Leading Change

Leadership requires two things: a vision of the world that does not yet exist and the ability to communicate it clearly

Simon Sinek

Contents Page

Introduction

Once the Voluntary Leavers Scheme has been finalised, a great deal of change lies ahead for the university and its people.

To support leaders through this change, we have pulled together a range of models and frameworks to support your thinking and planning through the changes ahead. We know that everyone will have different experiences of leading change, so these resources are not prescriptive, but there to provide a refresher in the thought process.

What is Change Leadership?

Successful change leadership is about supporting individuals and groups to do and think about things differently, to change behaviours and to implement changes associated with new systems and processes.

Any transformation programme will create significant organisational and individual change challenges. Staff will quickly realise that their roles and responsibilities are going to change significantly, and that job shifts may result.

It is vital that leaders understand the human dynamics of change and to act upon it. This task is particularly challenging as people respond both on a rational and emotional basis during change.

Change and how we deal with it
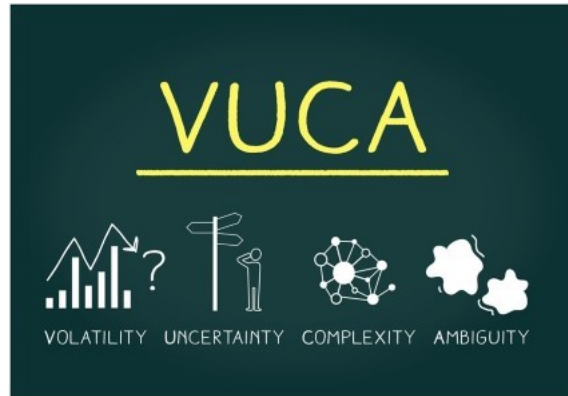
How should we approach uncertainty?

Even small amounts of uncertainty generate an 'error' response in the brain, taking attention away from our goals, and forcing attention to the error. Larger uncertainties can be highly debilitating.

Contemporary theories of leadership (adaptive and systems leadership, for instance) emphasise the increasing requirement to 'say yes to the mess', meaning:

• Accepting the decreasing likelihood that one person or entity can have all the answers.

• Adopting agile approaches to planning, decision-making and operations.

• Increasing emphasis on finding and welcoming diverse perspectives.

Key change frameworks

For several decades, the acronym **VUCA** has been used to describe the turbulent, unpredictable nature of the modern world, especially as it relates to businesses and organisations. First coined by the U.S. Army in the 1990s, it became increasingly relevant to leaders across all industries as many factors have made change the only constant. VUCA describes the challenges and uncertainties that organisations face in a wide range of contexts, from economic and political changes to technological disruption and global pandemics.

Volatility is all about the rate and magnitude of change in the business environment. **Uncertainty** describes the lack of predictability and the inability to know what will happen in the future. **Complexity** refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of different factors in the business environment. And finally, **ambiguity** describes the lack of clarity and the existence of multiple interpretations and perspectives.

More recently, James Cascio, an American anthropologist, futurist, and author, has devised another acronym, BANI. Rather than describing something about the world, it refers more to how we perceive it. It is not the world that has become more Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, or Incomprehensible. It is about us understanding that we have to let go of the illusion that it is not. As such, BANI is a reminder for all of us. We're living in a world that's delicate, uncontrollable, unpredictable and not always possible to comprehend.

Brittle refers to the potential for systems and structures to break under stress and pressure. **Anxious** describes the emotional and psychological toll that uncertainty and unpredictability can have on individuals and organizations. **Nonlinear** refers to the fact that small changes can have big and unpredictable effects in complex systems. And last but not least, **incomprehensible** describes the fact that some changes may be impossible to understand or predict, and that organizations may need to develop new ways of thinking and operating in order to adapt.

The Agile Company - Vuca & BANI

VUCA and BANI - leadership perspectives

The VUCA framework focuses on the challenges of the business environment and the need for adaptability, while the BANI framework focuses on the drivers of change, the need for innovation and our perception of change. Whichever acronym one considers from a leadership perspective, there are some behaviours that apply to both, many described by Carole Osterweil of Visible Dynamics on how to manage when 'walking in fog':

- Be transparent with your stakeholders – acknowledge the uncertainty and its sources. Openly acknowledging uncertainty is better than ignoring it.

- Keep talking about certainty and uncertainty – what you know, what you don't know and what you need to discover.

- Encourage people to be open about things they are uncertain about and where they feel most exposed.

- Explain that it may be uncomfortable, especially if they or others are expected or expect to be providing certainty.

- Build capacity and resilience into your plans by creating spaces for learning, innovative decision-making, and creativity.

- Promote exploration and learning, encourage risk-taking, and foster a climate of trust and openness. Demonstrate empathy and kindness to help others with their anxiety.
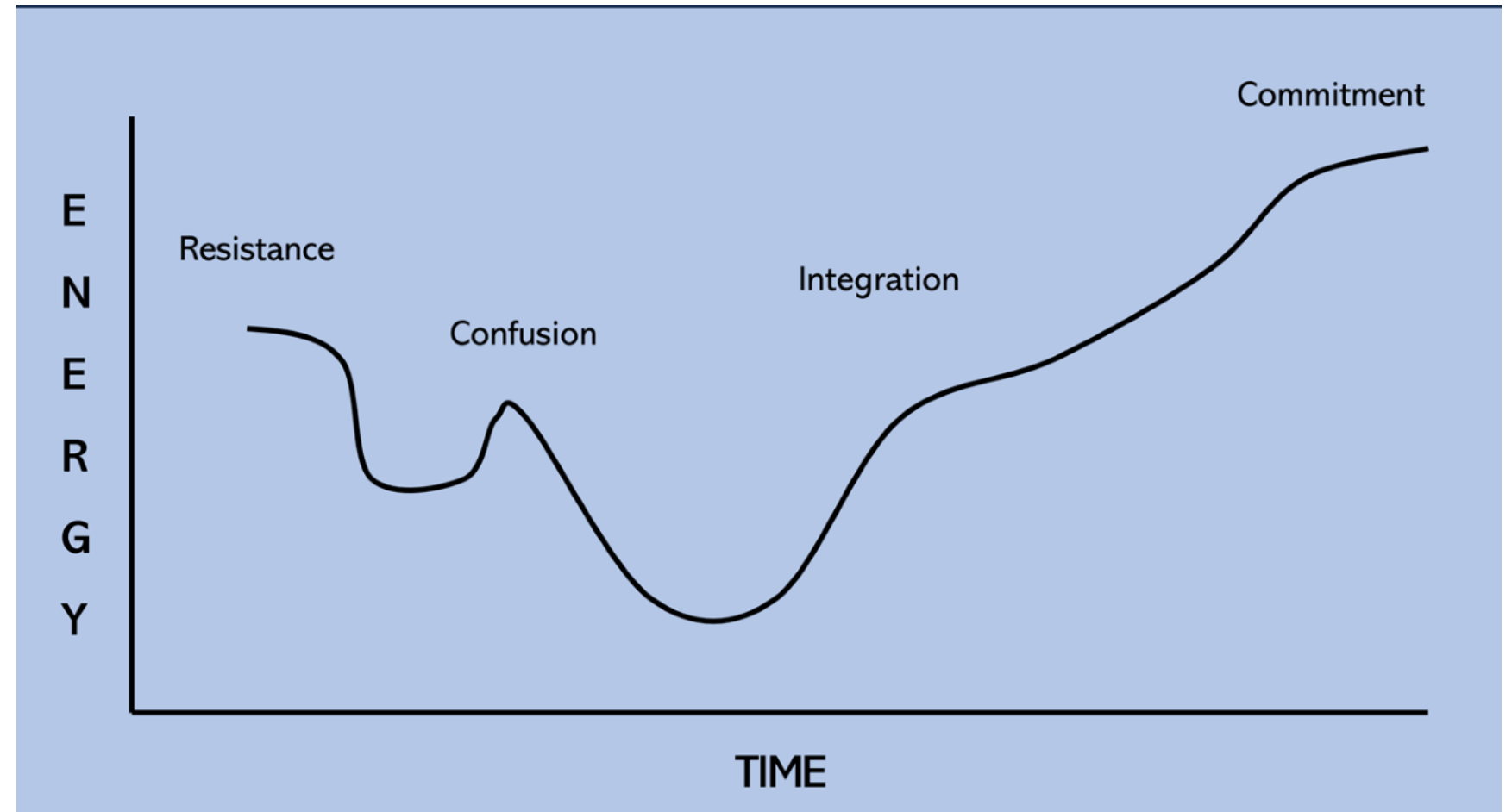
Be confident that in time, professional leadership and collaborative protocols will clear the fog, and you'll be able to turn uncertainties into quantifiable risks and benefits.

Carole Osterwell, Visible Dynamics

The Change Curve

The "change curve" describes the typical stages people go through in response to significant change.

Originally developed and published by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (*On Death and Dying*, 1969) as an examination of the stages of grief experienced in bereavement, it has increasingly been recognised as a reliable model of a sequence of reactions during organisational change.

The tool provided here uses a simplified version of the original Kübler-Ross five stage model (which she later extended to include seven separate stages). It refines the process into four main stages. These are illustrated on the following pages and offer an insight for leaders on what they could potentially expect to observe and how they could respond.

Change stage explanation

Stage 1: Resistance

Issues for Staff

- Anger
- Shock
- Loss
- Fear
- Reduced security

Possible Behaviours

- Sadness
- Withdrawal
- Caution
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Sarcasm
- Stubbornness
- Complaining
- Apathy
- Resentment
- Rumours
- Ostriches

Price to Organisation

- Decreased productivity
- No creativity or risk-taking
- Increased absenteeism
- Disruption
- Time & energy into speculation and rumours

Leadership engagement required

- Explain reasons for change
- Create compelling and urgent vision of future
- Listen carefully
- Make change safe for discussion
- Accept staff reactions
- Be visible
- Hold meetings for information and questions
- Maintain communication with senior managers & peers
- Create opportunities for involvement
- Keep staff accountable for day to day results
- Offer support and reassurance
- Clarify what stays and what goes – help staff with letting go
- Tell the truth

Change stage explanation

Stage 2: Confusion

Issues for Staff

- Clarity
- Focus
- Relationships
- Credibility

Possible Behaviours

- Questions and more questions
- Grumbling & complaining
- Lack of co-operation
- Political behaviour
- Frustration
- Erratic performance
- Scepticism
- Reluctant to be accountable
- Making assumptions
- Poor listening

Price to Organisation

- New staff leave
- Loss of talent
- Duplication of effort
- Decline in quality
- Customer dissatisfaction

Leadership engagement required

- Provide answers, answers & more answers
- Restate vision & key information often
- Create opportunities for participation
- Clarify new responsibilities
- Identify skill gaps and get people trained
- Set short term goals
- Show strong commitment to change
- Remove obstacles
- Stay approachable
- Hold meetings for planning and problem solving
- Develop critical mass in support of change
- Maintain standards
- Create quick wins and incentives to move towards change

Change stage explanation

Stage 3: Integration

Issues for Staff

- Testing
- Renewal
- Bargaining
- Recognition
- Stability

Possible Behaviours

- Renewed energy
- Excitement
- Optimism
- Independence
- Anxiety lessens
- Willingness to take small risks
- Self-worth restored

Price to Organisation

- Exaggerated budgets
- Unrealistic goals
- Loss of focus
- Things fall through the cracks
- Desire to overstaff

Leadership engagement required

- Model integrity and demand it of others
- Encourage staff to identify adjustments
- Establish policies, procedures, processes and systems
- Encourage creative thinking
- Keep communication alive
- Set clear goals and priorities for teams
- Keep staff focussed
- Give the change a chance
- Encourage participation

Change stage explanation

Stage 4: Commitment

Issues for Staff

- Empowerment
- Flexibility
- Productivity
- Future visioning

Possible Behaviours

- Action orientation
- High energy
- High productivity
- Open expression of views
- Acceptance of differences
- Personal satisfaction
- Risk taking
- Staff taking initiative
- Shared vision of future

Price to Organisation

- Complacency
- Inattention to new needs
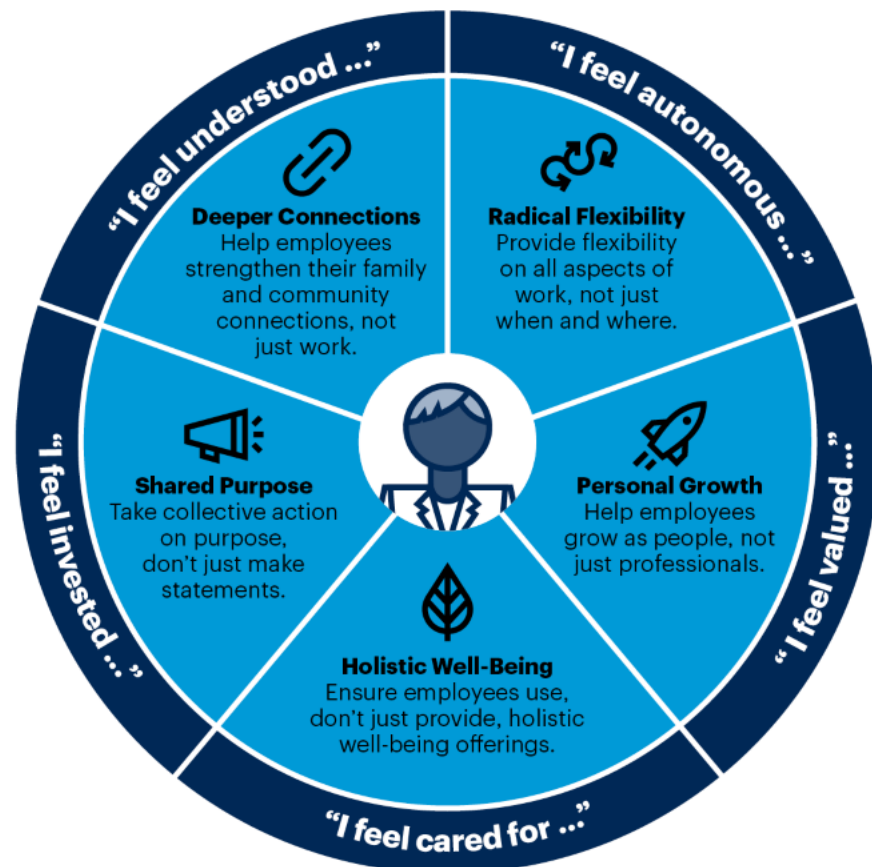- People unprepared for next change

Leadership engagement required

- Paying attention to changing environment and customer needs
- Generate creativity and new ideas
- Stimulate interaction and involvement
- Place emphasis on teamwork
- Reward high performance
- Continue to celebrate successes
- Keep involved and in touch with staff.

EVP - The Employee Value Proposition and how it can support change

The EVP represents the deal between employer and employee. It encapsulates the benefit an employee receives in return for what they bring to the organisation and should capture the essence of the organisation.

Gartner's New Human Deal

Economic and political volatility has forced everyone to examine their choices about how they spend their time, energy and social capital. Employees seek to gain more value from their jobs. Gartner calls this "The Human Deal," which has five components as seen in the infographic.

The continued landscape of instability makes it clear that the old management principles underlying the employee value proposition are outdated. It will be important to consider our employee value proposition while we design and implement change and consider what employees are seeking, namely:

1. Employees are people, not just workers.

2. Work is a subset of life, not separate from it.

3. Value comes through feelings, not just features.

"*The intent to leave or stay in a job is only one of the things that people are questioning as part of the larger human story we are living*," says Caitlin Duffy, Research Director in Gartner's HR practice. "*You could call it the 'Great Reflection*.' …It's critical to deliver value and purpose."

Gartner

EVP - The Employee Value Proposition

The 5 components of Gartner's Human Deal

Below are the five components of the Gartner's Human Deal, many of which align to our staff survey outcomes and actions:

1. **Deeper connections:** feeling understood through family and community connections, not just work relationships.

2. **Radical flexibility:** feeling autonomous in all aspects of work, not just when and where it gets done.

3. **Personal growth:** feeling valued through growth as a person, not just as a professional.

4. **Holistic well-being:** feeling cared for by ensuring holistic well-being offerings are used, not just available.

5. **Shared purpose:** feeling invested in the organization by taking concrete action on purpose, not just through corporate statements.

The Human Deal Framework

- **Deeper Connections** — Help employees strengthen their family and community connections, not just work. "I feel understood …"
- **Radical Flexibility** — Provide flexibility on all aspects of work, not just when and where. "I feel autonomous …"
- **Shared Purpose** — Take collective action on purpose, don't just make statements. "I feel invested …"
- **Personal Growth** — Help employees grow as people, not just professionals. "I feel valued …"
- **Holistic Well-Being** — Ensure employees use, don't just provide, holistic well-being offerings. "I feel cared for …"

gartner.com

Source: Gartner
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Gartner

While pay will always be an employee consideration, it is considered more a workplace hygiene factor rather than a motivator (*Herzberg*). People want acknowledgment and growth opportunities and to feel valued, trusted and empowered. Frontline workers, in particular, voice a desire to feel respected. Employees increasingly want to bring their authentic selves to work.

Bottom line: People seek purpose in their lives — and that includes work. The more an employer limits the things that create this sense of purpose, the less likely employees will stay in their positions. The era of the employment contract, where a worker provided services purely in exchange for monetary compensation, no longer exists. Now, employees expect deeper relationships, a strong sense of community and purpose-driven work.

Gartner

TVP - The Team Value Proposition

Developing a TVP can often support teams going through change as it gives them the opportunity to redefine themselves after a significant change.

A Team Value Proposition (TVP) is a concise statement that defines the unique opportunities and culture offered by a specific team. It focuses on what makes a specific team great within an organisation, including aspects such as people, culture, environment, projects, work style, and common language used by the team.

As an exercise it can be a powerful tool for teams undergoing significant change in an organisation. Here's why:

TVP Benefits

- **Creates a shared purpose & identity** A TVP helps the team define its core values, mission, and purpose within the organization. It reinforces why the team exists and how they contribute to the bigger picture, providing clarity during uncertain times.

- **Strengthens team morale & engagement** A well-defined TVP fosters a sense of belonging and pride in the team's work. It helps team members feel valued and recognised, boosting motivation and job satisfaction.

- **Provides stability during change** Organisational change can create uncertainty, but a TVP offers a sense of continuity and direction. It reassures the team by aligning them around common values and goals, even when external factors are shifting.

- **Enhances collaboration & communication** A TVP encourages open dialogue and team alignment by clarifying expectations. It fosters a supportive culture, reducing misunderstandings and ensuring everyone works towards the same objectives.

- **Boosts retention and attraction of talent** A strong team identity and value proposition can retain existing talent by making them feel connected to the team's purpose. It also helps attract new talent that aligns with the team's values, ensuring a stronger cultural fit.

- **Drives performance & accountability** A TVP clarifies what success looks like for the team and ensures accountability. It creates a sense of ownership among members, leading to higher productivity and commitment.

How to make EVP and TVP more human-centric

Gartner research shows that a human-centric approach, which provides people with more control over their work and work environment, also makes them more productive.

But it requires employers to rethink their approach. As with all fundamentally transformative strategies, this will take strategic commitment, leadership, culture development and thoughtfully applied technology.

Both leaders and employees must incorporate new norms and behaviors to develop an enterprise culture that supports the new reality.

For example, leaders and managers will need to focus on eliciting sustainable performance without compromising long-term health through practices such as proactive rest — helping employees maintain their emotional resilience and performance, as opposed to taking recovery after both have plummeted.

Examples include supporting annual leave before and after high-demand working periods, no-meeting Fridays, allotted wellness time and manager goals for ensuring teams take annual leave.

This is an overall shift in performance management, which is moving beyond just measuring employee outcomes and better reflects managing the current context with greater empathy.

Suggested ways of working to help us respond efficiently and flexibly to the changes ahead

Prioritise with Purpose

- Align with institutional strategy: focus time and effort on areas that directly support the university's core goals—student experience, research excellence, civic impact, financial sustainability.

- Be clear on trade-offs: not all activities can continue at the same level. Make the tough calls and communicate them.

- Simplify governance where possible: streamline processes and sign-off pathways so time is spent on delivery, not bureaucracy.

Here are two examples of re-prioritisation methods.

Eisenhower priositisation method

The MoSCoW method of prioritisation

Communicate with Clarity and Consistency

- Tell the story honestly: staff and students are more likely to support decisions when they understand the pressures and the rationale.

- Keep everyone aligned: regular updates from leadership help maintain shared direction across faculties, schools, professional services, and central teams.

- Create feedback loops: let staff and students raise concerns and suggestions, then close the loop by showing what's being done with that input.

Empower Teams to Act

- Decentralise where appropriate: let local teams solve problems within a clear framework of trust and accountability.

- Enable agile decision-making: give staff space to respond to issues in real-time, without waiting for multiple layers of approval.

- Back your people: publicly support those taking initiative and trying new approaches—even if every attempt isn't perfect.

Suggested ways of working to help us respond efficiently and flexibly to the changes ahead

Work Smarter, Not Harder

- Rethink meeting culture: reduce meeting load, make them purpose-driven, and use asynchronous updates when possible.

- Encourage cross-department collaboration: pooling expertise across faculties and services can surface solutions and reduce duplication.

- Share resources: from templates to best practice guides—make it easy for staff to replicate what works.

Leverage Tools and Technology

- Automate admin: Reduce time on manual or repetitive tasks (e.g., form processing, data entry, scheduling).

- Use AI and digital tools responsibly: For drafting comms, summarising papers, or analysing feedback—freeing up capacity for higher-value work.

- Invest in user-friendly systems: If tech is hard to use, it's a time drain. Simplify where you can.

Support Staff Wellbeing

- Acknowledge pressure: be visible in recognising that teams are stretched—and show empathy, not just expectations.

- Promote sustainable working: encourage breaks, flexible working, and workload planning. Protect protected time.

- Celebrate wins: publicly recognise efforts—both big and small—to keep morale up.

Embed a Culture of Learning and Adaptation

- Pilot new ways of working: try out different team structures, workflows, or models. Be willing to learn from what doesn't work.

- Encourage reflective practice: make time for teams to step back, review, and refine.

- Scale what works: capture and share lessons so good practice spreads beyond the original team or department.
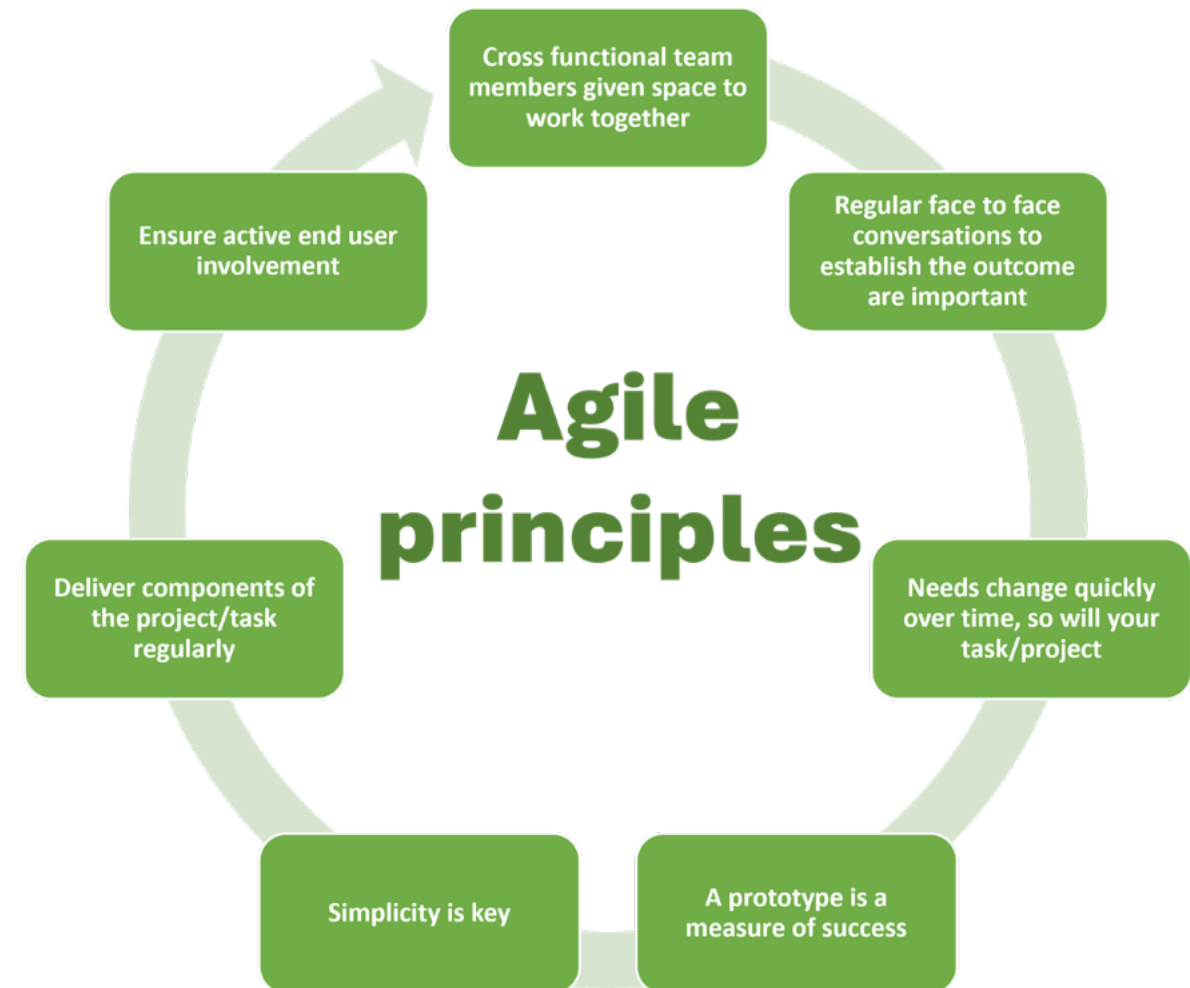
What new ways of working could help us to respond efficiently and flexibly to the changes required of us?

AGILE

Agile is a methodology that focuses on breaking a larger project or piece of work into more manageable portions of time and smaller tasks. Rather than delivering a whole piece of work at the conclusion of a project, Agile prioritises the delivery of several smaller pieces of work throughout the process. This allows the team and all types of stakeholders to work closely together during the course of the project, provide feedback at each step and make improvements along the way, rather than waiting until the end.

Compared to other more traditional methods of project management or work delivery, Agile is less rigid, which gives teams the ability to pivot in new directions as needed and adapt to changing circumstances or needs throughout the project delivery.

Agile works on the basis that nothing is ever really finished. Whatever processes we set up or projects we deliver, we will always need to revisit them because that is the true nature of constantly improving. Agile doesn't wait until the end of a very lengthy task or project to tell everyone involved that despite all the hours they put in, it still isn't right! Agile works iteratively and seeks feedback along the way, so changes can be made quickly at each stage and people do not waste time.

Agile principles

- Cross functional team members given space to work together
- Regular face to face conversations to establish the outcome are important
- Needs change quickly over time, so will your task/project
- A prototype is a measure of success
- Simplicity is key
- Deliver components of the project/task regularly
- Ensure active end user involvement

There are several Agile courses available through **LinkedIn Learning,** which are easily accessible. To behave and think in an Agile way means whole teams commit to this new way of working.

Finally...

Remember it's really important to look after yourself through change and think about how you can support your wellbeing and build resilience. Further resources to support you are available on the Staff Wellbeing Hub. We hope these resources will support you with your planning over the coming months and years.

Staff Wellbeing Hub ❯