

How to Navigate Through the Fog

Are you struggling to lead when the future feels uncertain and the path forward isn't clear? This HBR Executive Masterclass video with Professor **Linda A. Hill** of Harvard Business School can help. [Watch video now](#) (~15 min.)

Key Takeaways

- Leadership today is **less about having a clear vision** and more about building an organization that can **navigate uncertainty**.
- When the future is unclear, **purpose becomes the anchor**. Leaders must help people understand why the organization exists and who it serves.
- Leaders must become **“wayfinders” rather than “pathfinders.”** Instead of knowing the exact destination, they need to guide organizations beyond ambiguity.
- Innovation and learning happen through **experimentation, iteration, and fast feedback loops**, not through perfectly planned strategies.
- Learning organizations **collect feedback quickly** and adjust based on what they learn. Without feedback, organizations keep moving forward without knowing whether they're on the right path.
- **Innovation must involve the whole organization**. Separating “innovators” from “executors” prevents new ideas from scaling.
- In uncertain environments, people look to leaders not only for competence but for **character**—that is, evidence that the leader wants to do the right thing.

Try This

Ask “Who do we serve?” when decisions are unclear.

When you don't have enough information, use purpose as the tiebreaker: Who are we serving, and what do they need?

Turn opinions into hypotheses.

When someone proposes an idea, ask: What's the hypothesis? What evidence do we have? How can we test it?

Create space for bottom-up input.

Actively ask teams what they're seeing and learning. The people doing the work often have information leaders don't.

Normalize talking about what didn't work.

Ask: What didn't work? What did we learn? Treat mistakes as inputs, not failures.

Check in on how people are feeling.

In leadership meetings, ask: How are you feeling today? Use it to understand who needs support before making decisions.

Model uncertainty explicitly.

As one leader tells his team, I don't know...but I trust us to figure it out.