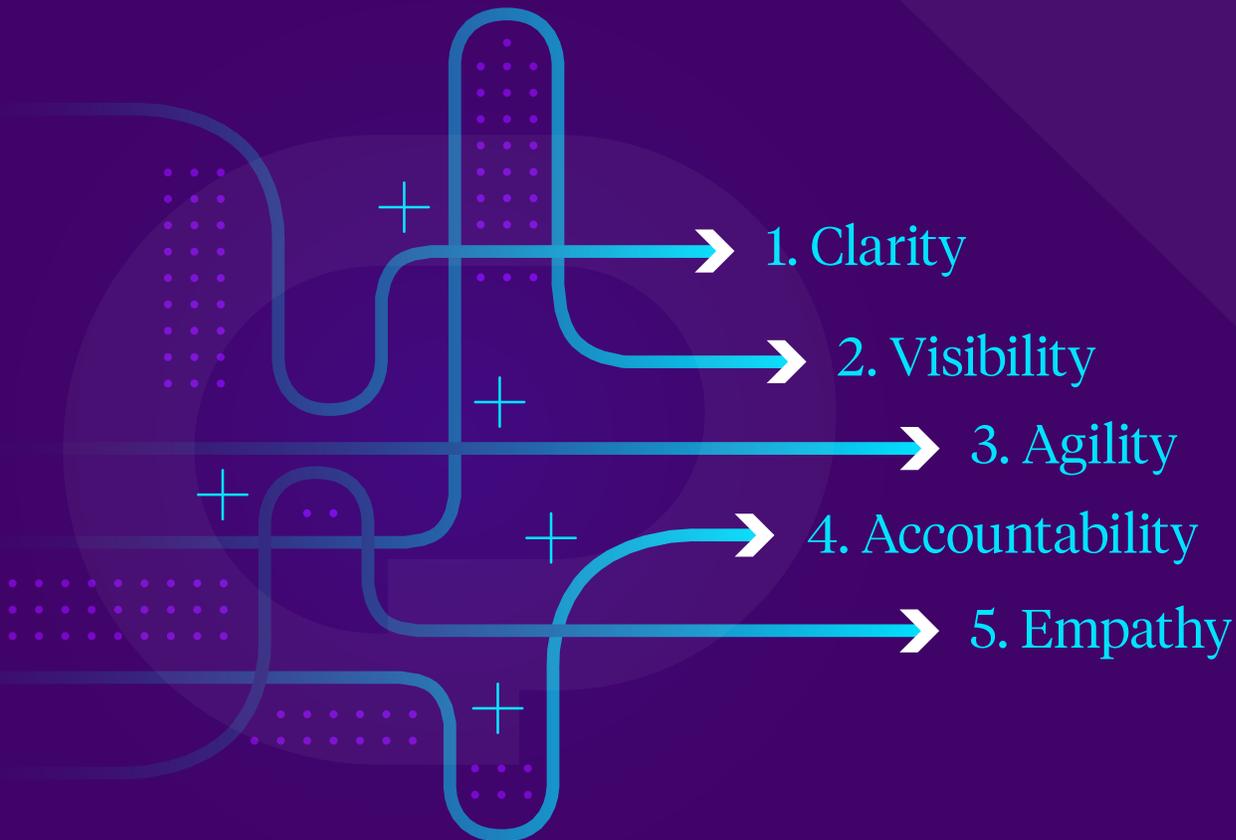


5 Skills to Lead Through Disruption

*Insights to Empower, Align, and Focus
Your Teams Amid Uncertainty*





Success During Disruption Requires Specific Skills

Our team has spent hundreds of hours with leaders of organizations and teams, large and small, who've each been tasked with the unexpected responsibility of preserving the future viability of their organizations.

Leaders feel the weight of calming fears, preserving jobs, and maintaining customer trust. And while every situation is unique, each interaction has informed our view of what it looks like for leaders to rise up and lean into the difficulties that disruption brings.

Through our interactions, we've identified five critical skills that impact a team's ability to adapt to change at the required speed.

The success of those adjustments hinges upon the team leader's competency in these five skills: [Clarity](#), [Visibility](#), [Accountability](#), [Agility](#), and [Empathy](#).

Each is valuable on their own, but when deployed as a system, they help a leader create incredible speed and engagement from their team or organization.





SKILL 1

Clarity

Disruption is often unexpected. That means most organizations' strategic plans will need retooling.

For most teams and organizations that experience major disruption, there's little value to leaning into long-term goals or planning when the future feels uncertain. And while key results help provide direction, when leaders find they are not truly realistic or achievable, they must be reexamined to be effective.

What's most needed during disruption is clarity around 2-3 short-term results for the next 60 to 90 days.

People crave the clarity that prioritization provides. They need to know where to focus their attention and what to set aside. Unfortunately, only 16% of employees that we surveyed "strongly agree" that individuals in their organization are clear on top key results.

With the uncertainty you may be facing, that number is likely much lower, both for short-term results and certainly year-end results.

Right now, the need for clarity is more important than ever before.

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16%
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TIP

Don't pick more than three results to ensure they are memorable.



Make sure the results are measurable, meaningful, and memorable.

TIP

If you can't measure expectations, you won't meet them.

The results you create should be communicated so frequently and clearly that a random survey of employees would reveal everyone knows what they are. One of our clients has identified “5-1-85” as their immediate deliverables. Each number has a unique and clear meaning for their team. These three metrics are measurable, meaningful, and memorable—and every single employee knows and understands their connect to them.

A simple test for how clear your team is on these expectations looks like this: In your next staff meeting, ask team members to take out a piece of paper and record the top three results in the next 60 days. Listen for consistency and responses to understand how clear your team is on “what’s most important right now.”

There is tremendous inherent power in simplicity. The history of our world shows us that human beings *want to follow* honesty and integrity, but they *will follow* clarity.

Visibility

Leaders should work to increase visibility during disruption. This is aimed, in part, at increasing clarity around the 2-3 results that you identify.

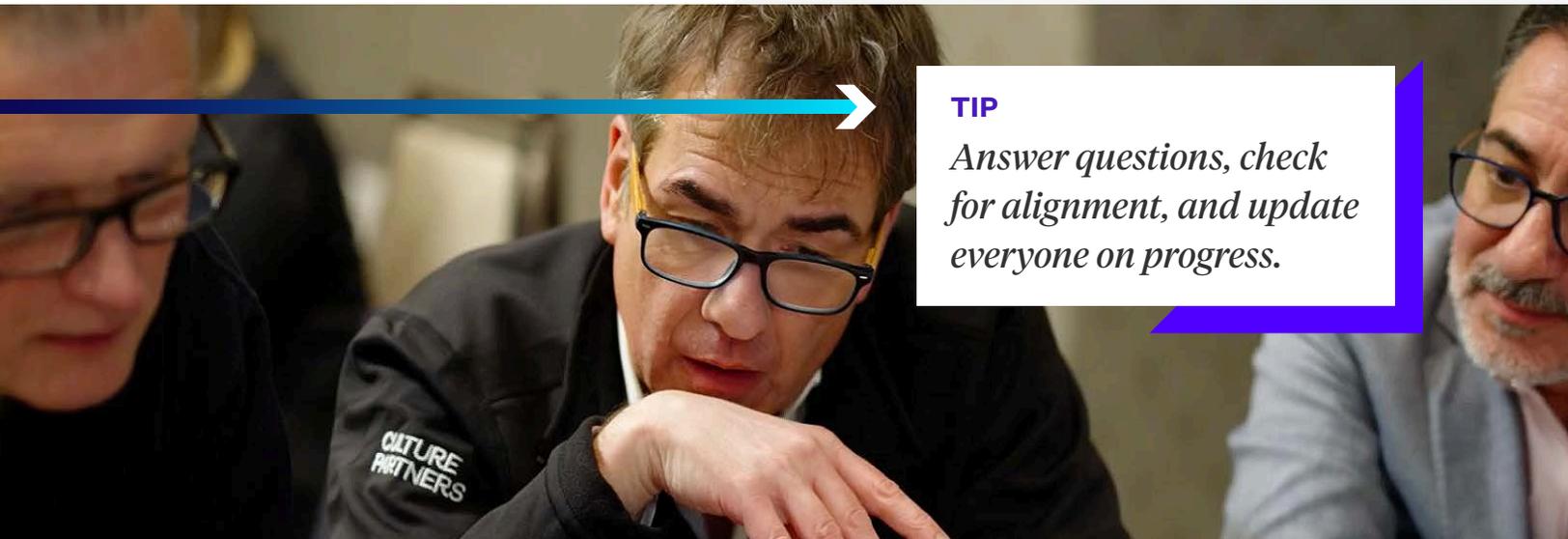
Accessibility should accompany greater visibility. Those closest to the customer and those making critical decisions need easy access to leaders to ensure alignment. When leaders and teams don't intentionally increase their accessibility, speed suffers, affecting an organization's ability to pivot as needed.

Some leaders demonstrate visibility and accessibility but still aren't seeing enough acceleration. They're likely missing transparency. Transparency leads to trust; and trust fosters engagement. Truly transparent leaders don't get satisfaction from having the most information in the room, but from everyone having access.



TIP

Answer questions, check for alignment, and update everyone on progress.



Transformation needs *radical candor*. But it also requires your acknowledging reality.

Some leaders and teams may not be listening or are holding onto the past. They don't really want transparency; they'd prefer to stay in *Preservation Mode* when *Transformation Mode* is what's needed. Transformation is hard, and it requires speaking and dealing with the truth.

We've worked with a few executive teams where no one had anything to say to the senior leader. The silence always reflected an underlying belief that the leader didn't listen well and was not to be trusted. Those senior leaders typically took up all of the space in the room and fostered a lack of collaboration between functions that needed to be working well together. Those are teams that struggle to find their way during difficult times.

Conversely, when a leader couples their efforts to be visible with greater accessibility and transparency, speed and collaboration follows.

Agility

No one needs explanation for why agility made the list, but what does it look like, and how do you know if you're good at it?

Most people like to think they're agile, flexible, and open to new ways of thinking. But many of us fail to demonstrate it, and most organizations don't prioritize and then execute in an agile way.

Agility requires:

- The ability to learn fast and move fast.
- A healthy relationship with failure.
- A clear focus on the core business while continuing to push for expansion of new products and growth opportunities.
- An understanding that pressure to execute won't fix alignment problems on a team, but rather exposes them.

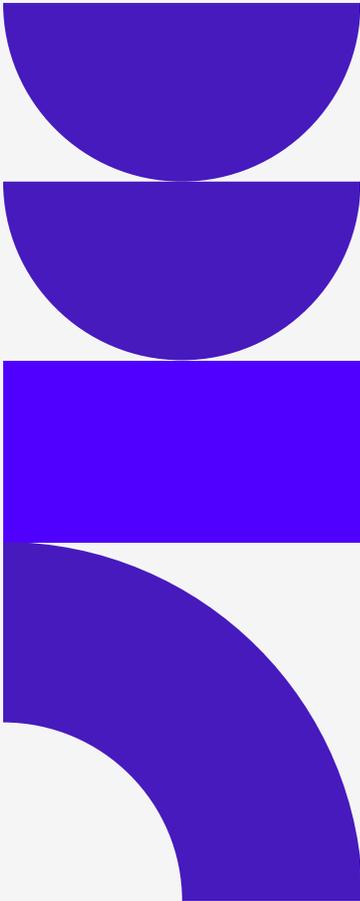
Agile teams innovate faster than the competition and bring greater value to the end customer. Doing all this well requires accountability.

In a culture with high levels of accountability, people feel connected to the purpose of their work, enabling them to recognize gaps in performance, take personal ownership for closing those gaps, and deliver solutions.

In fact, according to our research, high levels of accountability are directly correlated to accelerated speed to market, greater growth, and increased agility in adapting to change.

Accountability

So how do you increase levels of accountability, both individually and in your organization?



Accountability is often viewed as something that happens to us rather than something we take ownership over. Why do we need accountability? Organizations need shared accountability to foster collaboration and execute to deliver the results you need.

In moments of great upheaval, we see two prominent mindsets that pose challenges to greater accountability inside teams. That of a “wait and see” approach or that of “confusion/tell me what to do” mentality. Both of these are counter-productive and major obstacles to speed.

A set of four simple questions we created, called the Steps To Accountability, helps frame up what this should look like.

Each of the steps has a corresponding question.

- 1. See It:** What reality do I most need to acknowledge?
- 2. Own It:** How am I involved in the solution?
- 3. Solve It:** What else can I do?
- 4. Do It:** What do I need to do, and by when?



SKILL 4: ACCOUNTABILITY

The four accountability questions help reveal *where you and your team need to put your energy*

We have facilitated meetings with different leadership teams around those four questions over the years. The questions expose areas where greater alignment, clarity, and execution are truly needed.

We view accountability as a personal choice to rise above one's circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary to achieve the result you need.

It requires someone to See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It. Organizations where individuals choose to be part of the solution will accelerate the shifts needed to navigate disruption.

Our research indicates that organizations where people are constantly asking, "What else can I do?" can create a huge competitive advantage with 86% increase in innovation and 90% faster execution than organizations with low levels of accountability.

The Advantage of Getting Accountability Right

86%
increase
in innovation

90%
faster
execution



SKILL 5

Empathy

The final competency required during disruption has a major impact on a team's level of engagement and ownership.

The question, "How are you doing?" used to be a throw away greeting. That isn't the case during times of disruption when stress can be high.

Empathy is your ability to deeply understand what someone is experiencing from their perspective. Apathy is the opposite and suggests disinterest or a lack of concern.

Each one of us falls somewhere on the empathy-to-apathy spectrum when it comes to how others are experiencing our leadership style.

If you're looking for a way to demonstrate empathy, start with being curious about others at both a professional and personal level. Be genuinely curious about how others are doing, what they are working on, and challenges they face.

Spending a few minutes at the beginning of your meetings to hear how people are doing can go a long way. The line between personal and professional life continues to narrow with many embracing and enjoying an increased connection to one another.

Empathy isn't just a nice-to-have. It impacts collaboration, ownership, and ultimately speed.



Where to Focus

No one can claim mastery of these five competencies. Some of us are naturally gifted at a few of them. All of us could benefit from picking one or two where we need the most work and consider what strengthening our ability in those areas requires.

Before you decide what to lean into you, seek feedback from others. Get their perspective on how you're showing up in each category. Have them rate you on each category 1 to 10, and then provide them the opportunity to give you appreciative and constructive feedback.

Conclusion

There is no playbook for disruption. Each is different and places enormous demand on leaders. People's physical, emotional, mental, and financial well-being depends upon how we respond. The quality of our decisions will affect how our teams and organizations weather the storm.

Strengthening the five competencies will help you make better decisions, get greater ownership of those decisions, and adjust faster to changing conditions.

The leaders who demonstrate these five skills will produce the most impressive results during this period of disruption and the coming innovative era.

About Culture Partners

For over 36 years, Culture Partners, the leading culture consulting firm, has empowered clients across the world to harness culture to produce game changing results. Culture Partners powers thousands of top organizations across the world to achieve their goals by connecting their purpose and strategy, while activating those through culture to realize record-breaking results.

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