



THE INSTITUTE OF  
**LEADERSHIP**  
& MANAGEMENT

**No.20**

**Leadership Essentials**

# Adaptability

Achieving leaders adapt to changing circumstances



## Being more adaptable?

**Change is inevitable in any setting and there may be times when you feel that it's difficult for you and your team members to cope with the changing expectations you are experiencing. This can lead to feelings of stress and present risks in terms of the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole. Being adaptable is essential for you and your team.**

Pulakos E et al., 2000

### Being adaptable means that people are able to:

- Handle emergencies and solve problems.
- Respond to unpredictable situations and manage their stress.
- Learn new processes, activities and technology.
- Demonstrate adaptable interpersonal skills.

### As a leader or manager, you need to demonstrate your adaptability by:

- Being resilient and calm under pressure.
- Acting as a role model by using different methods of communication to suit different circumstances.
- Managing ambiguity and being open to change.
- Working well with diverse groups of people across all levels of the organisation.



### Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

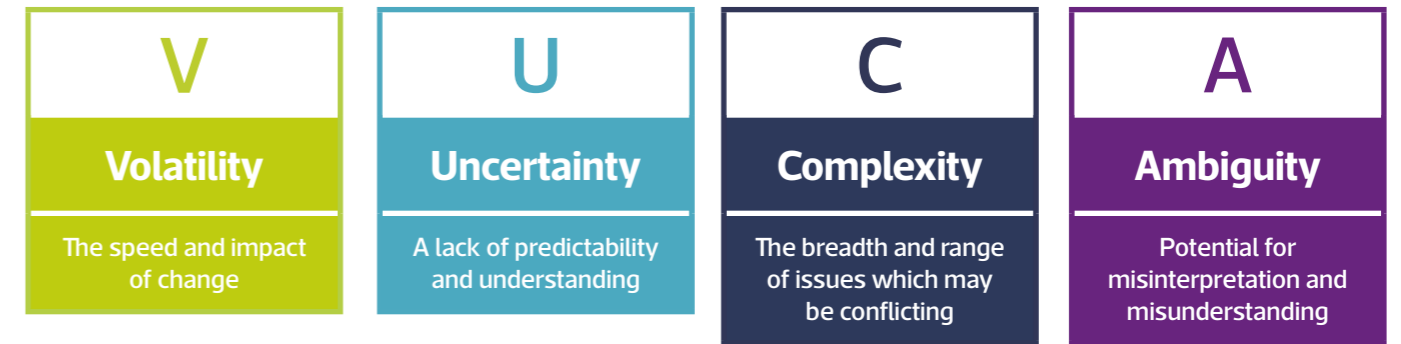
Each individual has a unique way of processing and making sense of information. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a tool to support effective communication and help build better relationships, both of which are essential to adaptability. Taken from NLP Academy (2017) NLP is defined as follows:

- **Neuro** – individuals establish their own mental filtering systems for processing the information absorbed through each of the senses. A mental map comprising of internal images, sounds, tactile awareness, internal sensations, tastes and smells forms as a result of this neurological filtering process.
- **Linguistic** – individuals then give this filtering personal meaning by assigning linguistic representation to it, resulting in conscious awareness.
- **Programming** – this is the behavioural response that occurs as a result of neurological filtering and the subsequent linguistic map.

## VUCA

The ability to be adaptable and to communicate effectively with greater awareness using techniques such as NLP helps individuals respond to the constant change organisations face. The type of change should be identified and VUCA, a popular acronym for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous, offers a means of making sense of the challenges of today's business environment..

The VUCA Prime was developed by Bob Johansen, author of Leaders Make the Future (2012) suggesting that, VUCA leaders need to 'flip' the VUCA model and focus on the following four antidotes:



### Antidote to VUCA by Johansen (2012)



#### Volatility is mitigated by "vision"

clarity of where an organisation is heading and sense-making about the organisational context. In times of volatility, leaders need to communicate clearly and make sure their intention is understood.

#### Uncertainty yields to "understanding"

and the ability to reflect. In uncertain situations, leaders should seek fresh perspectives and remain flexible. They need to understand their own and other's values.

#### Complexity is addressed by "clarity"

and sense making. In complex situations, leaders need to collaborate with others and be flexible about solutions.

#### Ambiguity is countered with "agility"

speedy communications between people and across organisations to help find quick solutions. When confronted with ambiguous situations, leaders need to listen, think divergently, act responsively, and implement decisions quickly.

### Agile Leadership

Agility should not be confined to countering Ambiguity, for 'Agile Leadership' is increasingly being seen as the key to organisational survival in this digital and VUCA world:

"Agile leaders are connected leaders. They know how to connect with their team, customers, colleagues and wider stakeholders. They also know how to connect with societal trends that are shaping a new reality around us - a digitally accelerating, politically unstable reality that creates novel opportunities and raises the threat of obsolescence across products and whole sectors." Hayward, S. (2018)

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## Developing adaptability skills for you and your team members

BECOMING MORE ADAPTABLE	DEVELOPING ADAPTABILITY IN YOUR TEAM
<p><b>Come out of your comfort zone</b> Actively seek opportunities to try something new or to work with people or departments with whom you haven't collaborated before. This will help make you more responsive when changes occur.</p>	<p>Model the behaviours and characteristics listed on the left. Address concerns but also emphasise the benefits.</p> <p>Ensure you offer sufficient levels of support and provide access to development opportunities and training to help your team get to grips with change.</p>
<p><b>Get involved</b> Volunteer to assist with any new initiatives, even where these are not central to your role. This can be achieved by working to understand more about the reasons for change, helping you to communicate these effectively to your team.</p>	
<p><b>Keep an open mind</b> Whilst it is normal to have concerns or questions about a change, give equal thought to the benefits of change and identify if you need additional information to help you and your team to do so.</p>	
<p><b>Reflect</b> Consider how adaptable you are and ask for feedback from others (including your manager and team members) to objectively assess your current level of adaptability.</p>	
<p><b>Learn from others</b> Are there other colleagues in your organisation you feel are already particularly adaptable? If so, it's worth asking them if they have any advice they can share with you.</p>	



### Dimensions of Leadership

The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

Find out more at [www.institutelm.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html](http://www.institutelm.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html)

