



Leading our  
way through  
change in the  
coronavirus  
world

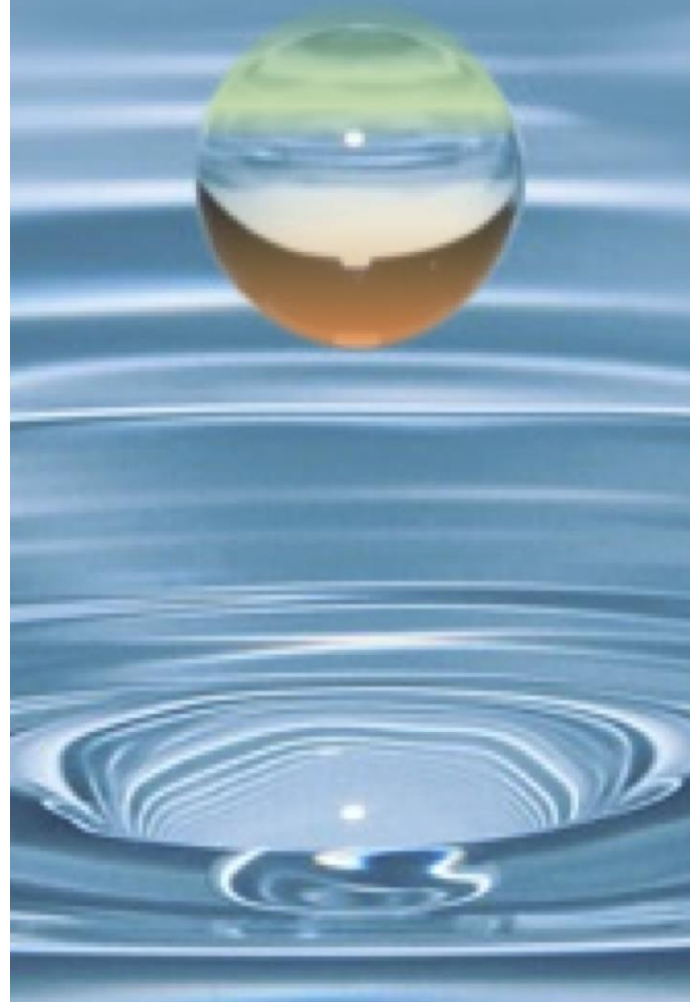
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**Professor Sharon Turnbull**  
**April 2020**

# CAPLOR HORIZONS RIPPLE PAPERS

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*...creating ripples of change*



*Learning differently*

*Thinking differently*

*Acting differently*

## Leading our way through change in the coronavirus world

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### Summary

*“So powerful is the light of unity, that it can illuminate the whole earth.” Bahá’u’llá*

The Coronavirus pandemic is having serious implications for many people and organisations across the UK and globally. Now, more than ever, leaders around the world are in need of support and guidance to safely get through this pandemic and effectively assist those most in need.

Each day more and more is learnt. However, so much remains uncertain. And this health crisis is on top of other short- and longer-term emergency situations – such as ongoing conflicts in some countries and the climate change emergency that affects us all. We can all draw from multiple sources, including the many wisdoms around us, to help discern the best way forwards in the particular circumstances we face, to try to keep our focus fresh and our actions relevant, and to try to remain as compassionate and kind as possible.

This paper offers some insights from Professor Sharon Turnbull, a Caplor Horizons’ Advisor. It starts by introducing the global pandemic in terms of a ‘VUCA’ world, highlighting some of the current and future challenges for leaders in this highly uncertain and complex landscape. It then explores some opportunities and lessons that leaders can draw on to effectively navigate this period. For example, we offer Johansen’s top 10 tips for leading in a post-pandemic world. It also emphasises the importance of taking a ‘values-based approach’ in order to remain motivated and connected to one another. It ends with some practical tips for leading in a coronavirus context proposed by McKinsey.

### A VUCA world

*“When the world is predictable you need smart people. When the world is unpredictable you need adaptable people.” Henry Mintzberg*

The Coronavirus crisis has challenged all our assumptions about what is normal in today’s world, and what to expect in the future. It is an illustration, if we needed one, that we are operating in a turbulent ‘VUCA’ world and must think afresh about what this means for our leadership.

VUCA means Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. By **Volatility**, we see that the changes all around us are happening rapidly and on a large scale. Such changes are driven by many simultaneous factors but are of course specifically driven by today’s global health pandemic. This is disrupting our businesses and our markets, changing the way we work and live, especially how we operate at a distance from each other and use technology.

Such volatility leads us all to experience a dramatic sense of **Uncertainty**, which means that predicting the future based on the past is no longer reliable or possible, and forecasting what the world might be like in the future is little better than guesswork.

The coronavirus has taken the world by storm, leaving every individual, organisation and leader feeling considerable uncertainty about how the future will unfold. To this we add the **Complexity** of today's global environment. So many factors now shape our world. We have seen how a virus can rapidly reshape our world and making obsolete the previous 'cause and effect' approach to decision-making that aided us and gave us certainty in the past. We can no longer predict with any accuracy or certainty the outcomes of our actions in today's world. Yet our interconnectivity is visible for all to see. So how can we as leaders support and enable our communities and organisations to find a path through this turbulence?

Knowledge is of course more available to us today than ever before. This is illustrated by the volume of science at our disposal about the coronavirus and its behaviours, but this knowledge is also quickly obsolete, and we cannot be certain of its reliability. We see **Ambiguity** about what today's global events mean for our lives and futures, and what effects they may have on our world. During this pandemic, we are experiencing information overload, but at the same time this information is contradictory, ambiguous, and partial, making it increasingly difficult for leaders to make sound decisions with any sense of certainty or confidence.

## Effective leadership during and after the pandemic

*"The best part of life is not just surviving, but thriving with passion and compassion and humour and style and generosity and kindness."* Maya Angelou

At Caplor Horizons, we have recognised that today's VUCA world in which this pandemic dominates our lives places many additional demands on leaders in all sectors, and in the third sector, as in the health sector, we are particularly badly hit by change. Charities will increasingly be needed to play their part in supporting the vulnerable and reshaping society for the post pandemic world but are also suffering from funding and human resource challenges as the world's attention focuses more on survival than philanthropy.

However, the world is also becoming more interconnected, and many of us can take heart from an increasingly global sense of support and solidarity across humanity, breaking down traditional barriers and borders in the same way that the virus has done. We know in our hearts that we will not survive this pandemic and thrive again until we set aside differences to work together.

Talent is in short supply in many sectors due to unprecedented demand, especially in our farming, retail, and health sectors. We must think of new ways to deploy and share talent. Digital technologies that were already becoming more pervasive in all aspects of our working and personal lives before the global pandemic, now offer a lifeline to so many citizens, communities and organisations. People who have never connected before online are now learning to do so and assisting them in this transition is urgent.

Our planet is now breathing again, and nature is regenerating as a result of this pause in global travel and industrial production. How can we as leaders ensure that when we move into the post-pandemic world we do not destroy the fragile rejuvenation process that has begun? All of these are vital questions that

we will need to address. The Commitment<sup>1</sup> was founded in 2019 to help to speed up government action towards a healthy planet. During and after this tragic pandemic The Commitment are finding positive ways to enable the planet to continue to restore itself as we return to a sense of normality, and to draw on the lessons we have all learned from living in a locked-down world.

Bob Johansen's book, 'Leaders Make the Future' written in 2012<sup>2</sup>, offers us useful ways to understand how leaders will need to adapt as we all move into tomorrow's post-pandemic world. In summary, Johansen argues that successful leaders in a VUCA world will:

1. Develop the keen ability to grow and build new things
2. Develop clarity to be able to see through the messes and contradictions that make up our world
3. Be able to turn dilemmas and threats into advantages and opportunities
4. Develop the ability to immerse themselves in unfamiliar environments and to learn from these
5. Be able to see things from nature's perspective in a world where our resources and biodiversity are becoming depleted and weather patterns unpredictable
6. Develop the ability to bring divergent cultures together towards positive engagement
7. Be open and authentic
8. Have the ability to innovate quickly and tolerate failure
9. Create and nurture purposeful business and social change networks
10. Build and nurture shared assets and resources that benefit multiple players

We believe that this is a useful list for today's crisis leaders and that those organisations able to develop four key leadership behaviours are likely to successfully transition into the post-Covid-19 world. Johansen argues that the following leadership antidotes to VUCA are **Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility**, Vision to address Volatility, Understanding to address Uncertainty, Clarity to address Complexity, and Agility to address Ambiguity.

### Taking a 'values-based approach'

*"Open your arms to change but don't let go of your values."* Dalai Lama

At Caplor Horizons, helping organisations to build their leadership capabilities is a core part of our work. However, focusing on building these capabilities for tomorrow's post-Covid-19 world will be a new challenge for us all and for leaders in all sectors. Leading with **vision, understanding, clarity and agility** will require an even sharper focus on leading change, and the need for even greater resilience than ever before. It will also require a clear values-based approach.

In a recent webinar<sup>3</sup> focussing on leading through the pandemic, Professor Kathleen O'Connor, Clinical Professor in Organisational Behaviour at London Business School shared the outcomes of a number of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thecommitment.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Bob Johansen (2012) *Leaders Make the Future, Ten new Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*, Berrett-Koehler, California.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.london.edu/campaigns/executive-education/pandemic-webinars#previouswebinars>

surveys compiled by Gallop that in a crisis leaders need to act in a way that is “compassionate, stable, hopeful and trustworthy” in the eyes of others. We would argue that these values are important for leaders at all times, but especially at times of crisis. O’Connor also proposes that leaders’ communications should be frequent, realistic and hopeful, whilst conveying the message that “we are all in this together”. At this time of unprecedented turbulence and uncertainty, she argues, we all need our leaders to help us to retain a sense of autonomy, belonging, and the ability to deploy and enhance our individual competences.

Leaders will more than ever need to lead through their values. Gary Buxton<sup>4</sup> recently tweeted:

“Values are a constant in a world of change and as such they offer people continuity and a sense of comfort.”

We wholeheartedly agree. Now, more than ever, leaders need to be clear about, and display, the values that underpin their leadership through their words and actions.

An example of an organisation that is led by their values is An Cosán. The concept of a ‘wolf pack’, has arisen as a way of capturing the essence of their values and organisational culture: see image below (for more information see Annex 1).

The team regularly measure their performance and leadership qualities against their 3 values. These are particularly relevant in the coronavirus context as virtual working becomes more common and relationships and culture need to be nurtured.

## Our Values and Culture

### Connected

At An Cosán we work as a pack. We are connected to each other and to those we serve

### Compassionate

At An Cosán we are nurturing and caring towards our pack. We appreciate and support one another and the communities we serve

### Courageous

Strong, resilient and committed to changing people's lives



<sup>4</sup> Garybuxton.co.uk



## Practical tips for leading in a coronavirus context

In a recent article from McKinsey<sup>5</sup> published in March 2020, the authors argue that old style, business as usual, top down leadership will not work in this Coronavirus crisis which is so uncertain and complex. They propose instead the following practical checklist for leaders who are navigating their organisation through this unprecedented crisis:

1. Leaders should focus firstly on **well-being** and people's lives, demonstrating empathy as well as opening themselves to empathy from others. Staff may have lost loved ones, be worried for family at the front line or who are unwell. This is the most important priority of all and must not be delegated.
2. Leaders should develop a network of teams and 'foster **collaboration** and **transparency**' across this network, making sure that accountability for decisions is clear, distributing authority carefully and sharing information.
3. These teams will need to be **united** and unified behind a single purpose and guided in their actions by framing questions for them to investigate.
4. Leaders should demonstrate 'deliberate calm', the ability to detach and think clearly, at the same time as showing 'bounded optimism' i.e. 'confidence combined with realism' which will develop **trust** in others.
5. A 'pause-assess-anticipate-act cycle' is needed so that leaders avoid overreacting to new information as it comes in, taking time to **reflect** first before acting.
6. Finally, continuous attention to 'thoughtful, frequent **communication**' and adjusting responses according to new information is vital to reassure stakeholders that leaders are responding thoughtfully to all concerns, questions, and interests.

Keeping these values and behaviours in mind will, we believe, support leaders and their organisations through this most difficult of times.

## Conclusion

*"Grace happens when we act with others on behalf of our world."* Joanna Macy

At Caplor Horizons, while we are still in crisis, we will continue to work with organisations and their leaders to enable them to address the challenges facing them right now and to prepare for the future, building on their values-based leadership. Whilst the VUCA world may be speeding up our experience of these challenges in the pandemic world, we know that effective leadership continues to be key to addressing change as we rebuild our world and restore confidence. For many of us this enforced 'stop' has enabled a period of reflection. Let us learn from this time and reflect on what we have gained from this disruption. And let us also preserve the recent quiet space that has enabled some respite to our natural world.

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<sup>5</sup> D'Auria, G. and De Smet, A. (2020) *Leadership in a crisis: Responding to the coronavirus outbreak and future challenges*. Available from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/leadership-in-a-crisis-responding-to-the-coronavirus-outbreak-and-future-challenges#>

# Our Culture



## Connected

**At An Cosán we work as a pack. We are inclusive, united and connected within our organisation and the wider community.**

- ✓ **Communicate:** Improve our internal communication e.g. through newsletters, notice boards and information sheets. Improve our external communication e.g. through our website, branding and ambassadors.
- ✓ **Unite:** Provide more opportunities for the whole staff team to get together and share learning. Better staff induction.
- ✓ **Include:** Make our sites and services more inclusive to a wide range of community members as well as An Cosán staff members.

- ✓ **Support:** Encourage health and wellbeing as well as making time for reflection and planning. Provide staff training and upskilling opportunities.
- ✓ **Appreciate:** Celebrate successes, appreciate everyone's strengths, and listen to each other.
- ✓ **Care:** Act with empathy, love and respect at all times. Retain our unique and welcoming environments.

## Compassionate

**At An Cosán we are nurturing and caring towards our pack. We appreciate and support one another and the communities we serve.**

## Courageous

**At An Cosán our pack is strong and resilient. We are committed, ambitious and focused in achieving our common goal.**

- ✓ **Adapt:** Be innovative, adaptable and resilient to changes in the external environment. Remove barriers and push the limit where possible.
- ✓ **Achieve:** Have perseverance, ambition and passion for our cause.
- ✓ **Advocate:** Use our voices and words to advocate for change and greater awareness and visibility around An Cosán.



## Caplor Horizons – Background

Established in 2014, Caplor Horizons is an independent charity. We work with other charities and responsible businesses and now have over 50 Advisors. These are outstanding people that bring specialist knowledge and experience. They contribute their time on a voluntary basis, or at reduced rates, so that Caplor Horizons can provide high quality and distinctive services at an accessible cost.

Working locally, nationally and internationally, we help other organisations think differently about themselves and the new horizons that they face. We support them in strengthening their leadership, renewing their strategy and improving their influence.

We want to encourage and assist a new generation of organisations that are committed to making a positive and lasting impact. We believe that if we are to achieve real, sustainable change, we need to inspire and enable people to learn differently, think differently and act differently.

**Our vision is:** *A world where leaders deliver a sustainable future for all*

**Our purpose is:** *To be courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change*

**Our values are:**

- **Courage** – We are courageous change makers committed to challenging assumptions, taking risks and having difficult conversations
- **Compassion** – We are open, understanding and heartfelt, encouraging the nourishment of our whole selves and others
- **Creativity** – We learn, think and act differently, and are innovative and resilient in an ever-changing world

**Our beliefs are:**

- Through diversity we ignite dynamic innovation
- Collaboration helps achieve greater impact
- Everyone matters
- We are all leaders in our individual and collective ways – we are all change makers!
- Learning is more effective if it is fun, engaging and creative
- Building on people's strengths creates greater resilience

**Our strategic goals:**

- Goal 1: Transforming Leadership
- Goal 2: Strengthening Resilience
- Goal 3: Increasing Collaboration

Learning differently  
Thinking differently  
Acting differently

