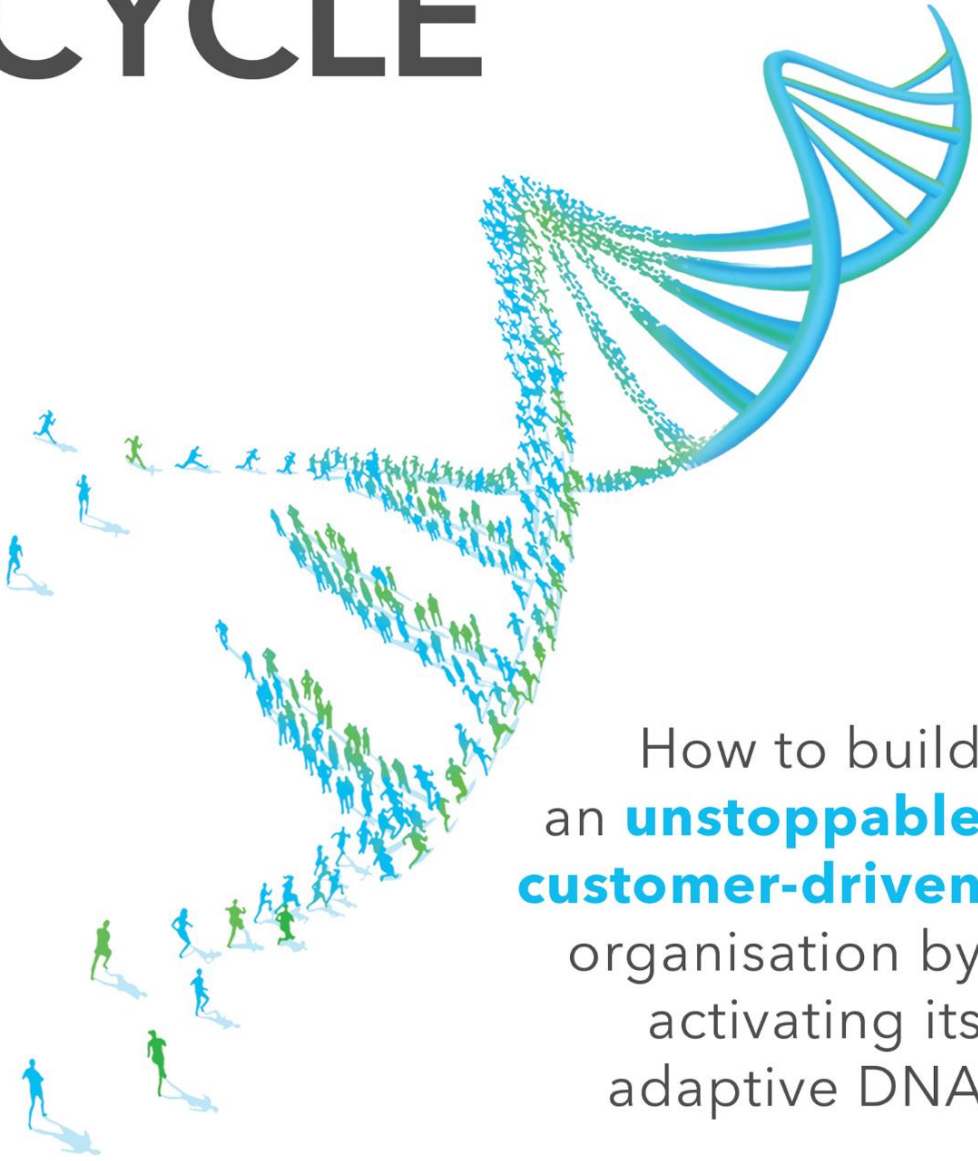


The THRIVE CYCLE



How to build
an **unstoppable**
customer-driven
organisation by
activating its
adaptive DNA

KATE CHRISTIANSEN

WHAT TO EXPECT

How adaptive is your organisation?

What does an adaptive organisation look like from the inside?

How do you build one?

Where do you start?

THIS BOOK PROVIDES THESE ANSWERS and many more. You could think of it as your *Complete Leader's Guide* to turning the organisation you have today, into one that holds an adaptive advantage over its rivals.

The Thrive Cycle, and its original framework, will enable you and your organisation to discuss, define, develop and measure adaptive capability in a meaningful way. It crystallises the lessons of twenty years spent influencing, cajoling and coercing large, complex organisations to adapt, and shares the insights from a career spent in-between the organisational silos. The result is a new, reality-based approach to one of the world's biggest challenges: CHANGE.

If you're a leader with the ambition, passion and strategic imperative to create The Adaptive Organisation, this book will show you how.

About the author



Kate Christiansen is an *adaptive performance specialist, high-energy catalyst & disruptor of status-quo thinking*. With decades of experience leading teams through turbulent terrain, Kate's innovative methods revolutionise conventional approaches to strategy, change, disruption and adaptive thinking. She partners with C-suite Executives and leadership teams to activate, navigate, and accelerate the mission-critical moments that matter.

Kate is the expert leaders trust when they want to:

- *Disrupt old thinking* and inspire strategic conversations at off-site events.
- *Make complex change easier* and more energising by transforming the biggest obstacles into catalysts of opportunity.
- *Think outside-the-box everyday* by turning team meetings into innovation incubators that build better bonds, unlock creativity and confront complexity collaboratively.
- *Accelerate their impact* in their new executive role by creating clarity and building strategic momentum in the *second* 90-days.
- *Address that mission-critical challenge once and for all* so they can sleep better at night.
- *Develop a future-fit strategic plan* that is flexible and ready for the unpredictable and uncertain waters of today's business environment
- *Cultivate an unstoppable leadership culture* that aligns strategy, delivery and ways of working to build an organisation or team that is ready for anything.

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ADVANCED PRAISE

'This engaging and highly-readable book provides **an innovative approach** to one of the biggest challenges facing business today: managing relentless change. It offers a range of **practical insights** and tools which for me, makes it **essential reading**.'

Keith Jackson Former CRO, Bupa Group

'The Thrive Cycle explores what it means to be an Adaptive Organisation in an ever-changing world. **A highly relevant and timely contribution** to the science and art of change leadership'.

Richard Umbers CEO and Managing Director; Myer

'The Thrive Cycle is **an actionable, easy to read guide** to making positive change happen in complex organisations. Written by a seasoned change practitioner, this book is **essential reading for C-suite and senior managers** who are tasked with leading change and ensuring their business adapts to, and thrives in, an increasingly uncertain environment'.

Tom Singer Former CFO , InterContinental Hotels Group

'Sometimes I read a business book and wonder how the author managed to pad out 250 pages with what is essentially one idea – but **this book is different**. The Thrive Cycle is chock full of sensible, practical tools borne out of **real world experience** and anchored in **customer-centricity** and **employee engagement**. Importantly, it shows how to achieve what is for many businesses 'the impossible dream' – **being big and adaptive**'.

Chris Smedley CEO, Assure

‘**An invaluable read** for leaders who want to make their organisations healthier and sustainable; **indispensable reflection** for those who think their organisation does not need to adapt...and **a survival kit** for those who consider themselves victims of change’.

Domènec Crosas Director General, Sanitas Mayores

‘The Thrive Cycle shows **step by step**, how to triumph when faced with the significant challenge of leading change in complex businesses. It is **a must-read for executives and senior managers** with responsibility for **delivering sustainable results** in constantly changing environments’.

Di Fulton - Non-Executive Director, ColInvest

‘**So many “a-ha” moments** in *The Thrive Cycle* for any leader who has experienced major organisational change. This practical and engaging book provides a **comprehensive and flexible framework**, supported by a range of useful, easy to apply tools. **A must-read!**’

**Gabrielle Prior – Former International Director of Operations
Quality, Nielsen/NetRatings (now Nielsen Online)**

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The Thrive Cycle:
Unlock The Adaptive Organisation Within

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The Adaptive Dilemma

YOU ARE A LEADER IN A SUCCESSFUL organisation but you know it's caught in a rut. You know this because whenever it attempts strategic change, the outcome rarely lives up to expectations, and the process feels harder than raising the *Titanic*.

The world is changing at an accelerating rate and to succeed, you know your organisation must move beyond its linear, project-by-project approach. It must be able to holistically adapt, continuously evolve and change itself in order to stay relevant. This will be essential if your organisation is to deliver a superior customer-experience and consistently deliver superior performance.

Most leaders in your organisation know it's not as adaptive as it needs to be and there have been numerous attempts to change. Topics like innovation, agility, customer-focus and strategy execution have bounced around the executive table many times. Consultants have been engaged, processes have been re-engineered and systems have been bought. And while there have been some improvements, none have lived up to 'The Adaptive Organisation' that was promised.

I can help.

After 20 years adapting organisations to address strategically critical changes in their environment, I know it's not easy. I've led many change-initiatives and have covered the spectrum from strategy development, change leadership to business analysis. I've led global change programs across multiple countries; integrated multi-billion dollar mergers; established several start-ups; led transformations; and developed entry strategies for emerging markets. I've worked extensively across Europe, Asia and Australia and held leadership roles in numerous sectors including telecommunications, outsourcing, healthcare, financial services and tertiary education.

Most of my career has been spent in ‘organisational no-mans-land’ – the unmapped territory between the vertical silos. It’s from there that I’ve influenced, cajoled and wrangled with vertically-oriented organisations, convincing (even coercing) them to think and move in a horizontal, holistic way.

This experience has given me a unique, first-hand understanding of what *really* happens within organisations when they attempt to adapt. Why they miss game-changing opportunities; why organisational change always takes longer and costs more than expected; why so much resistance is encountered; and most importantly, why strategic change so rarely lives up to its promises.

If you’re looking for these kinds of answers – this book is for you. You should also know that you’re not alone.

A recent survey⁴⁵ found as few as 9 percent of organisations rated themselves as being ‘excellent’ at executing initiatives aimed to deliver strategic results. Similarly, only 56 percent of strategic initiatives met their original strategic intent. Another study²² found that 88 percent of C-suite executives saw executing strategic change as being ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to their organisation’s competitiveness. And yet, 61 percent acknowledged that it was something their organisation found extremely difficult to do. A separate study revealed that 57 percent of organisations reported being unsuccessful at executing strategic initiatives during the previous three years²⁰.

Many CEOs of large, successful organisations will tell you that they see significant change on the horizon, yet they lack confidence in their organisation’s ability to cope with it⁴⁵. Their nervousness is not without cause. By 2020, it is predicted that 75 percent of organisations on Standard & Poor’s Top 500 list, will have been established after the year 2000. This prediction is reinforced by the declining average lifespan of publicly listed companies, which has reduced from 67 years in the 1920s to 15 years today⁴⁹.

Of course, established organisations having difficulty adapting to change is not a new problem.

It was 1996 when John Kotter brought the topic of organisational change and change leadership to mainstream conversations³⁴. It was the

same year Michael Porter presented his thoughts in ‘*What is Strategy?*’ and called for leaders to re-think their approach to market change⁴⁶. Since then, NASA has successfully landed two Rover robots on Mars, we’ve cloned sheep, developed a map of the human genome and transitioned computing from a room full of mainframes into a device that can fit in your pocket.

So why, when we’ve made such progress in other areas, do organisations led by smart people still face the same issues? Why do companies like Kodak, Blockbuster and Borders fail when Fujifilm²⁹, Netflix and Amazon succeed? And why do former ‘game-changers’ like Nokia and Blackberry find themselves falling from former glory?

There are many theories.

Some put it down to complacency, others suggest what’s needed is greater innovation or customer-focus. While all of these form part of the answer, you and I know from experience, it’s not that simple.

So what is a modern-day leader to do?

How do you lead your *pre-millennial* organisation to secure a place in the remaining 25 percent of the Standard & Poor’s Top 500? How do you ensure that it’s the top 25 percent, not the bottom? And importantly, how do you do all of this while sustainably creating short and longterm value for your customers, organisation, and its stakeholders?

This is *The Adaptive Dilemma*, and this book solves it.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHANGE

Experience has taught me many things. One of the most valuable lessons has been, that in order to successfully adapt to any change, you must begin by asking the right questions. Not only this, you must ask and answer them in the right order. This is true regardless of whether the change is big or small or affects us as individuals, our teams or our organisations.

Failure to answer the right questions is guaranteed to make the change harder than it needs to be, more costly, deliver a less valuable outcome and take a higher toll on your most valuable asset – your people.

I call these questions *The Fundamentals* and within the context of an organisational change they include:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- Why is change required?
- Why change now?
- What does the ideal outcome look like?
- Where are we today?
- What's the gap?
- What's causing the gap and where should we focus?
- Where do we start?

Notice that none of these early questions start with the words *how* or *when*. These come later because unless you know what you are trying to achieve, why it matters and where you want the change to take your organisation, you're guaranteed never to get there. Further, unless the people within your organisation know these answers, they will be unprepared for, or unwilling to take the journey and unlikely to reach the finish line.

Creating an organisation that is more adaptive than it is today is an organisational change and just like any other, it needs to start by answering the right questions. The irony is, of course, that in order to successfully transition from where your organisation is today, to where it needs to be, requires the same capability (i.e. being adaptive) that it is actually wanting to create. This makes creating The Adaptive Organisation one of the toughest changes of all and helps to explain why so few organisations succeed. It's also why starting with what I call *The Adaptive Fundamentals* is critically important.

The Adaptive Fundamentals and why they matter

In order to successfully create The Adaptive Organisation, your organisation needs to develop clear answers to eight questions. Each question fulfils a specific purpose and clears a path for the change to follow (Figure 1-1).

So now, let's come back to your organisation. Thinking about the eight questions I just described, take a moment to reflect on your own organisation.

- *How many of these questions have been satisfactorily answered?*
- *If you asked five of your leadership colleagues, how consistent would their answers be with yours, or with each other's?*

What happens when The Adaptive Fundamentals are missing?

When doing the above exercise, if you answered 'not many' and 'not very', then the following scenario may sound familiar.

A mission-critical project fails. People run for cover and work frantically to show why the disaster wasn't their fault. When the dust settles, the organisation decides that something has to change to prevent this kind of thing from happening again. It's urgent! The Executive Team want results! However, instead of starting with The Adaptive Fundamentals, the organisation scrambles to find a solution.

Unfortunately, when an organisation attempts to become adaptive without first addressing The Adaptive Fundamentals, the journey goes something like this.

The initial conversations tend to run around in circles. Most stakeholders find it too theoretical because there is no commonly accepted language or reference point that enables people to connect, understand one another or talk in 'concrete' terms. Everyone has their own opinion as to what the answer should be.

FIGURE 1-1: The Adaptive Fundamentals – Eight questions that provide a solid foundation for The Adaptive Organisation

QUESTION TO ASK	WHY THE ANSWERS ARE SO IMPORTANT
1. What are we trying to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes a shared benchmark with which your organisation can compare itself.
2. Why should our organisation become more adaptive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligns the hearts, minds and actions of your leaders (and thus, their teams) and fosters the motivation, determination and resilience to succeed.
3. Why should we change now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a sense of urgency and develops the appetite for action.
4. What does The Adaptive Organisation look like for us?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a clear goal that is relevant to your organisation’s circumstances and makes sense to your leaders, customers, people and stakeholders.
5. Where are we today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a shared view of reality and consensus as to how adaptive your organisation <i>really</i> is.
6. What’s the gap between today and our desired future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops a consistent understanding of the challenge to be overcome and where the greatest attention is needed most.
7. What’s causing the gap and where should we focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that interventions are targeted and focus on the things that will drive the greatest improvement.
8. Where do we start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a clear way forward and enables the organisation to move from talking about becoming adaptive, to actually making it happen.

Engaging stakeholders becomes a long, painful process. While on the surface people will say the organisation needs to be more adaptive, not everyone is convinced it offers tangible benefits. And, because progress is so slow, even those who start out as believers can find it all too hard and eventually lose interest. ‘Herding cats’ is an image that frequently comes to mind.

Eventually, the organisational approach fragments and stakeholders, fed-up with the apparent lack of progress, start to implement their own solutions. However, because there is no overall design, none of the solutions fit together and instead of making the organisation *more* adaptive, they make it *less* so.

I could go on but there’s no need. You’ve experienced this scenario first-hand, either in your own organisation or one you’ve previously encountered. It’s like a three-legged-race with a thousand people tied together but no one knows which leg they should start with.

Is it any wonder that when the starter-pistol fires, everyone topples over?

So, why does this happen? Why don’t organisations start with The Adaptive Fundamentals?

ALIGNMENT. EASY TO SAY, HARD TO DO

A bit like playing football, building The Adaptive Organisation is not a solo sport. Sitting in a room, writing up the answers then sharing them by email is not enough. The Adaptive Fundamentals must be underpinned by intellectual and emotional alignment between the senior leaders of your organisation. Without this foundation, there is no platform from which to cohesively and effectively lead the change.

Many business books talk about the importance of alignment. It sounds so simple on paper. Just get all the leaders in a room, have a workshop, agree on the answers and there you have it – *instant alignment*.



‘Creating The Adaptive Organisation is like a three-legged race. Everyone needs to work together or the whole thing falls flat on its face.’

Yeah. Right!

So why is alignment so difficult to achieve? And, why is it particularly hard to achieve when you’re trying to make your organisation more adaptive?

Many of the challenges can be traced back to human psychology.

As individuals, every experience and conversation we have is filtered by our own perspective, beliefs, values and understanding of the world. These individual filters influence what we think, the choices we make, what we say and how we behave.

Just imagine putting twenty people in a room and asking them ‘where should we go for lunch?’

Immediately mental ‘cogs’ would start turning. Twenty individual filters would kick into action and use the information available to form opinions, make suggestions and assess the options. In fact, when viewed collectively, there would be hundreds of filter-combinations influencing the group’s ability to agree where we should go for lunch.

If this is what happens when a group is dealing with a familiar concept like ‘lunch’, it’s little wonder achieving alignment around a more complex and abstract concept (i.e. adaptiveness) poses a significant challenge.

WHY A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED

Human beings have an innate drive to make sense of the world. ‘Not knowing the answer’ makes most of us feel incredibly uncomfortable and we’ll often go to great lengths to understand and make that feeling go away.

One of the ways we do this is by creating frameworks. We develop language and create tools that help us to turn abstract concepts (i.e. stuff that’s hard to get your head around) into something more concrete. We then use these frameworks to connect with each other, achieve shared understanding, and this enables us to create things together.

Consider the following example.

Imagine that you and I are going on a business trip. If I said I’d pick you up at midday, you’d know when I expected you to be waiting on the pavement with your suitcase. That’s because there is a common framework for *time*, which includes terms like *minutes*, *hours* and *midday*. And, thanks to horology we also have tools like clocks, watches, schedules and calendars that make the concept more concrete and thus, enable shared meaning to be easily created.

But what would happen if this common framework didn’t exist? What if we had no way of talking about or telling the time? How would that impact our ability to catch a plane? How would the plane know when it was supposed to take off? How would we know what day we were leaving?

When you think about it, the impact would be profound. Without a clear concept of what time was and how to measure it, there would be no computers, cars, traffic lights, timetables, New Year's Eve and no birthdays. In fact, consider this scenario long enough and you'll quickly conclude that without a common *time* framework, we'd be back in the dark ages, relying on candles and oil-lamps.

So having a common framework is useful. It makes communication quicker and easier and enables us to connect and collaborate more effectively.

Let's explore what happens when we have multiple frameworks operating in the same space. How does this impact our ability to connect with one another?

To demonstrate, I'd like you to picture a scene of a 32-degree day in your local main street. What are people wearing? If you live in America you've probably pictured lots of overcoats, scarves and hats, because 32-degrees Fahrenheit is pretty cold. In Australia, however, we use Celsius to measure temperature and so 32 degrees is beach weather. If I were picturing my local street, I'd imagine people wearing light, cool clothing and sunhats. Therefore, if a friend asked both of us 'what kind of clothes should I pack to wear in 32-degree temperature?' we'd both give completely different answers. While we'd both technically be right it wouldn't help our friend with their packing.

So, even when we're using concepts that are quite familiar, without establishing a common framework first, shared meaning quickly dissolves.

Now let's come back to The Adaptive Organisation and the eight questions (i.e. The Adaptive Fundamentals) that need to be answered if we're to succeed.

When you read through the questions, they look straight-forward. However, if like me, you've ever brought a group of leaders together and tried to answer these questions, the conversation was probably harder than expected. That's because *being adaptive* (like *time*) is an abstract concept.

Without a common framework of language, measurement and tools that turn *adaptiveness* into something more concrete, there is no shared reference point through which to reach agreement. As a result, the conversation degenerates into a collection of firmly-held opinions fueled

by past experiences and driven by personal ambitions. At best The Adaptive Fundamentals become half-answered or half-agreed and without this strong foundation, any momentum dissolves and you're soon back where you started.

But what if it didn't have to be this way? What if your senior leaders spent less time arguing over opinions and more time having realitybased conversations that made your organisation more adaptive? What if there was a framework that ensured *everyone* started *every* adaptive conversation on the same page? And, what if at its core, sat a concept that was so simple it could be explained and understood in less than ninety seconds?

Well, now there is. It's called The Thrive Cycle.

THE THRIVE CYCLE IN A NUTSHELL

The Thrive Cycle is an organisational capability. It exists within every organisation and determines the degree to which that organisation is able to holistically adapt to change. There's a whole chapter on it later so for now, I'll just give you a quick overview.

Some Thrive Cycles are stronger than others. When The Thrive Cycle is nurtured it becomes robust and the entire organisation becomes more adaptive. When The Thrive Cycle is neglected, it becomes weak and the organisation becomes less adaptive. It therefore follows that if we're wanting to create The Adaptive Organisation, we need to build a strong Thrive Cycle capability. However, like the concept of 'time', in order for The Thrive Cycle to be something we can work with and improve, we first need a way to talk about, recognise and measure it. That's where the Thrive Cycle Framework comes in, and it is this original concept that will unlock the adaptive organisation within.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Any established organisation, no matter how big or how complex, can become adaptive. I'm not saying it's easy or that it can be achieved overnight.

This book is for experienced leaders who have the required ambition, courage and commitment to create an adaptive, organisational advantage and who wish to learn how it can be done.

The Thrive Cycle Framework and the ideas shared within this book have been developed using first-hand knowledge of what works, what doesn't, and why. At its core sit real-life lessons (my own and those shared with me by others) gained during years of satisfying successes, excruciating failures and those head-in-hands moments thinking 'Surely... you can't be serious'.

Once understood, The Thrive Cycle Framework will enable you (and your people) to identify, understand, develop, measure and continually improve your organisation's Thrive Cycle capability. It will:

- **Increase the adaptive consciousness** of your organisation, enabling it to have meaningful, structured conversations that create alignment.
- **Empower your organisation and its leaders** by identifying the organisational levers that drive Thrive Cycle capability, so that they can be systematically addressed.
- **Provide hands-on strategies** that enable you and your leaders to overcome the inevitable challenges of creating The Adaptive Organisation.

To achieve this, the book has been divided into three sequential parts.

PART 1 – UNDERSTANDING THE ADAPTIVE ORGANISATION

Part 1 focuses on building a foundation of knowledge and addressing some of the early Adaptive Fundamentals. It answers questions like 'what does it mean to be adaptive?' and 'why does being adaptive matter?'. We'll explore The Thrive Cycle and complete the Adaptive Audit to assess its status within your organisation. We'll also identify your Adaptive Profile and you'll be introduced to four very different organisations (the Surfers, Swimmers, Splashers and Sinkers) and understand how their attributes impact their ability to adapt.

PART 2 – THE SIX ELEMENTS OF ADAPTIVE SUCCESS

In Part 2 we'll start to look beneath your organisation's Adaptive Profile and examine some of the key drivers contributing to it. You'll be introduced to The Six Elements of Adaptive Success and learn how and why they make your organisation's Thrive Cycle stronger or weaker.

Starting with the first Element, *Enduring Commitment*, we'll explore the concept of adaptive advantage and consider what it means within the context of your organisation. This chapter also emphasises the importance of engagement and shows how you can build ongoing alignment across your leadership community.

The chapter on the second Element of Adaptive Success, *Adaptive Principles*, will show how putting customer-value first holds the key to building and sustaining an adaptive advantage. From there, we'll explore the third Element of Adaptive Success, the *anchors of Certainty*. We'll examine the role of organisational purpose and how establishing Value-Creating Values enables confident decision-making during times of turbulent change.

When we reach the fourth Element of Adaptive Success, *The Vital Thread*, we'll explore how it can be used to predict and respond to change-opportunities in your organisation's internal and external environments. We'll meet Orion Healthcare and learn how a strong Vital Thread holds the key to remaining relevant to customers, leading disruption and creating maximum value from organisational change.

The fifth Element is *Thrive Cycle Leadership* which, quite literally, makes The Thrive Cycle go round. This chapter discusses the three leadership capabilities your leaders need to develop, and reveals the secret to applying the right leadership behaviour and mindset at the right time.

And then, in the last chapter of Part 2, we'll examine the sixth Element of Adaptive Success, a *Balanced Ecosystem*. Within any large, complex organisation, achieving the right balance between customer, people, process and systems can be challenging. It answers questions like:

- How do you continue to stay relevant to customers?
- What kind of organisational structure do you need?
- How do you measure and improve your adaptive capability?
- How do you get prioritisation right?

- What kind of leadership and people capabilities does your organisational environment need to support?
- How do you ensure your adaptive capability continuously improves?

This chapter explains why your organisation needs a Chief Adaptive Officer, what an Adaptive Advantage Team does, and shares practical ideas as to how to achieve the necessary buy-in from your leadership team. We'll also learn how Thrive Cycle Learning enables you to create an Adaptive Advantage Scorecard as a means of tracking and improving organisational adaptiveness.

PART 3 – UNLOCKING YOUR ORGANISATION

Part 3 consolidates everything we've talked about in the previous two sections and moves the conversation into 'action' mode.

We'll come full-circle and revisit the eight Adaptive Fundamentals. We'll go through each question – one by one – and show how you can apply what you've learnt to develop the answers. This chapter explores how you can do so in a way that achieves consistent and aligned agreement among your leadership community. In some ways, this chapter is like a quick reference guide. It summarises many of the key concepts from the book and can be used back in your organisation. There's also a roadmap to help you get things started.

The final chapter is entitled *You're it!* This brings the conversation back to you and your role as the *Driver* behind The Adaptive Organisation. It describes what it will take to successfully lead this change and introduces some practical ways to overcome some of the inevitable challenges like engaging the non-believers, being willing to take risks, and letting go of control.



These are just some of the highlights. You'll also find over thirty 'Applied Leadership' sections that look like the following.

THESE SECTIONS HAVE been specifically designed to bring the ideas within the book to life within your organisation. They do so by either asking you to reflect or by sharing practical tools and guidance (e.g. checklists, step-by-step strategies, advice for tricky situations etc.). You may also like to keep a notebook close by to capture your thoughts.

Anyway, that's enough about what's coming up. I'm really excited to be sharing this journey with you so let's just sit down, grab ourselves a hot drink and make a start.