

DEVELOPING LEADERS INTO MASTERS OF AMBIGUITY



What does ambiguity actually mean, and how do leaders genuinely master it?

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Ambiguity Changes Everything

Have you noticed the tendency of people in the business world to fixate on words starting with the letter 'A'? **Agility, Adaptability, Ambiguity and Accountability** come to mind.

No doubt all four are worthy of a leader's 'A-list,' but which is the most important?

Our vote goes to Ambiguity – because that one A-word changes everything.

But what does ambiguity actually mean? Or more particularly, how do leaders not only cope with ambiguity, but genuinely master it?

What Does Mastering Ambiguity Mean?

Mastering ambiguity requires leaders to have the skills, the change leadership toolkit, the resilience and the judgment about what approach to use in different contexts. That means:

- Deciding to move forward without the full picture
- Looking cool, calm and confident when you've no idea what's going to happen
- Inspiring a team towards a possible future in an uncertain situation
- Reducing uncertainty and dialling down the pressure
- Accepting the unacceptable and finding certainty in the uncertain

Five Steps Towards Mastering Ambiguity

#1 Awareness

Masters of ambiguity know themselves intimately; they understand their tolerance levels and what makes them tick. Most importantly however, they know how to handle **themselves** in a changing world.

#2 Judgement

Ambiguity means that **decisions** need to be made, or not made, with less than the complete picture. Mastering ambiguity is about finding anchors and looking for what's clear, and then backing your judgement. To use a simple metaphor, masters of ambiguity are professional gamblers; novice leaders are amateur punters.

#3 Resilience

Thriving in ambiguity is as much about **mindset** as it is about technical skills or experience. The mindset great change leaders possess is, "Things are sometimes out of control, but it's better to make a decision than not to make one at all". This highlights a resilience to make and learn under pressure while others freeze.

#4 Navigation

A plan is important, however when navigating ambiguity, the plan changes because circumstances change. Sometimes this means accelerating or going in a slightly different direction, and sometimes it means throwing the whole plan out the window and coming up with a new one. Be on the **move** – set a plan, and tolerate the ambiguity while you relentlessly look for evidence that you're on the right track.

#5 Relationships

Relationships are the glue that holds things together when everything around is shifting. Masters of ambiguity cultivate a **network** of broad and deep relationships knowing that structures change but relationships prevail.

Where Next For Change Leadership?

A paradigm shift is underway. Conventional models for dealing with change were designed for technical change – they assume clear vision, defined boundaries and settled destinations.

However, the reality is totally different because most of the big challenges leaders face aren't technical, they are adaptive, which is why change leadership is emerging as the critical capability and toolkit for all leaders.