

# Reinvention Through Disruption:

Moving From Perpetual Crisis to  
Collective Adaptability





# Disruption confronts organizations from many directions.

Artificial intelligence, geopolitical tensions, and economic instability are only a few of the challenges today that organizations must work over, under, around, and through.

It's understandable to reach for a quick fix, but there are none. Complex, systemic issues require complex, systemic solutions.

The sheer amount of uncertainty has led organizations to quickly and constantly react and pivot, changing processes and practices at a rapid pace. This accelerated reactivity has led to change fatigue — at a tremendous negative cost to organizations.

Simply reacting and pivoting isn't creating lasting success. But these responses can feel inevitable — how else do you keep up with chaotic disruption? We believe organizations and leaders who stay stuck in perpetual crisis mode have little chance of long-term success. Fortunately, there's a better way.

**For organizations to thrive amid disruption, they need to move from perpetual crisis mode to a new state of collective, sustainable adaptability.**

Our research and work around disruption, polycrisis, and collective leadership can help you develop rigorous and adaptable strategies that link leadership today with leadership needs of the future. These insights will help your organization implement the leadership development strategies, skills, and vision that are essential for success.

## #1

***Leading in a Dynamic Environment is the top leadership challenge for senior executives based on our ongoing research — and the gap is widening.***

## Disruption's Impact: Perpetual Crisis Mode

The top challenge of C-level executives is leading an organization that must adapt to ever-changing circumstances. COVID-19 and its aftermath accelerated that need even more, according to [our research](#).

Organizations have plenty of experience resolving individual crises and disruption. But the landscape itself has changed. We're in a state of [polycrisis](#), where multiple crises hit at once and create a web of interconnected challenges.

Traditional approaches to crisis won't work because you're not just dealing with one crisis — each problem feeds into the others, and your response to one creates bigger challenges than if you were dealing with them separately.

If you get too focused on tackling crisis after crisis without seeing the bigger picture, your organization will be stuck in a reactive mode — leading to [change fatigue](#).

Like polycrisis, the impact of change fatigue is complex and interconnected: decreased employee commitment, increased burnout and turnover, and decreased organizational performance. These systemic impacts can erode your organization's ability to recover and eliminate the bandwidth and perspective required to prepare for even more new unforeseen challenges and crises.

# 72%

**Employees who say their organization experienced disruptive change, according to a [Gallup survey](#).**

# 43%

**Contextual factors such as geopolitics, technology, and climate account for this variation in the net profit margins of public corporations, according to the [Boston Consulting Group Henderson Institute](#).**



## Adapting How You Adapt

To snap out of crisis mode, organizations must shift their strategic approach — **viewing disruption as continuous evolution without an endpoint.**

This shift isn't for individuals alone — systemic problems can't be solved by heroic leaders. While talented people and dedicated [talent development](#) is necessary, it's not sufficient. A coordinated strategy is needed across your organization that connects the dots to address interconnected issues.

We believe organizations must embrace **collective, sustainable adaptability.**

### THE NEED FOR ADAPTABILITY SEEMS OBVIOUS.

But it's not just about being flexible amid everyday challenges. As found in our research, the ability to engage in complex problem solving through [managing polarities](#) — paradoxical, ongoing, and unsolvable dilemmas, such as balancing current challenges and future opportunities — is an essential capability for managing polycrisis. Furthermore [our research](#) found that the inability to develop or adapt in the face of change was the most frequently cited reason for career derailment among managers. So, not only is adaptability required to deal with disruption, but it's also an essential skill to keep your top talent engaged and performing.

### EMPHASIZE COLLECTIVE POWER.

By embracing collective action, your organization can become more agile and better understand and address systemic challenges — embracing collective problem solving to address issues of disruption.

### WHY SUSTAINABLE?

Responding to disruption requires continual evolution — and that starts with building a [learning culture](#) across your organization. The challenges of today won't necessarily be the challenges of tomorrow. It's not just about teaching your leaders skills or what to do. It's about teaching them *how* to learn, understand, adapt, and lead. And it's a continuous process, so you need approaches that are scalable, replicable, and maintainable in the face of new crises and organizational shifts.





## 3 Key Shifts To Thrive Amid Disruption

For your organization to adapt and thrive, 3 equally important shifts are needed. These initiatives aren't necessarily sequential. Each shift can feed into the next, or it can be accomplished independently. You should evaluate where your organization stands, take stock of the vision for the future, and invest time and resources accordingly.

### 01. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Create a culture that integrates leadership development to enhance adaptability.

### 02. INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY

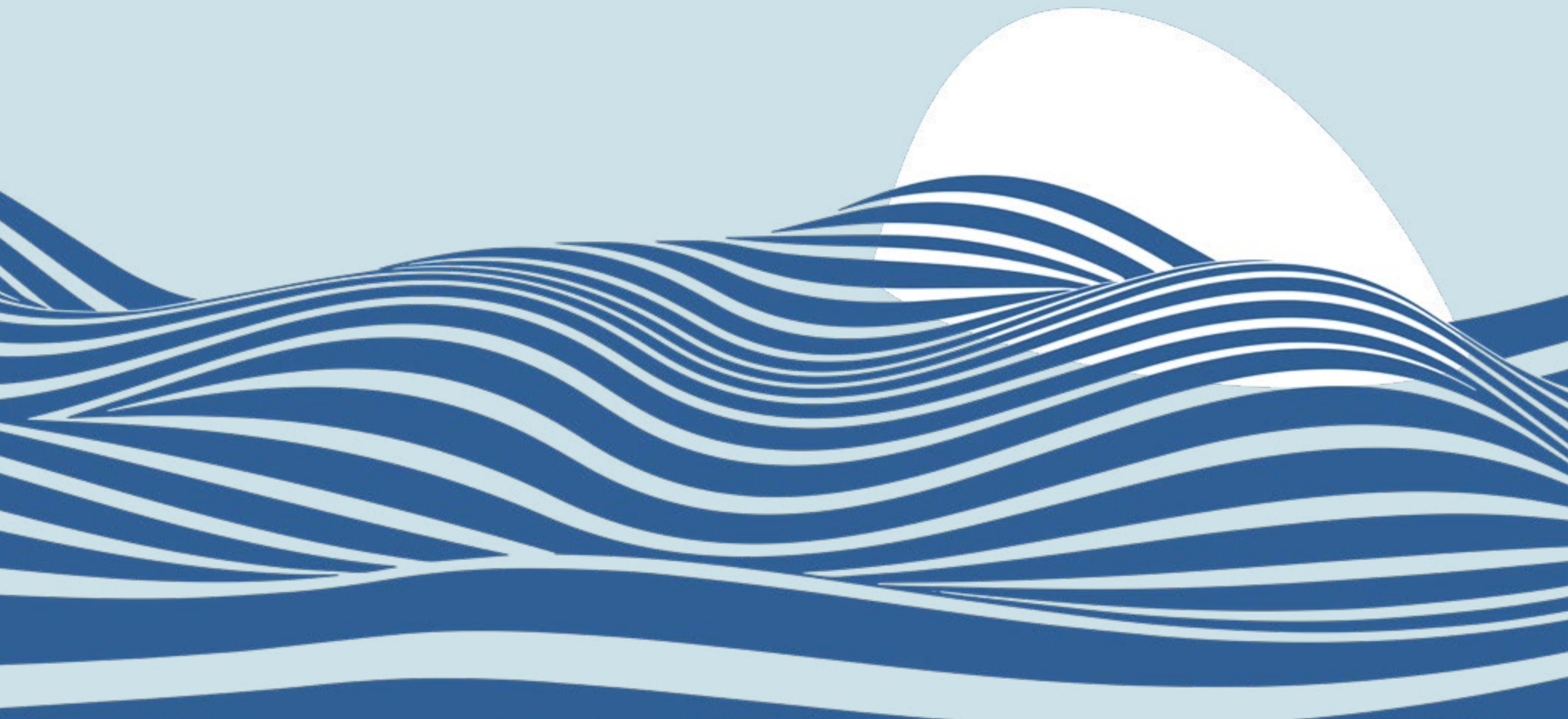
Help leaders develop the mindsets that give them the perspective and confidence to address systemic issues.

### 03. COLLECTIVE CAPABILITIES

Strengthen organizational capabilities to overcome social barriers and enable collective action.

# 01.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE





# 01.

## Organizational Culture: Moving Towards Interdependent Leadership

Organizational culture is the way things are done. No matter your strategy, individual capabilities, or collective buy-in, without a culture conducive to [learning agility](#), responding to disruption will be even more challenging. While starting with culture change at an organization can feel overwhelming, it's essential to prepare your organization to tackle disruption. But what is culture, exactly?

Culture is a self-reinforcing web of beliefs, practices, patterns, and behaviors, and it's constantly evolving. Consider process improvements across groups and organizations, which we've found to be one of the [top challenges for senior leaders](#). It's tempting for senior leaders to focus on process improvements in isolation, but most quickly realize that any attempt to change process without accounting for organizational culture will quickly be derailed.

We believe [culture is what makes strategy happen](#). So, the first step to a strategic shift this large must address culture change. And without transforming the conditions that create and facilitate those beliefs, practices, patterns, and behaviors, any attempt to change culture will be short-lived.



### 3 TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP CULTURES



#### **Interdependent**

Views leadership as a collective activity that requires mutual inquiry, learning, and a capacity to work with complex changes.



#### **Independent**

Assumes that leadership emerges as needed from a variety of individuals based on knowledge and expertise.



#### **Dependent**

Holds only people in positions of authority responsible for leadership.

So how do you change culture? Through instilling a mindset of continuous learning across your organization. By helping your leaders see their development and their challenges not as singular problems to be overcome but as a continual, integrated process, you can transform how they respond to those problems. And one of the best ways to instill that mindset is through leadership development.

Why? Leadership development embraces learning and change. Furthermore, effective leadership development itself is continuous and evolving. While timeless skills can help regardless of circumstance, understanding “how” to learn and being in an environment conducive to learning reshapes leadership development from a singular activity to a transformative growth mindset.

By embracing the power of leadership development, you move your organization towards an interdependent leadership culture, which fosters the growth mindsets needed for sustained adaptability to disruption.

An interdependent leadership culture sets the stage for a transformative and adaptive organizational strategy to overcome disruption. And since leadership development is a continuous process, it’s a key piece of any organizational strategy that seeks to deal with complex, systemic issues like polycrisis.

By weaving continuous learning into your organizational strategy, you set the foundation to build the individual capacity and collective capabilities required to overcome disruption.

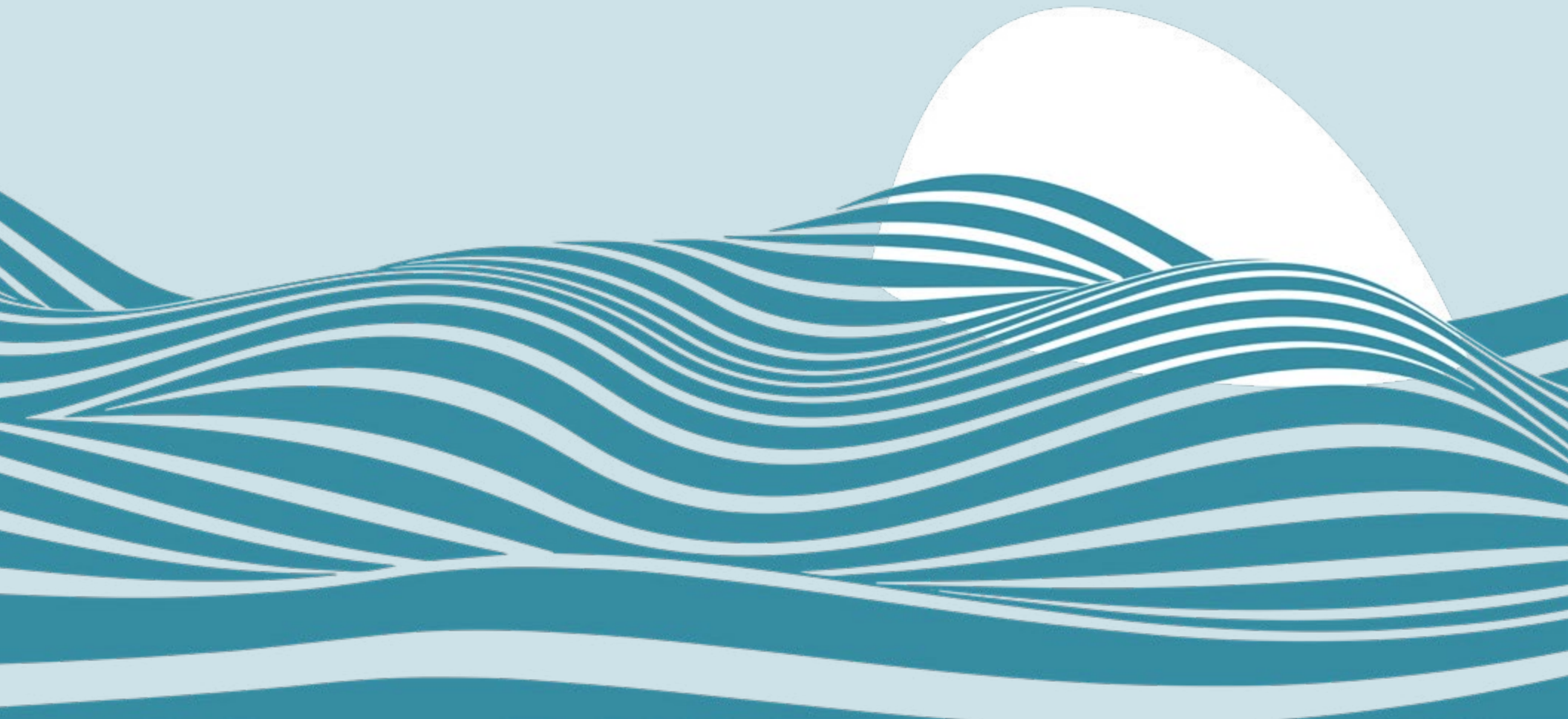


**Identify your organization’s leadership culture**



# 02.

## INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY



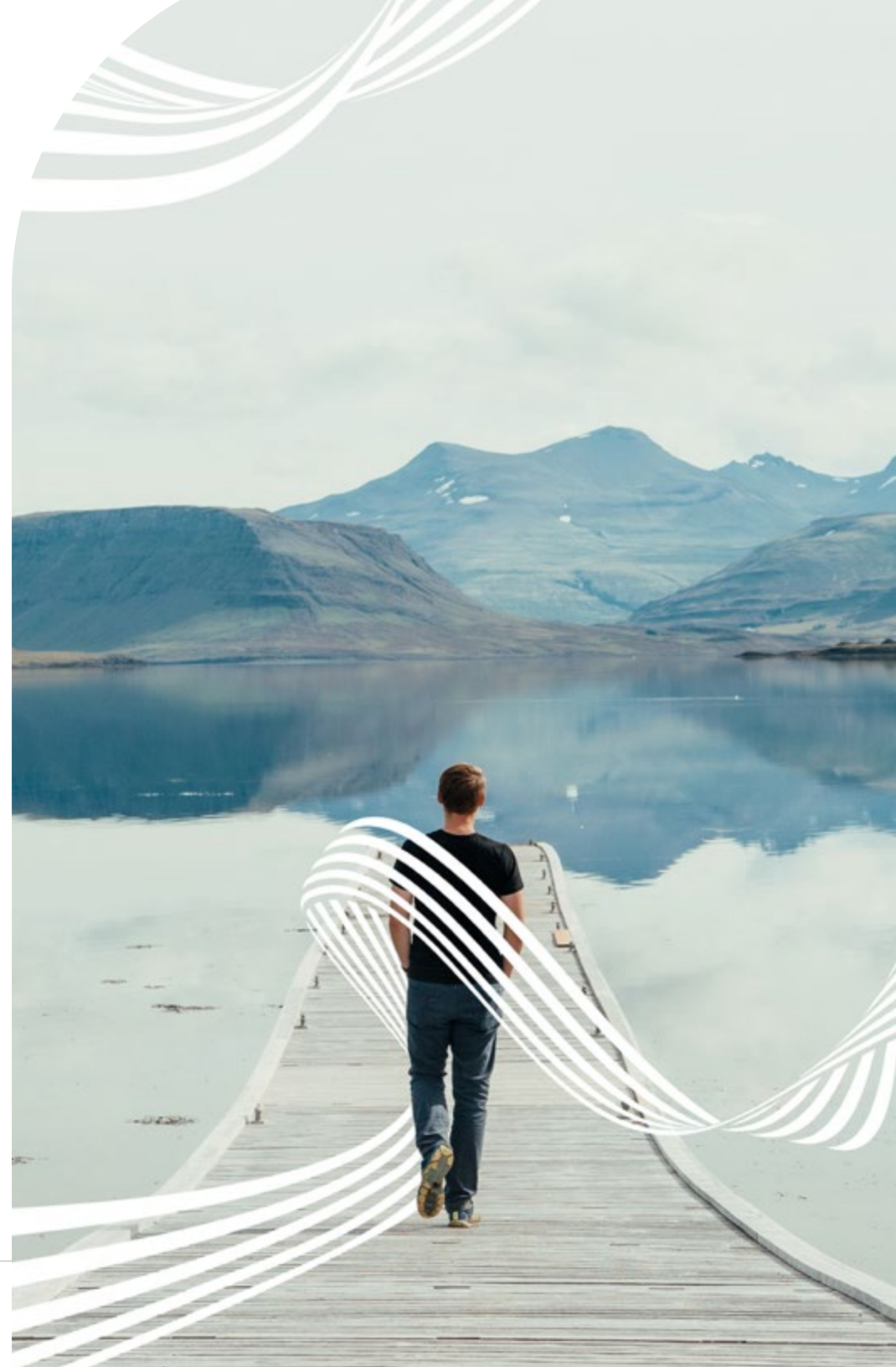
# 02.

## Individual Capacity: Vertical Development & Belief Barriers

Barriers to individual change go beyond skills and competencies — they include the internalized assumptions and a lack of wider context that prevent individuals from understanding and addressing systemic issues.

One way these internalized assumptions show up are through [belief barriers](#), or beliefs and perspectives that disconnect individuals from systemic issues. These beliefs can make individuals think systemic issues are too complex, abstract, and disconnected to solve, and ultimately “not their problem.” This [lack of ownership of systemic problems](#) drastically reduces the chance that individuals will tackle or even understand the complex challenges they face.

To offset this lack of ownership, you need an approach that builds not just skillsets, but an individual’s capacity to understand and address systemic issues. This broadens their perspective and creates confidence.



Horizontal development is the traditional talent development approach — building technical skills and leadership competencies. It's important, but not sufficient. Leaders need the broader perspective required to understand the interconnected nature of their challenges and to connect the dots.

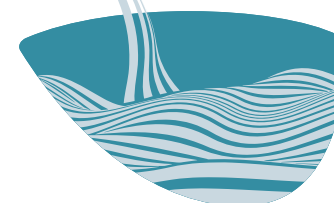
We call this broader understanding of dimensions and complexity vertical development. It's about developing greater wisdom, clearer insights, and more complex and sophisticated ways of thinking. It's called vertical development because it's based on levels, or stages, of thinking.

Vertical development involves gaining new perspectives and leadership mindsets needed to make your business strategy work. And when you leverage vertical development, your understanding of the world, its complexities, and the interweaving of ideas, perspectives, and challenges is forever altered.

Vertical development prepares your leaders to address disruption by helping them connect present challenges and future unknowns. It doesn't replace skill development but augments it — giving leaders the wisdom, perspective, and clarity to use their skills and learn even more.

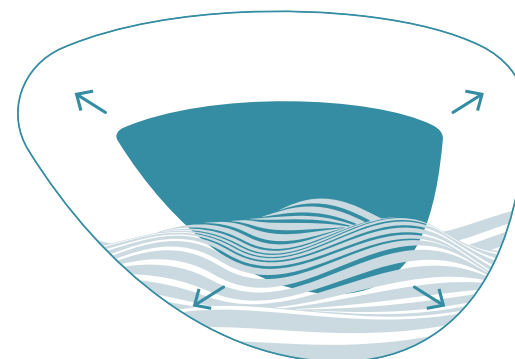
» **Dive deeper into the conditions that support vertical development**

## HORIZONTAL DEVELOPMENT



**Fill the vessel**  
(with knowledge and skills)

## VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

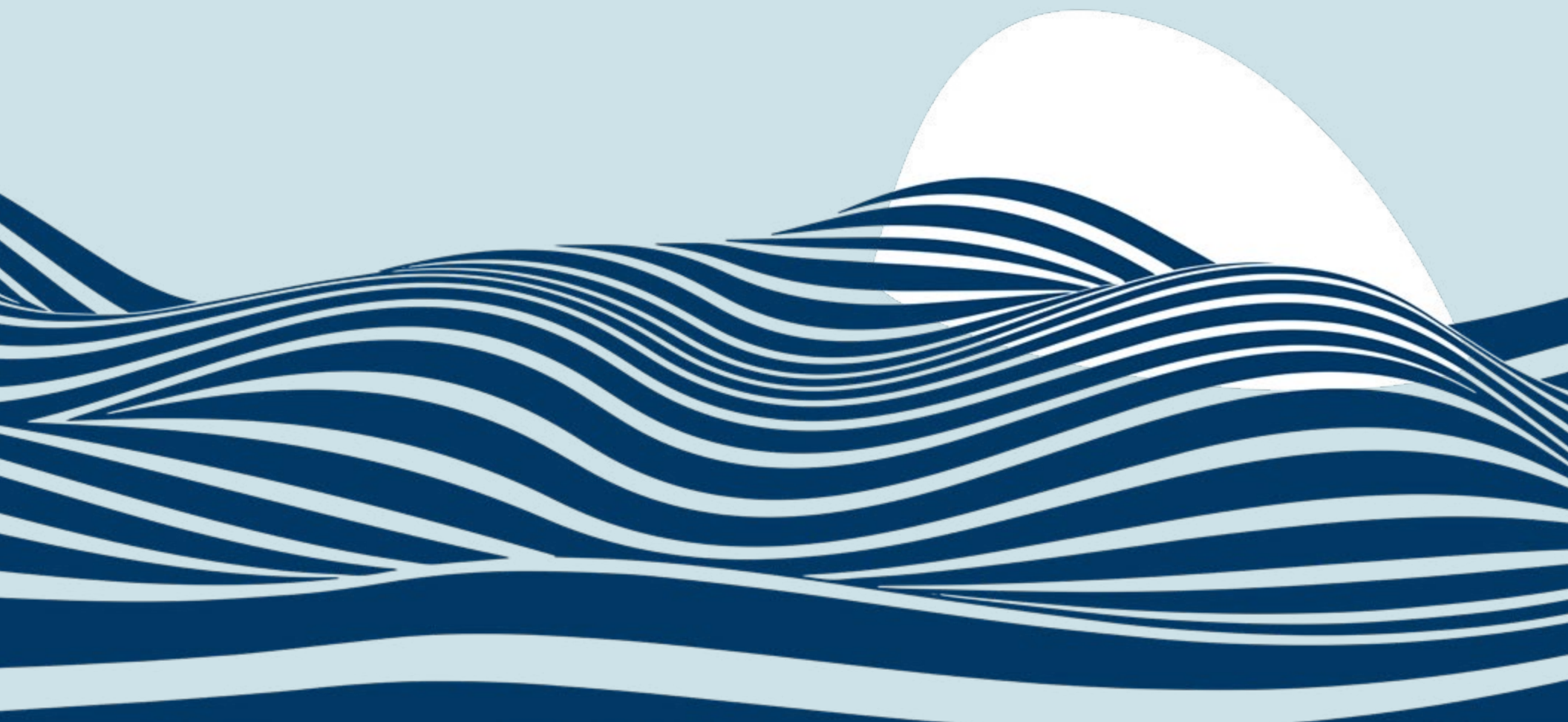


**Expand the vessel**  
(with capacity)



# 03.

## COLLECTIVE CAPABILITIES



# 03.

## Collective Capabilities: The Fundamentals of Effective Leadership

A continuous learning culture provides the foundation for development, and vertical development opens a new way of seeing and interacting with the world. Both are key in dealing with disruption, but they're also the essential pieces of harnessing the power of **collective agility** — helping organizations do far more than they ever thought possible.

Embracing a relational view of leadership helps your organization move beyond shared individual goals and focus on shared collective outcomes, enabling the organization to continuously assess and adapt its capabilities to meet the challenges of today and the unknowns of the future.

Our **Direction – Alignment – Commitment (DAC)<sup>TM</sup> framework** is a powerful tool for addressing social barriers that inhibit collective action. Our research has found DAC to be a critical outcome of effective leadership, and the precursor to action in organizations. When organizations achieve DAC, they tap into collective forces that can motivate individuals and organizations.

- **Direction** provides a common purpose / vision that compels individuals to set aside personal interests in favor of the greater good.
- **Alignment** harnesses collective resources in a focused, effective way. Rather than operating from a state of reactivity and focusing on the loudest crisis, your organization coordinates its collective actions, helping individuals tap into their unique strengths and uncover responses not otherwise possible.
- **Commitment** helps create shared ownership. We've long recognized that for organizations to succeed in responding to change, they must answer the question, "What's in it for us?" Motivated individuals, teams, and organizations that commit to a shared vision tap into a sense of ownership — they freely choose to sacrifice and work in service of a larger goal. This kind of inspiration can't be bought or ordained — it arises out of setting a compelling direction and helping others align on how they best contribute to accomplishing the goal.





**For effective leadership to happen, interactions and exchanges have to create these 3 outcomes.**

Imagine the impact that would result in your organization if there was a shared understanding of [the definition of leadership](#) — and a leadership vision, language, and behaviors were all linked to critical business needs. By building a culture focused on learning, collective agility, and reinvention, and by equipping individuals to understand the systemic impact of their actions, you prepare your organization to act as a sustainable, adaptative collective, achieving results beyond an individual level. Effective leadership of individuals, teams, organizations, and society is the only way we can thrive amid disruption.

So how can you start applying DAC to harness collective capabilities in your organization? One way is through [boundary spanning leadership](#), which we define as the capability to establish DAC across boundaries — such as between functions and across geography — in service of a higher goal. Boundary spanning can help your organization move away from individual responses to systemic problems — it's key for stimulating information flow, sharing perspectives, generating novel ideas, and fostering true collaboration. And boundaries aren't only inside your organization; they also include external stakeholders and challenges.

If vertical development gives you the broad wisdom and perspective needed to lead, boundary spanning leadership is how you put that enhanced wisdom and perspective into practice. By creating DAC across key boundaries, you set up your senior leaders and your organization for collective success, even amid complex crises. And you fully engage with the broader ecosystems of challenges, partners, and stakeholders that make up polycrisis, setting the stage for systemic impact.



[See how to put boundary spanning into practice](#)



# Visionary Leadership Requires Collective, Sustainable Adaptability

[Transforming your organization](#) through culture change, individual capacity, and collective capabilities enables you to craft a new vision for the future, one that connects the present realities with future opportunities.

Through this transformation, organizations align their L&D strategies with their current and future business goals. They develop leaders who can navigate complexity and disruption with mindsets for transformation and adaptability. And they foster a guiding vision that can evolve and sustain through the unknown.

At CCL, we approach leadership from a whole-systems perspective. For 50+ years, we've shaped the industry, pioneering the field of leadership development with our research-based approach. Our [leadership solutions](#) help organizations grow their leaders to engage with complexity, evolve through disruption, and create impact. Organizational change requires organizational solutions, and CCL is the trusted partner to guide you every step of the way.


## Leading in Uncertain Times

Develop your organization's collective capabilities with our leadership agility training, and convert continuous disruption into strategic opportunity.

 [LEARN MORE](#)

## Supporting Talent Development in an Unpredictable Context

Get solutions and research-based recommendations to address today's most pressing talent development challenges.

 [READ OUR REPORT](#)





At the Center for Creative Leadership, our drive to create a ripple effect of positive change underpins everything we do. For 50+ years, we've pioneered leadership development solutions for leaders at every level, from community leaders to CEOs. Consistently ranked among the world's top global providers of executive education, our research-based programs and solutions inspire individuals in organizations across the world — including 2/3 of the Fortune 1000 — to ignite remarkable transformations.

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