremely heavy workloads and unrealistic demands — it’s time to take stock and reflect on what really matters. They want flexibility, variety, and control over their lives. Working in the fractional C-suite access economy is their answer. They can build a portfolio of SME clients or larger organizations whom they work with on an ongoing basis, splitting their time across all of them. Finally, they are back in control of their agenda, they bring balance back into their lives and forge deep, value-adding relationships with business owners and corporate CxOs who fully respect and cherish their input.