



## Surfing or Drowning Developing a Creative Strategy in Uncertain Times

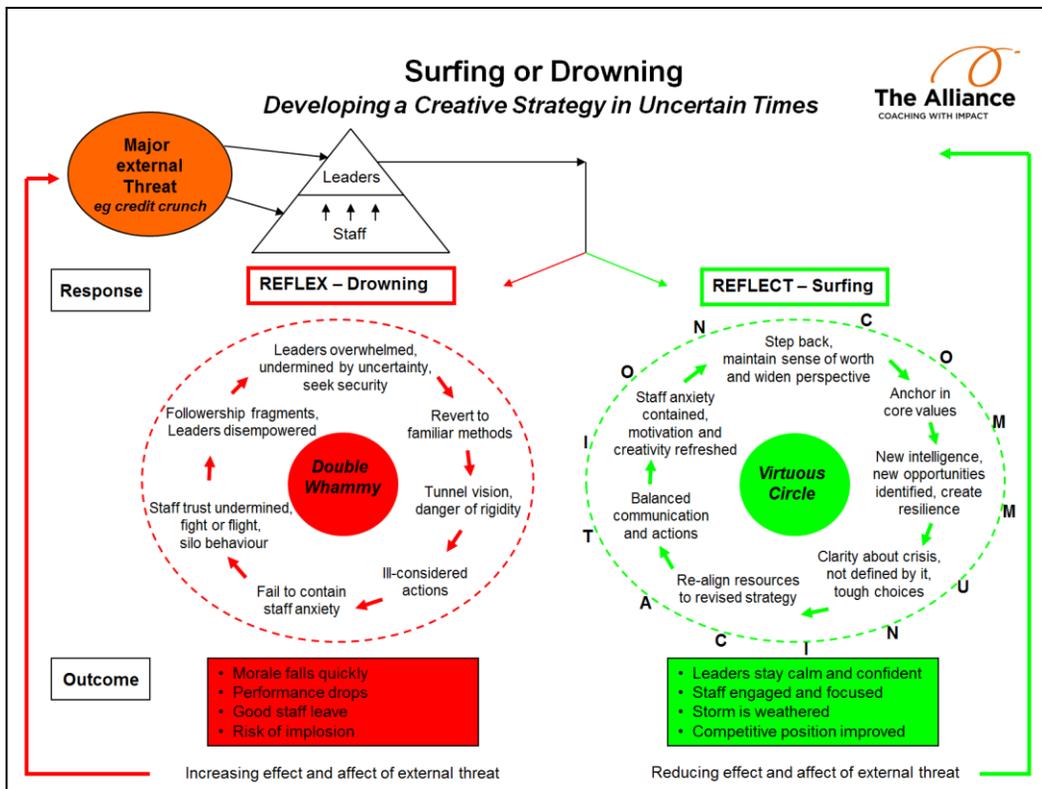
### A Think Piece

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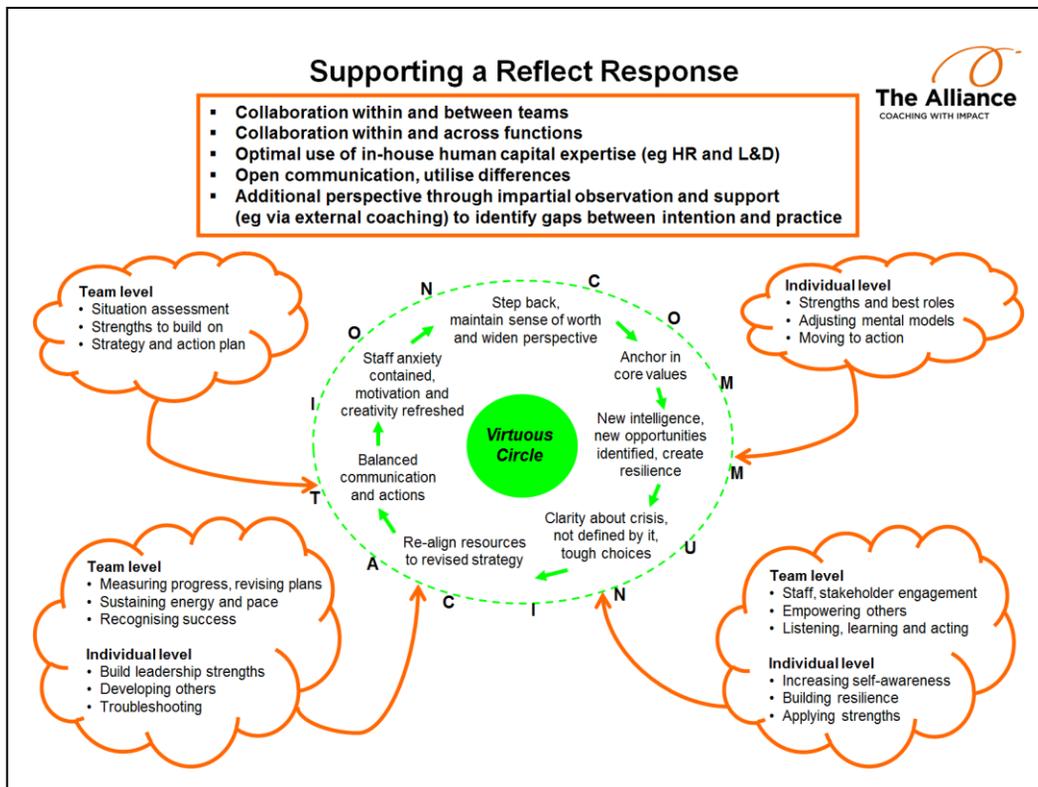
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1. This think piece has been produced by The Alliance, a network of experienced coaches. All Alliance coaches are graduates of The Business Coach™ programme from Meyler Campbell, accredited by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, and the Solicitors Regulation Authority.
2. There is a companion paper comprising some key questions which are designed to help test your current positioning on the reflex / reflect continuum (as referred to in this think piece) and to stimulate thinking about additional actions.
3. A number of Alliance guides are also available: *Guide to Being Coached*; *Guide to Selecting a Coach*; *Guide to Internal and External Coaching*; *Guide to Coaching Supervision*.
4. For further information contact [info@alliancecoaching.co.uk](mailto:info@alliancecoaching.co.uk) or call 020 7794 5841 ([www.alliancecoaching.co.uk](http://www.alliancecoaching.co.uk)).



1. Major external threat, eg the credit crunch, requires rapid response from leaders.
2. The threat is also visible to staff who are likely to become anxious.
3. If uncertainty prevails for even a relatively short period the anxiety may cause staff to behave dysfunctionally, thereby increasing the pressure on leaders.
4. Containing staff anxiety and maintaining staff morale are key to avoiding catastrophe.
5. Leaders respond either in '**reflex** mode', taking immediate, but perhaps ill-considered actions, or in '**reflect** mode', taking time-out to think clearly and respond appropriately in ways which maintain staff engagement.
6. In the extreme, **reflex** action can set up a vicious circle, where staff disaffection can lead to key staff leaving, the creation of silo behaviour and token commitment of energy. The organisation is hit by a **double whammy** – major external threat and internal disintegration, ('drowning').
7. Well conducted **reflect** action sees leaders taking a short time-out to put the threat into perspective, re-affirm the strengths of the organisation, identify new market opportunities, get clear about the crisis and potential necessary tough decisions, re-align resources to revised strategy, engage staff and take decisive action. Clear communication to all, throughout this process, is vital. Staff anxiety is contained and staff fully engaged on both the immediate survival plan and on resuming the journey of profitable growth and development, ('surfing').
8. The keys to maintaining staff motivation and commitment are autonomy, competence and relatedness, through ensuring that staff:
  - Have the freedom to act in the common good
  - Have all of the skills and competences required for their tasks
  - Can relate their actions to those of others in a well communicated plan.



1. There are a number of key activities which can be undertaken by leaders to support a **reflect** response, these include ensuring:
  - Collaboration within and between teams
  - Collaboration within and across functions
  - Optimal use of in-house human capital expertise (eg HR and L&D)
  - Open communication, utilise differences
  - Additional perspective through impartial observation and support (eg via external coaching) to identify gaps between intention and practice
2. Combining team collaboration to establish and maintain common purpose, and individual work, to help leaders gain perspective, unfreeze and act on their strengths can ensure that the **reflect** response is taken. And external coaching can be a vital tool in facilitating this.
3. The precise nature and content of the various activities will change over time starting with helping the team ground itself in the reality of the new situation, thinking through a range of possible responses and choosing the best one.
4. Once direction has been established and an action plan developed, the work (calling upon external coaching as appropriate) can focus on critical areas for success such as staff and external stakeholder engagement, supporting individual leaders in improving their self-awareness, addressing any factors which are holding them back and helping them to use their personal strengths to maximum effect.
5. As staff become engaged and the organisation responds, attention can be focused on measuring progress, sustaining energy and pace and building further the coherence and performance of the top team.