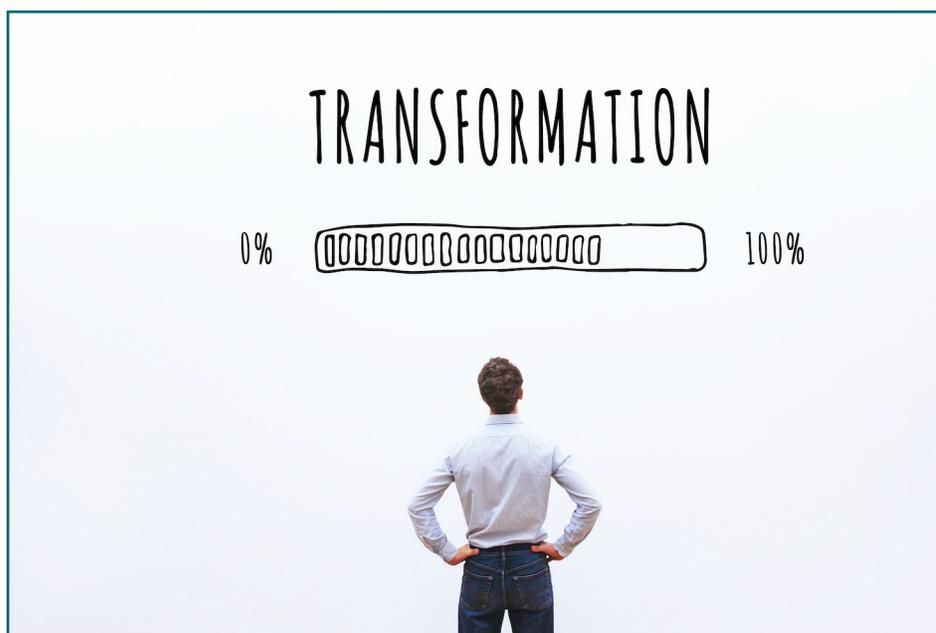


# 5 Essential Adaptive Practices for Agile Leaders

written by

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**Adaptive leadership** has taken on a new meaning during this current climate. It has challenged leaders to shift suddenly, mentally and physically, but also practically. Business metrics tracked in February to gauge the health of the business are not the same metrics that need monitoring today. Strategic conversations have shifted to tactical ones. And sensitive topics that would have waited for in-person discussions are now taking place inside a video conference.

Leaders at all levels are drawing upon the critical elements of their leadership brand to help them navigate the daily uncertainty. At this moment, the capacity to effectively perform the leadership responsibilities needed at scale in large, complex systems requires the non-linear interplay of priorities, functions, politics, and people. Adaptive leadership has never been more critical toward influencing dynamics in productive ways.



*“Executives leading difficult change initiatives are often blissfully ignorant of an approaching threat until it is too late to respond.”*

~Ronald Heifetz, the creator of Adaptive Leadership theory

## Leadership Competencies of the Moment

Although we don't know what will be different on the other side of this present crisis, we do know transformational, adaptive change will have occurred at a deep level. Truly agile leaders need to understand the required shift in their contribution from driving results through hands-on influence to becoming:

- Architects of change,
- Developers of flexible systems and organizations,
- Business strategists,
- Risk mitigators, and
- Value creators.



These specific leadership competencies require good judgment, sophisticated and courageous people skills, strategic thinking abilities, and a host of other valuable and rare assets. Most importantly, they are critical to the moment we now find ourselves. The following **five essential adaptive practices** serve as a starting point for agile leaders:

1

### Accept that the playbook didn't have this scenario in it

A leader's ability to tolerate ambiguity, and not act or react instantly, can be especially challenging for leaders with trained expectations for instant results. As an agile leader, understanding how today's events will impact tomorrow's plans is crucial. Adjust to the real business challenges of the moment, recognizing the metrics you previously led with no longer apply.

2

### **Use the immediacy of this crisis as “case-in-point” teaching**

As an agile leader, there’s no better time than the present to develop your people with real-world applications. Use the fluidity of this crisis to allow hearing different perspectives. Manage conflict that emerges through consistent communication, providing context and insight to the decisions. Model accountability by accepting your portion of responsibility for what unfolds, the good, the bad, and the ugly. This example will set the expectations (and give permission) for others to follow.

3

### **Increase peer-to-peer learning, sharing, and support**

During unprecedented times like these, collaboration and team alignment across functions are incredibly important. Create an outlet to come together with other leaders to discuss the unknowns, share the questions asked, and talk candidly about what’s working and what’s not. Look for the alternate, and possibly better future that the present challenge opens up and engage your people in defining change in order to meet that future; can your organization emerge even stronger and more rapidly aligned to its future than would have been possible without the disruption?

4

### **Challenge your assumptions by getting out of your intellectual and emotional comfort zone**

Leading right now is a powerful learning experience that is sure to challenge one’s assumptions and routines. Adaptive leadership entails mobilizing others to be a part of the solution, to share in the risk/reward, and to foster individual role ownership and the outcomes produced.

5

### **Build-in time and structure for reflection and mindfulness**

Agile leadership in a time of crisis means digesting the experiences one has and consciously connecting the dots, so the lessons live on past this one moment in time. Even in this ever-changing environment, time and thoughtful attention—quietly alone—or in conversation with a mentor, peer, or coach can’t be overlooked. Schedule in the time so that you are ready for what tomorrow will bring.

Ronald Heifetz, who introduced the adaptive leadership model with Marty Linsky, defines it as the act of mobilizing a group of individuals to handle tough challenges and emerge triumphant in the end. Today’s crisis will take momentous effort and will not be easy. Developing these five essential adaptive practices will better enable leaders and their organizations to weather this, and future storms, emerging stronger than before.

## About Waldron Effective Organizations Services

Waldron's tailored coaching and consulting services are designed to build strong leaders and agile organizational cultures.

Lasting Transformation is Our Goal.

Whether a small shift in the way our clients work or a total disruption of the business model, we assist clients in driving greater results at the individual, team, and organizational levels. We are committed to providing truthful insights delivered discreetly, in a clear and concise manner. Our highly tailored engagements move individuals and organizations to achieve desired results and outcomes.

Contact us to learn about Waldron's approach to helping clients "learn by doing", using actual present challenges and opportunities to develop new ways of working, leading, and collaborating. This approach ensures our solutions make effective and efficient use of resources and equips clients to continue success after our engagement ends.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



**Kim Bohr** is COO and Head of the Effective Organizations practice at Waldron. In her role, Kim focuses on working with Waldron's exceptional leadership, consulting, coaching, and project management teams, as well as its staff members across all offices. Kim's professional mission is to make organizations better from the inside out by helping leaders create alignment between people, processes, and an organization's guiding principles. Kim is a published author, speaker, and entrepreneur. In support of her passion for transformational learning, Kim is an adjunct faculty member at Seattle University, where she teaches MBA and undergraduate courses on business strategy, operations, and leadership. Also active in the community, Kim leverages her extensive professional experience in humanitarian work and volunteering, including serving as a national Board member of Susan G. Komen.



## ABOUT WALDRON

*Waldron believes in empowering organizations and individuals to realize their full potential.*

For over 35 years, Waldron has helped high performing executives and organizations lead the process of change, individual and organization transformation, giving Waldron specialized insight into the complexity involved in adapting to rapidly changing business environments. Viewed as a trusted advisor, we partner deeply with our clients. We are committed to providing truthful insights delivered discreetly, in a clear and concise manner. Our highly tailored engagements move individuals and organizations to achieve desired results and outcomes.

Waldron is an equity owner of Career Partners International (CPI). It is through the Waldron CPI group and its 360 offices worldwide that we are able to serve our multi-region and multi-national clients with-consistently-delivered, differentiated and highly personalized support services for client organizations' career transition/outplacement, executive coaching and leadership development needs.

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