

Advanced Leadership Guide | Endurance Leadership

An In-depth Approach to Leadership in the Intervening Phase of the COVID-19 Crisis

Prepared for | Creative Coaching partners and their trusted colleagues

Prepared by | Industry leading executive coaches, leadership development experts and change management specialists at Creative Coaching Professionals*

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**All content in this document was authored by Creative Coaching Professionals, unless otherwise noted.*



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Preface

As economic jurisdictions around the world begin to outline criteria for the ease of commercial and social restrictions, the COVID 19 crisis has entered a new phase. This phase, characterized by differing jurisdictional approaches and a reliance on multiple public health factors, moves past the initial crisis response but cannot yet adopt a position of resolution or post-crisis stability.

Leadership requires a different approach in a period that can be understood by Winston Churchill's famous description "**the end of the beginning.**" This period is punctuated by contradictions, by anxious caution and pent-up excitement for progress. Leadership must remain agile and resilient in the face of enhanced uncertainty as policies and timelines remain precarious based on factors outside of leadership's control. Organizations operating across multiple jurisdictions also face the challenge of conflicting or inconsistent regulatory restrictions.

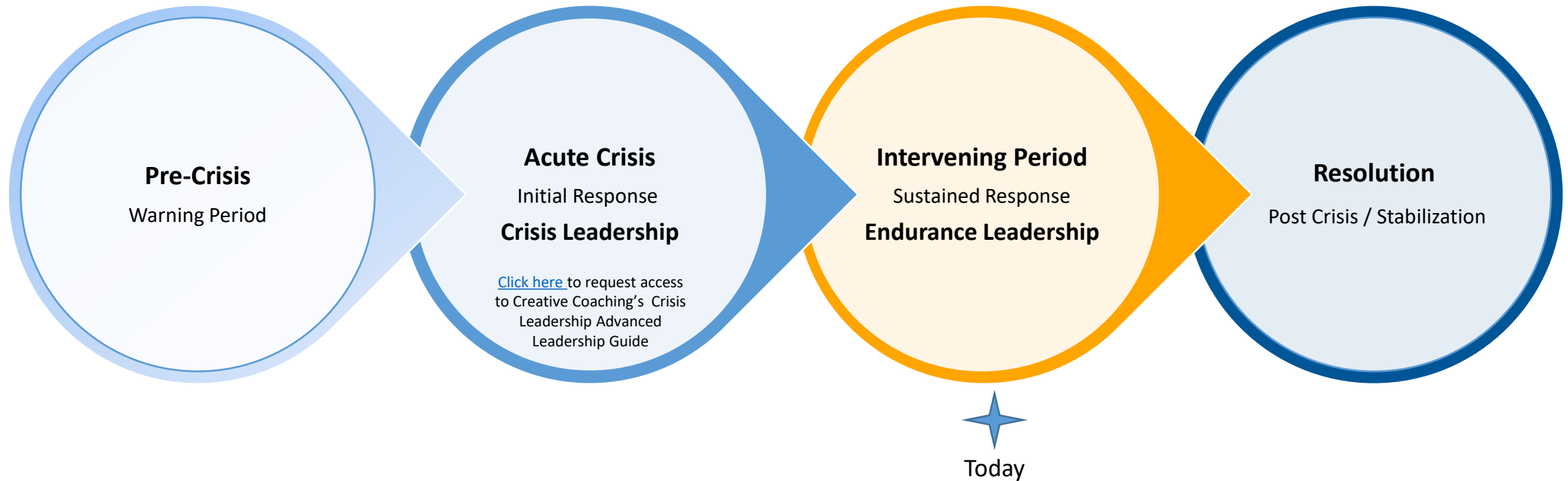
At Creative Coaching, we are committed to supporting our partners in leadership past the end of the beginning and into the **intervening phase** of the crisis we believe is defined by **endurance leadership**. This guide outlines the unique challenges facing leadership during this phase and provides actionable leadership strategies to overcome them. Additionally, we provide a lens to view the learnings present in this stage and insights to leverage these into opportunities now and for the future.

FACT 1 | The COVID-19 crisis continues to exert unprecedented and evolving challenges on leadership.

FACT 2 | The intervening phase of the crisis requires a leadership approach different from the response phase and the crisis resolution phase.

FACT 3 | Organizations that maximize innovation and leverage strengths during the intervening phase of the crisis will be positioned to shape the new future.

Phases of a Crisis | COVID-19 Prolonged Impacts



Intervening Period | occurring between events or periods of time

Intervening Stressor | unique pain points caused by the prolonged impacts of the COVID-19 crisis

Endurance Leadership | Defined

Leadership is an action not a position; endurance is a mindset not an outcome.

Endurance | the ability of an organization to exert itself and remain active over a long period time, as well as the ability to resist, withstand, recover from, and have immunity to trauma, wounds or fatigue.

Endurance Leadership | the ability of a leader to remain steadfast through a period of sustained uncertainty; the commitment to drive results while maintaining the ability to apply past learning to seek alternate solutions and opportunities; leadership that inspires and enables others past multiple challenges over a long period of time.

The Need for Endurance Leadership | Contingency vs. Capability Planning

Contingency planning anticipates problems; capability planning anticipates success.

CRISIS RESPONSE PHASE

- Responds to situation – the **crisis is the leading variable**
- Adaptive / agile mindset **in the moment**
- Intermediate and long-term anticipation of consequences | **strategy focus**
- **Contingency plans** for anticipated problems and potential need for specific solutions for individual problems



INTERVENING PHASE

Requires
Endurance
Leadership

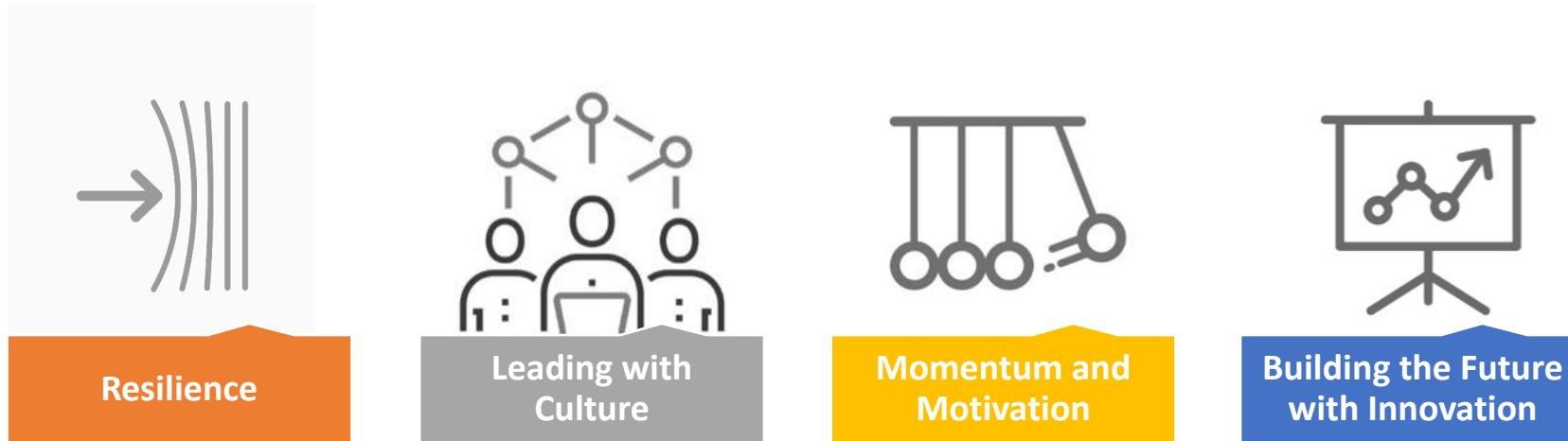
- Responds to the business – **the organization is the leading variable**
- **Applies** adaptive / agile mindset **to future planning**
- Evaluation of intermediate and long-term anticipation of consequences | **options focused**
- **Capability plans** for anticipated success with built in solutions for multiple potential problems

Contingency Planning | a plan made for dealing with an emergency, or something that might possibly happen and cause problems in the future – **AKA Plan B**

Capability Planning | a plan made for a desired outcome accounting for changing or unknown variables; adaptable for multiple avenues for success – **AKA Plan A Versatility**

Challenges of the Intervening Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic | Four Key Areas of Focus for Endurance Leadership

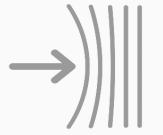
Reflect to learn, anticipate to plan, move forward to succeed.



Responding to the challenges of the intervening phase and anticipating post-crisis possibilities require intentional effort in the four key areas of Endurance Leadership

- The pace and productivity of the initial crisis response will wane; new ways of **collaboration** need to be established and **resilience** will be a staple leadership skill set
- Changes in ways of working has an impact on how employees engage with company **culture and values**
- Employees are alternately experiencing both a vacuum of communication **and** an overload of information
- Leaders must **adapt communication strategies** from the initial crisis response to **motivate and maintain momentum**
- Leaders must **balance future unknowns** with the need to **act in the now** by focusing on what can be controlled and **leading with innovation**

Endurance Leadership | Resilience



“Resilience is not a passive quality but an active process.”

Barry Winbolt

Resilience Challenges:

- Prolonged periods of uncertainty can lead to decision paralysis and lower engagement.

Result:

- Exhaustion of coping skills
- Reduced reality testing abilities
- Disconnection from the value of the work
- Reduced performance

COVID-19 Intervening Stressors

Resilience is a composite skill. It includes the ability to bounce back *and* the ability to maintain focus and energy during prolonged periods of uncertainty. Intervening phase policies hinge upon public health impacts. Avoiding stagnancy requires leaders to **actively combat the disengagement** that can be caused by sustained ambiguity.

Leadership Strategies

- Avoid the ‘wait and see’ approach as a standard position, **continue with initiatives and plans** set before the COVID-19 crisis, adapt and evolve these as necessary to create certainty where possible.
- **Anchor confidence in the ability to adapt.** Acknowledge the unprecedented and shifting nature of the crisis and the precarity of progress. Setbacks in public health can alter policy almost instantly. **Create comfort in ambiguity by accepting and communicating that decisions will be made with imperfect information.**
- **Lead with empathy;** understand there may be a learning curve. Create an environment that **supports innovation** through calculated risks and the **courage to make mistakes.**
- **Healthy tension can be an outlet for negative tension:** promote brainstorming and healthy debate in team collaboration sessions; adopt a ‘devil’s advocate’ position to foster generative discussion.
- **Reinforce delegation skills:** Ask, what is the work only I can do? Have team leads to the same. This will reduce volume related stress and connect leaders and teams to the **value of their contribution.**
- **Continue to check in** with your team. The potential for increased virus exposure in the intervening phase may cause different levels of anxiety. For some, this phase represents hope, for others with increased risk factors in their personal lives, it represents fear.

Endurance Leadership | Leading with Culture and Values



Culture is the intangible mirror that directly reflects the leadership of an organization.

Culture Challenges:

- Changes to ways of working impact organizational culture.
- Culture is powerful tie between people and an organization – it can be an equally powerful negative force if it is perceived as ingenuine or is inconsistent.

Result:

- Employees struggle to connect with corporate values
- Perception of values and culture as disposable

COVID-19 Intervening Stressors

The new ways of working imposed by the COVID-19 crisis have challenged traditional ways employees interact with organizational culture. The impact on interpersonal relationships, team functioning, and inter-team collaboration can reduce employee's connection to the meaning and purpose of their work. Relying on organizational culture and values can mitigate this loss.

Leadership Strategies

- **Leadership visibility is a key component of culture.** Reflect on how you are displaying organizational values to your wider team. **Walk the talk** - now more than ever.
- **Aspects of organizational culture and values need to be translated for new and unexpected ways of working.** Evaluate what is most important about your culture and what impact the COVID crisis has had on these.
- **Cultural disruption** often exposes behaviours and offers an **opportunity to redefine what culture looks like and acts like.** Ask: what about your culture in this crisis has become a rallying point? Perseverance, service level, commitment, pride? How can these behaviours be recognized and leveraged in the future? What is your culture ambition?
- Essential services experience unique challenges and opportunities. **Ask what impact the designation 'essential service' had on the culture and purpose of your organization?** What positives can be leveraged now and be carried forward?
- Consider a **team accountability agreement.** As new ways of working persist, discuss with the team what they feel is and isn't working and co-create a responsive strategy.
- Adopt a heightened approach to recognition to **reinforce desired culture** and/or values related behaviours in action. Start meetings with a **culture, values or leadership minute** – a short story shared by a team member that recognizes on another in action.

Endurance Leadership | Motivation and Momentum



Meaning is the ultimate motivator to keep teams engaged with the value of their work.

Motivation and Momentum Challenges:

- Initial morale and communication techniques may lose effectiveness.
- Psychological effects of prolonged uncertainty can impact productivity.

Result:

- Drop in productivity and morale
- Loss of team bonds
- Disconnection from the team's purpose and goals

COVID-19 Intervening Stressors

The prolonged nature crisis and the precariousness of economic openness can start to wear on the initial energetic response to the crisis. New work processes or demands can begin to feel tedious. Overuse of technology can be tiring. Individuals and teams may fall victim to 'limbo', waiting for the next phase of changes. Employees may move between contradictory extremes, feeling both overwhelmed by communication and change and cutoff from information or future planning - both stifle innovation.

Leadership Strategies

- Move team mindsets out of the 'holding pattern' and into the present by **setting and acknowledging incremental short-term goals**.
- Encourage **big picture thinking** to connect teams to the **purpose** of their work.
- Acknowledge and replace the loss of thinking time. Commute times, walks to the office, etc. represent **space for reflection that prepares us for action**.
- The frequency of communication required in the initial phase may feel inundating now and stifle momentum. **Communicate with purpose, simplicity and directness**.
- The **loss of information from organic conversations** can leave team members feeling out of loop. **Consider FYI updates** to the team to keep individuals apprised on projects they may not be directly involved in.
- **Avoid the motivation crash**. Sustain the initial energy spurred by the ease of social and economic restrictions by keeping teams as involved in decision-making processes as possible. This **sense of ownership** will create a sense of control and foster engagement.
- Engage individuals and teams in designing their own future by implementing a **Stop, Start and Continue assessment** strategy. Hold individuals and teams accountable to capture efficiencies realized through COVID-19 and in doing so motivate them to maintain their own momentum.

Endurance Leadership | Building the Future with Innovation Now



“Innovation is seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.”

Dr. Szent-Gyorgyi

Innovation Challenges:

- The precarity of economic openness may limit planning abilities.
- Pressure on vendors, customers and consumer demand create unparalleled uncertainty for business continuity.

Result:

- Business adopts a ‘wait and see’ approach
- Surrender of control
- Failure to anticipate multiple solutions

COVID-19 Intervening Stressors

The ease of economic restrictions does not represent a return to the past. It creates a new, unknown economic environment. The current state of consumer and commodity demand will challenge traditional predictive models. Vendor and client relationships across sectors must adapt. The difference between organizations who simply weather the crisis and those who shape the future will be determined by the leaning, reflection and innovation in the intervening phase.

Leadership Strategies

- **Assume learning.** This situation and its duration are unprecedented; therefore **the experience must yield new insights.** Ask yourself open-ended questions such as, “What does this situation/outcome/approach tell me? What has surprised me?”.
- Lines of sight and exposure into micro levels of ways of working have opened for senior leaders. This is **organizational data.** What did you learn? What will you do with this data?
- **Optimize organizational benefits of innovation** by ensuring adaptations of procedures and technologies are shared – work-arounds, solutions and strategies used in one division may be unknown to others with the same challenges.
- **Rely on and establish trust.** Fear and emotion continue to permeate all aspects of life: anxiety about physical, emotional, financial and digital safety may impede the ability/willingness to take the calculated risks required for innovation.
- **Lead with vulnerability** to access the collective strength and insights of your team. Admitting you don’t have all the answers will inspire the **courage to innovate.**
- **Leverage the disruption** experienced by teams during this time of change (i.e.: the storming phase of team development) and **actively capture opportunities to innovate** various practices and processes.

Endurance Leadership | Building the Future with Innovation Now ... Continued



“Change calls for innovation, and innovation leads to progress.”

Li Keqiang

Innovation Challenges:

- Reliance on a post-crisis return to predictable patterns.
- Changes to staff and organizational structures in the crisis response viewed only as temporary.

Result:

- Failure to capitalize on present innovation opportunities
- Failure to leverage current learning opportunities and insights created by the crisis

COVID-19 Intervening Stressors

The intervening phase with varying degrees of economic openness is likely to last into Q4 and perhaps into 2021. Flexible intermediate and long-term strategies should address current innovation opportunities and anticipate business needs through various stages of openness to respond, rather than react to material changes in regulatory and consumer environments.

Leadership Strategies

- Look to build fluency with new or current ways of working, not attachment. This will allow teams to pivot, enabling them to **keep what is working while discarding what is less effective.**
- Reintegrating furloughed employees or employees on reduced assignment should be done intentionally. **Review and adapt onboarding procedures** and team orientation practices to address potential lags.
- Review succession plans and timelines. Key positions may be impacted by early retirement packages and unreturning employees. **Maintain open and honest lines of communication** about intentions and possible timelines with all staff.
- Ensure **consistent execution on regular Performance Management cycles.** Keep employees engaged in development planning and goal setting processes and encourage innovation to enable and enhance future performance.
- Demand in certain sectors may come roaring back, particularly should infection rates hold steady through the first phases of economic reopening. Anticipate talent management needs and capacity and measure this against current operational staff. Ensure a talent strategy is **developed and cued up for implementation** to address foreseen gaps.

Thank You

For questions, a simple debrief, or further exploration of this content please reach out to your trusted partner at Creative Coaching at anytime.

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