



## What is Leadership and what does it require?

Leadership – the process of identifying and responding to adaptive challenges for which there are no immediate answers<sup>1</sup> and where change is required in individual and organizational behaviors, values and practices<sup>1</sup>.

But exercising leadership is not easy or quick – it is about building capacity, to adapt and survive; to develop a pathway through competing pressures and interests to change and respond. requires ongoing effort to address hard, often painful, questions and to make hard decisions.

Those who do, or may, exercise leadership need to draw on a complex set of capacities:

- **Personal Abilities and Character** such as having courage and resilience, and the ability to “generate and take the heat”; to stay calm in the face of challenge; to express compassion and empathy and build meaningful relationships; to be aware of oneself and one’s vulnerabilities.
- **Organisational Capabilities** such as ability to communicate direction and make links between strategic and operational activity; to identify adaptive issues that threaten an organisation; to identify patterns of dysfunction; to have an interpretative framework for the processes of change; to encourage conversation and shared responsibility in others.
- **Strategic and Diagnostic Abilities** such as ability to reflect and think systemically; to use own authority; to form and use partnerships; to identify strategic and adaptive challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> This fundamental concept is drawn from the work of our Harvard colleagues Ronald Heifitz (see **Leadership: No Easy Answers**) and Marty Linsky (**Leadership on the Line**, HBS Press).