

3Rs OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE IN THE NEXT NORMAL

Uncertain. Unknown. Unpredictable. Besides mirroring the dynamic nature of a crisis, these adjectives are reflective of the “**next normal**” - an unprecedented new era that is ever-changing and riddled with ambiguity. As such, **resilience as a leadership competency** is more important now than ever. This refers to the ability of a leader to manage, recover, learn, and grow from chronic or crisis adversity. This series will share stories of leaders from diverse backgrounds and industries on how they have responded in times of uncertainty, managed recovery, and reinvented for the future. This issue of this series explores how leaders may reinvent from crises or adversities by being **agile and adaptive**.

RESPONDING

NAVIGATE THROUGH
UNCERTAINTY

RECOVERING

LEARN AND EMERGE
STRONGER

REINVENTING

PREPARE FOR THE
FUTURE

STEERING THE WAY FORWARD: AGILE AND ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Acknowledging that the environment is ever-changing and dynamic prepares one to engage openly with the unexpected and helps one to regain a sense of balance amidst disruptions. A key feature of effective leadership in such times is embracing agility and adaptability and integrating them into team processes and organisational culture. Such a mindset would allow leaders to be resourceful and creative in the face of potential disruptions.



Han Keen Juan, the founder of Old Chang Kee, started out with a clear vision to modernise and re-engineer the curry puff business by continuously upgrading the production facility and implementing fresh ideas that are in sync with consumer trends.

He is **not afraid to make mistakes** and gives his staff **second chances** when they do because he believes that is the way one can learn and grow. His willingness to embrace technology has enabled him to grow his business from just five workers to one that employs almost 600 today.

His nephew, Mr William Lim, said “Mr Han understands that the business environment **changes constantly** and he gives the staff the **freedom to try new things.**” In addition, Mr Han **encourages and engages opposing viewpoints and ideas**, rather than feel threatened by them. Mr Han's long-time friend and mentor, Mr Ricky Cheong, described him as someone who is **open to new ideas and ready to change**.

The onset of the pandemic had also shown the world the power of agile leaders and organisations. One of the most well-known pivots has been that of **General Motors**, which began producing over **30,000 ventilators and 2 million FDA-cleared Level 1 surgical masks**. In fact, generations of employees have been counted on to develop solutions during times of crisis, like in 1942 where manufacturing facilities were fully converted into military production plants during World War 2 to produce artillery cases, propellers and tanks.



We are living in an age of accelerating disruption brought about by features of the modern world (e.g., digitalisation and globalisation), therefore increasing the demand for agile and hyper-aware leaders who can push for timely adaptations while steering their teams and organisations through a fog of uncertainty. This is a challenge, even to the most prescient leaders. **Beyond predicting the ways in which the situation unfolds, it is increasingly useful to develop a comfortable and creative relationship with uncertainty.** Leaders who are able to cultivate a culture of **adapting fluidly to environmental**

changes and being open to novel ideas, will ensure that their teams and organisations remain resilient in the face of disruptive forces and possibly even thrive in rapidly-changing environments.

While agility and adaptability are not words typically associated with public sector organisations and other large companies due to their layers of management structure and organisational complexity, the pandemic has shown their ability and potential to be agile and to adapt to the changing and imposing circumstances. How do these large organisations keep pace in rapid times? The key lies in **giving clear directions** to employees on how to achieve their mission and **enough autonomy** to make decisions at the front line. Leaders are the biggest enablers of a successful agile transformation as they play a key role in **developing new mindsets and capabilities** within their team, and **shaping the organisation culture** to be more resilient amidst waves of transformation.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

#1: Develop your Personal Inner Agility

- To avoid falling back on survival instincts when faced with complexities, one needs to learn to **relax at the edge of uncertainty**, and **recognise and appreciate emergent possibilities**.
- Building blocks of inner agility:
 - **Embrace your ignorance:** Good new ideas can come from anywhere and a single technology product can reshape your business. In such a world, listening — and thinking — from a place of not knowing is a critical means of encouraging the discovery of original, unexpected, breakthrough ideas.
 - **Radically reframe the questions:** One way to discern the complex patterns that give rise to both problems and windows of emergent possibilities is to change the nature of the questions we ask ourselves. Asking yourself challenging questions may help unblock your existing mental model.

#2: Build Agility in Teams

Agility cannot be achieved in isolation and successful transformation requires agility of their teams as well.

- Agile teams are typically **small, diverse, empowered**, and **connected** by an underlying creative mindset of **partnership**. This involves not only trusting, listening and collaborating more, but also being prepared to **welcome plural views**, and to **foster inclusion**.
- Another hallmark of agile is teams is having members who are **empowered and trusted** to make timely and necessary decisions. Agile leaders should **focus on guiding and supporting** rather than directing and micromanaging.
- Leaders should work towards creating a **psychologically safe** environment where people feel comfortable sharing knowledge and taking calculated risks. Such an environment facilitates **joint problem-solving**, creates room for **experimentation**, and encourages all team members to **take ownership of individual and team outcomes**.
 - Leaders should also frame reasonable failures as opportunities for learning, through creating an understanding that it is an expected part of the process of navigating the unknown.

#3: Shape an Agile Organisational Culture

To sustain an agile culture, the surrounding context must support the new mindsets and behaviours.

- **Leaders as a role model:** Leaders need to be clear on what an agile mindset means to them, so that they can "walk the talk" and demonstrate new mindsets and capabilities authentically.
- **Fostering understanding and conviction:** Leaders can shape culture through co-creating and articulating the direction forward. Going beyond just words, leaders can bring culture to life by incorporating it as one of the work streams and having team members lead the agile transformation.
- **Building capabilities:** Leaders should assess for gaps in knowledge and strive to narrow the gaps by building new mindsets and capabilities. Agile organisations go beyond traditional notions of learning and development by weaving learning into the fabric of daily activity.
- **Consistently review and evaluate your work for relevance and adapt accordingly**, relying on team members if necessary. A cycle of regular feedback and improvement ensures that one is able to keep up in a climate where conditions are constantly changing.

Please scan the QR code to find an *infographic* that explores **key principles of Agile and Adaptive leadership and other leadership characteristics** that are also on the rise in this next normal.



“Success in management requires learning as fast as the world is changing.”

- Warren Bennis

Sources

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