



## Leading in Uncertainty: Using Uncertainty to Create the Future

In February 2020, the thought of the public service working remotely en masse was a distant possibility, and perhaps not even a probability. Yet only a few weeks later it was happening—and it was working!

Being catapulted into the future creates pressure to adapt, which can be quite intense. The good news is that humans are hardwired to adapt, and we tend to adapt well when we are supported within a community.

The more chaotic the situation, the harder it is to create order while looking out for the welfare of others. But leaders who do it well mobilize loyal teams to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

**All change arises from an opportunity,  
and all opportunities arise from a disruption in certainty.**

This tool will help you, as a leader, reflect on your changing environment and support team engagement towards designing the future state. Take 30 to 60 minutes to reflect on your present context and envision the possibilities. Then, use the team questionnaire to collaborate on new opportunities to lead change in your organization.

### Identify opportunities

When we are under stress, the reptilian brain activates and switches us into survival mode. The default perception in this state is to look to the future to anticipate what could possibly go wrong. But with some practice, we can consciously engage our executive functions (prefrontal cortex) to use reason, explore possibilities and evaluate options. To do this, we need to recognize that we are in a state of disorder, and create a little bit of space to relax, reflect and be proactive.

Good leaders know that every transition holds possibility; the bigger the disruption, the greater the potential for bringing about something new. Great leaders take time to envision and strategize.

Explore the possibilities.

### Self-reflection exercise

To prepare:

- Set aside 30 to 60 minutes to focus on the task at hand
- Allow your ideas to flow without censoring them
- Remember that the realm of possibility is much bigger than we generally consider it to be



Use the following questions to guide your self-reflection.

What aspects of the present situation would you like to carry into the future?

What aspects of the present situation would you like to leave behind?

What new direction or new way of doing things exists now that did not exist before?



## Create a vision

As you manage chaos and evolve your situation to a more orderly state, you will find yourself in a unique position to create a new future, one that is perhaps drastically different from the recent past. As questions arise about what this "new normal" will be, take the time to clearly define what it will look like.

**From the possibilities identified in the previous question, select one opportunity to develop. Imagine what the future looks like and how it functions within this opportunity. Who are the players and how do they behave?**

**What is your role and how will you succeed? How do you want to feel?  
How do you want your team members to feel?**

**"The best way to predict the future is to create it."**

Peter Drucker

## Capitalize on opportunities

To make lasting change, you don't necessarily have to take dramatic action. Small actions, like adopting a new value and consciously aligning your behaviours with it, can have an exponential impact. If every day you shifted your actions towards a goal by only 1%, imagine where you'd be in just a few months.

Still, when something dramatic happens, carpe diem!

Whether it's slow and steady, or sudden and dramatic, the key to creating the future is a clear vision and getting buy-in from your teams.



**We can let change happen or we can make change happen.**

The rapid transition to remote working illustrates what's possible when finding a solution to a common problem is at the forefront of the collective consciousness.

The impossible becomes possible.

**How can you present your idea in a way that sparks curiosity and enthusiasm?  
How can you ensure that your teams feel a part of something meaningful?**

**What in your environment can you say “yes” or “no” to that will allow you to be more proactive than reactive?**

YES	NO

### **Get buy-in**

Providing your teams with similar questions can allow you to open a conversation that will give you insight into what's important to them and what will help them do their best work.

Allow time for your teams to reflect on the questions below, and schedule a meeting to discuss their responses. If you wish, prepare a poll on Slido.com to capture feedback anonymously before you meet.



## Team questionnaire

What aspects of the present situation would you like to carry into the future?  
What aspects would you like to leave behind?

What new situation or conditions would you like to see in the future?

How do you want to perform?

How do you want to feel?



## Ensure that change happens

Now that you and your teams are proactively focused on the future, use the momentum to develop a collective vision and plan, and to clarify the values (attitudes) and guiding principles (behaviours) that team members will use to hold each other accountable.

Identify the individuals who demonstrate a growth mindset. Ask yourself who on your teams:

- is curious about trying new things
- is energized when faced with something they don't know how to do
- puts themselves in situations where they could fail
- looks at their tasks in terms of iteration rather than getting it right
- seeks and embraces feedback

These are the people who are your most likely ambassadors for change. Once you have their buy-in, they will champion the cause, seek to overcome obstacles, and help support those who are more risk-averse, thereby strengthening group cohesion.

## Conclusion

Periods of intense stress can test the bonds of a team, but under the right conditions, the same stress factors can build cohesion. There is no way to be certain of the outcomes. By establishing a collective vision and a joint mission that people know how to contribute to, you will be able to move towards the future you envision.