

Praise for *The Agile Leader*

Praise for the first edition

We need to disrupt existing business models to drive growth in our unpredictable world. This book can help leaders to think differently, to agitate for change and to take others on a transformation journey. It highlights the importance of culture, behaviour, and ways of working. KEVIN COSTELLO, CEO, HAYMARKET MEDIA GROUP

To be agile, you need to try to test things. Not everything you try is going to work. Fail small, fail fast and learn quickly. *The Agile Leader* demonstrates that agility is not just about creating things. It's also about ruthless prioritization, managing risk and knowing when to stop. This book helps leaders to make choices that define their business success on a day-to-day basis. If you're not moving forward and innovating and changing things, then your competitors will be. HUMPHREY COBBOLD, CEO, PUREGYM

In *The Agile Leader*, Simon Hayward develops the approach to building an agile organization that he introduced in his first book, *Connected Leadership*. He looks at how many successful organizations are led by their customers, working with them to constantly innovate and improve, for mutual benefit. He also focuses on the importance of simplifying business processes and breaking down silos to encourage collaboration. In an uncertain climate, businesses need to be adaptable, flexible and always evolving. As well as spotting opportunities for growth, we need to make decisions quickly to seize these opportunities. We have adopted many of the principles of agile leadership at Pentland Brands to future-proof our own organization. ANDY RUBIN, CHAIR, PENTLAND BRANDS

With disruption happening in every industry and customer behaviour changing all the time, agility has become a highly prized leadership skill. By reacting with agility to changing customer needs and focusing effort where it will have greatest impact, this book shows where leaders can gain quick wins as well as achieving long-term, sustainable success. ROGER WHITESIDE, CEO, GREGGS

This book explains very clearly just what makes agile leadership different to traditional leadership. Making the shift towards a more agile style of leadership can be a huge challenge. Simon Hayward offers a range of insights and advice to help you make that shift in a sustainable way. MARK ALLEN, CEO, DAIRY CREST

The digital explosion has had a huge impact on every industry. It has disrupted traditional ways of working. This book highlights the importance of customer focus, learning and collaboration in becoming increasingly innovative and agile. By adopting the principles of agile leadership you can stay ahead of the competition. CAROLINE RUSH CBE, CEO, BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL

A thoughtful read for leaders and aspiring leaders on the balance between reflection and action needed for transforming, or even just surviving, in an age of digital overload. BEN PAGE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, IPSOS MORI

We live in a fast-moving world. This book recognizes that as a leader, you are on a constant journey. You cannot stand still. You need to stay abreast of new ideas and developments, to learn from others, to seek out opportunities and react to them. There is no finishing post. Being truly agile is about constantly evolving. VANDA MURRAY OBE, CHAIRMAN, FENNER

Technology is accelerating the pace of change. It increases customer expectations. *The Agile Leader* offers valuable advice to leaders who want to embrace that change and to place customers at the heart of their business. It highlights the importance of developing a clear vision, purpose and framework so leaders can empower others to go ahead and work in more agile ways, and to react to customer needs and new opportunities. ANGELA SPINDLER, CEO, N BROWN

This is a really timely and thoughtful book for any leader thinking about how not just to survive, but to thrive, in our fast-changing world. It's a powerful sequel to Simon Hayward's *Connected Leadership*, really bringing agile leadership to life through a series of compelling interviews and case studies, alongside lots of practical hints and tips. ALISON NIMMO CBE, CEO, THE CROWN ESTATE

This book demonstrates that by embracing agile leadership you can drive innovation and improved productivity. It will be relevant to managers and

leaders across all organizations as it promotes having fewer hierarchical structures, and recommends collaboration and devolved decision making. This encourages a clearer focus on customer needs and will enable more agile working by removing bureaucracy and encouraging empowerment. CAMPBELL FITCH, GLOBAL HR DIRECTOR, SPIRE GLOBAL

This book is full of useful tips to help leaders succeed in a digital world. Drawing on his extensive research and real-world case studies, Simon Hayward demonstrates how leaders can, indeed have to, adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. JACQUELINE MOYSE, HEAD OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL GROUP

This is an inspiring book which is both thought-provoking and full of practical solutions and insight to help you to be an agile leader in a fast-moving environment. HENNY BRAUND, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ANTHONY NOLAN

In *The Agile Leader*, Simon Hayward identifies the biggest barriers to agility and explains very clearly how to overcome these. By distilling robust research into valuable insights, he offers guidance to leaders who want to develop their own capabilities in order to drive business-wide transformation. A very practical guide which can change the way you work and help you to influence wider ways of working across your organization. MARK BROWN, VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL TALENT MANAGEMENT, FRESenius MEDICAL CARE

This book provides leaders with a blueprint for creating a more agile organization. It identifies the barriers to agility and suggests some specific ways to overcome them. This is a very useful guide to streamlining your business in a complex world. RICHARD PROSSER, CHAIRMAN, AUDLEY TRAVEL AND TUSKER DIRECT

In *The Agile Leader*, Simon Hayward distils a great deal of research and real-world experience into a very practical and insightful guide. Illuminating case studies deliver some real 'light-bulb' moments. Building on *Connected Leadership*, this book provides a roadmap for developing a more agile business and describes how to take people with you on a journey of transformation. It explains why collaboration and connection between colleagues, customers and key business stakeholders is critical to ensuring your business can evolve and thrive. ALAN BODDY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, LIVIN

Many start-ups begin life as very agile businesses but find it difficult to hold on to that agility as they grow. *The Agile Leader* shows how businesses can continue to evolve, adapt and innovate, no matter how big they become. TONY FOGGETT, CEO, CODE

Once again, Simon Hayward has managed to produce a book that is informative, challenging and a good read. PROFESSOR CATHERINE CASSELL, DEAN, BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL

In this book, Dr Simon Hayward draws on well-documented research into agility, complexity and distributed leadership. He distils this into some very practical advice to help managers and leaders deal with the everyday challenges of working in an unpredictable and fast-paced environment. PROFESSOR FIONA DEVINE OBE FACSS FRSA, HEAD OF ALLIANCE MANCHESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

I have worked with Simon Hayward in various different formats and have found his insights on leadership to be enormously valuable. PROFESSOR DAME NANCY ROTHWELL, PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR, THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

How to lead effectively in this fast-moving chaotic world? In this fine book, Dr Simon Hayward argues convincingly that today, agility is a crucial element of effective leadership. Packed with research findings and practical advice, this book should be recommended reading for current and future leaders, as well as students of management theory. PROFESSOR JOHN PERKINS CBE, FORMER CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER, DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS, HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

Dr Simon Hayward condenses a wealth of research and case-study material into a highly readable guide to agile leadership. He explains how leaders can develop their own capabilities, build more agile teams and play a part in creating agile cultures that support organizational transformation. PROFESSOR MIKE BRESNEN, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCE, MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

The Agile Leader

How to create an agile business in the digital age

SECOND EDITION

Simon Hayward



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About the author

Dr Simon Hayward is an international thought leader, valued by many client organizations as a trusted adviser and partner. He is founder and CEO of Cirrus, a leadership consultancy, and an Honorary Professor at Alliance Manchester Business School. He has a wealth of strategic leadership experience gained over 30 years. He has developed leadership strategy and leadership development programmes with client organizations across Europe, Asia and North America.

Simon's first book, *Connected Leadership*, was published by FT Publishing in 2016 and was shortlisted as Management Book of the Year in 2017 by the Chartered Management Institute and the British Library. It has been translated into Chinese and Arabic. Simon has also had chapters published in the *Palgrave Handbook of Leadership in Transforming Asia* (2017), which explored connected leadership in the Asian context, and the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods* (2017). Simon is a regular media commentator, featuring in leading publications including the *Financial Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *Management Today*, *Human Resources* and *The Guardian*, as well as on Sky News and the BBC. He is also a regular conference speaker. The first edition of *The Agile Leader* has been translated into Korean, Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, Hungarian and adapted for use by EBSCO and Skillsoft.

Simon has a DBA and MBA from Alliance Manchester Business School and an MA (Hons) in English from Oxford University. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a member of the British Academy of Management and the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Cirrus was recognized as the Best HR and Learning and Development Consultancy by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in its 2017 awards. Cirrus has won many other awards for its work with clients in leadership and engagement, including the International Business Award for best small/medium professional services company in 2020.

He led Academee, a successful leadership development business, to be recognized as the fifth Best Workplace in the UK by the *Financial Times*, and one of *The Sunday Times* 100 Best Workplaces in 2007. The company also

won a special Business Excellence Award for People and People Results before being acquired by Marsh & McLennan Companies in 2008.

Simon has been recognized by the World of Learning Awards, British Gas/*Daily Express* Tomorrow's People Awards and Entrepreneur of the Year awards. His work with clients has been recognized by the People Management Awards, Management Consultancies Association Awards, HR Excellence Awards, *Personnel Today* Awards and the Hotel Catering Personnel and Training Awards.

Simon is a keen runner and a fundraiser for cancer charities. He is a Vice-President and Chairman of Fundraising at the East Cheshire Hospice. He lives in Cheshire, UK, with his wife Clare and has three sons.

Foreword to the second edition

The leaders of the future

We are about to enter a period of enormous change, in how we work, where we work and how we cope with the challenges of a world recession which may last longer than any we have had in living memory. The age of robotics, of electric cars, of new energy sources, of less globalization and more digitalization and the challenges of climate change for business and governments is our future. These changes, and many more to come, will require agile leaders, people capable of making quick and effective decisions in an ever-changing world. We know the management of change is not easy, as Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*:

It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating change...The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new.

We need leaders who are agile decision makers, who are disruptive thinkers, who take people with them, who are collaborators and most importantly have a 'sense of purpose'. We need of course leaders who have a vision of the future but also can take the decisive action to achieve the agreed organizational goals. As the old Japanese proverb goes: 'vision without action is a daydream, action without vision is a nightmare'. We also need business leaders of the future to create a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety in the workplace – this requires more managers with greater social and interpersonal skills to manage people working more remotely, who find it difficult coping with change, engaging them in the decision-making process and making people feel valued and trusted. Mark Twain summarized this in a sentence: 'Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can somehow become great.'

This book highlights all the qualities of agile and future leaders, from barriers to agility, to the importance of disruptive/innovate behaviour but in the context of a learning culture, to decisiveness in decision making and to creating a safe culture amidst a maelstrom of change. During the Covid period we have seen a lack of political leadership in many countries, with significantly less agile behaviour, which had consequences for controlling the virus and for the lives of many. Business, on the other hand, showed greater agility in embracing remote working, in the use of technology to continue to build teams and to deliver their products and services. But with the recession upon us and technology advancing at an ever-faster pace, the agility of our business leaders will become a business imperative. This book has many of the answers to how we might achieve the successful management of change over the next decade and should be read by all people in a leadership role in the private as well as the public sector. Remember, as the old adage goes, ‘If you always do what you always did – you’ll always get what you always got!’

*Professor Sir Cary Cooper,
Alliance Manchester Business School,
University of Manchester, UK*

Foreword to the first edition

It is an honour to be writing this foreword for Simon Hayward's book on agile leadership. I first met Simon when we worked together at Manchester Business School. As a Dean of a business school I am proud that our universities make an important contribution to cutting-edge thinking about leadership. In business schools we create new knowledge to help us critically make sense of the key global, grand challenges that face our economies and societies. What delights me about Simon's work is his ability to take that thought-leadership and translate it into an accessible and interesting commentary, alongside a useful set of tools.

Leaders reside in an increasingly challenging world. Being sufficiently agile in the complex, digital environments we inhabit is both desirable and necessary. Having spent a career working in business schools and watching how the preoccupations of managers and leaders change over the years, I know full well that the challenges that Simon identifies in this book are at the forefront of the thinking of many of the leaders we seek to develop.

The demands upon leaders have become increasingly sophisticated in recent years. As technological developments proceed at a sometimes alarming rate, the importance of human connections becomes even more crucial in the effective leadership and management of others. As Simon points out, we need to be disruptors as well as enablers, building trust and making decisions in thoughtful ways.

Simon's first book introduced us to the notion of connected leadership and offered a step-by-step roadmap to how we, as leaders, could enhance leadership within our own organizations. I remember reading that book and reflecting upon my own practice. Not only did it challenge my own preconceptions about how to make things work, it also gave me ideas about how to negotiate some of the everyday leadership dilemmas I encounter.

In this book the focus is agility. Once again Simon has managed to produce a text that is both informative, challenging and a good read. In writing this book, Simon draws on well-documented research into distributed leadership, authentic leadership and complexity leadership, creating a powerful framework for leaders to use to create the optimal conditions for agile working to flourish.

I invite you to join with me in learning about agile leadership and, perhaps more importantly, thinking about how we can develop our own agile leadership skills.

*Professor Catherine Cassell,
Dean, Birmingham Business School,
University of Birmingham, UK*

Preface

Creating greater organizational agility is one of the top concerns of chief executives with whom I speak around the world. This is especially true in the context of accelerated digital transformation, Covid-19 disruption, and continued socio-political uncertainty. To increase organizational agility requires agile leaders, who pioneer agility and create the climate for agile ways of working to flourish. In these pages you will gain what I believe is a rounded view of the specific ways in which to develop agile leaders in practical terms.

In Part One I describe what agile leadership means, both as an individual leader and as an organizational capability. In Part Two I explore key agile leadership practices, with how you can adopt them to enable agile working. In Part Three I widen this out with a description of how to create an agile organization and how this relates to our wider society.

This book builds on my work on *Connected Leadership*, which is based on research into what leadership factors help or hinder the transition to being more agile and customer centric. It explores in more depth the whole area of agile leadership. This book is self-contained, so you do not need to have read *Connected Leadership* (Hayward, 2016) beforehand, but if you have, you will appreciate the wider context for this book, which focuses on being an agile leader in the digital, post-Covid world in which we live. I have identified the eight leadership attributes that enable agile working to flourish at an enterprise level, as well as at departmental and team levels.

So, how can you get most value from this book? There are perhaps four main groups of readers for whom this book will be helpful: senior leaders in long-established or more recently formed organizations; middle or junior leaders in similar organizations; students of leadership; and practitioners of leadership development.

If you are a chief executive or senior leader in a large established organization, this book gives you a blueprint for creating a more agile organization, as well as a broader appreciation of how challenging this will be. If you are a senior leader in a start-up or smaller organization, you can probably implement all the content of this book more quickly, as you will probably be doing some of it already. For junior or middle managers, this book gives you both a clear route to developing more agile ways of working in your area and how to play your part in the wider organizational transformation to being agile.

For students of leadership this book provides an easy-to-read introduction to leadership in an agile context, as well as giving you a broad understanding of the key aspects of leadership that are most important in shifting ways of working to embrace agile. For leadership development practitioners, this book provides a holistic approach to agile leadership, highlighting the ways it is different to more conventional leadership. Developing agile ways of working at an enterprise level is a real challenge and needs a significant shift in both mindset and behaviour from leaders if it is to be sustainable. This book shows you how.

I would welcome feedback from readers from all groups, so please let me know what you think via email at simonhayward62@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you, so I can share this insight more widely, and so that we can continue to build practical insight into becoming agile leaders in this digital age of disruption. Thank you.

Reference

Hayward, S (2016) *Connected Leadership*, FT Publishing, Pearson, London

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My sincere thanks go to everyone at Cirrus who has helped with ideas and feedback on the manuscript, and for helping me to take time for researching and writing this book.

Thank you to all of the Cirrus clients with whom I and my colleagues have worked in recent years – your collaboration and counsel has been and continues to be incredibly helpful in achieving clarity on what actually works in practice.

I would like to acknowledge the various authors and researchers whose work I have drawn on in my own research. They are all cited in the book, so that you the reader can follow up if in more detail where you wish. I have sought to combine excellent research into all things agile with my own leadership research, which started through my doctoral programme at the Alliance

Manchester Business School in 2010, and with my experience working with some of the world's leading organizations over the last three decades.

Thank you also to the excellent research team I have been working with at Alliance Manchester Business School – Professor David Holman, Professor Robin Martin, Professor Sheena Johnson, Dr Sara Willis and Dr Kara Ng. I have enjoyed the international research journey so far, and here is to the next phase.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends for their patience and for putting up with so many weekends and evenings of me stuck in the study. Thank you, Clare, my wonderful wife, and Harry, Max and Freddie, my wonderful sons. Your patience and encouragement have helped me enormously.