The
A–COMPASS

The UNFPA adaptive management model

Acceleration
for transformative
results

THE A-COMPASS

RESULTS

ADAPTATION

EVALUATION

DESIGN

← ADAPTIVE MOMENTS →

L — Learning

A — Agility

C — Collaboration

L — Leadership

MONITORING

IMPLEMENTATION

TUNA ENVIRONMENT: TURBULENCE, UNCERTAINTY, NOVELTY, AMBIGUITY

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A–COMPASS

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UNFPA

April 2022

The A–Compass adaptive management model focuses on institutionalizing adaptive management within UNFPA. It introduces concepts and provides required tools to move the organization towards the practice of adaptive management.

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FOREWORD

UNFPA has committed to achieving three ambitious and transformative results by 2030: ending the unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices – all based on high-quality population data. Yet, unless we accelerate the rate of progress, we will not be able to realize these results on time by 2030.

The challenges we face today are complex, interconnected, and often unprecedented in scale. The Covid-19 pandemic and other crises have shown that even impressive gains can be worryingly fragile.

In this era of upheaval and uncertainty, adaptive management is the only way forward. To achieve effective, impactful and truly transformative results, we need to strengthen our capacity to offer agile and resilient programmes in all contexts in which we work.

To scale up progress, the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 identifies six accelerators – among them, "Resilience and Adaptation". This means we all need to commit to fostering an adaptive culture within our business units and across the organization.
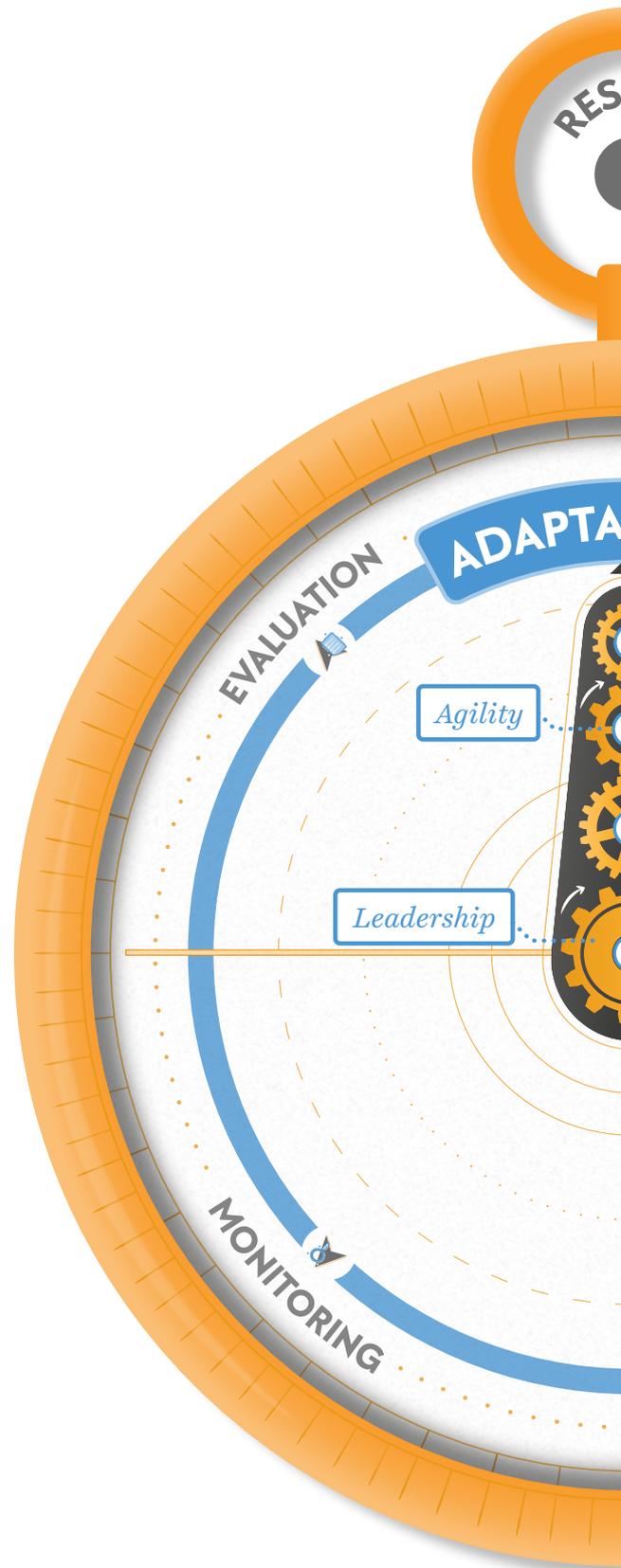
What follows is a compass to guide our journey towards a management approach suited to the rapidly changing contexts and megatrends shaping our efforts to carry out the UNFPA mandate. This new adaptive management model – the A–Compass – will help us navigate the pathways to acceleration and build a movement at all levels to institutionalize a culture of adaptive management throughout the organization.

Through a process of collective inquiry and timely, evidence-based response, UNFPA will be more effective, more efficient and fully able to rise to current and future challenges as we accelerate action towards a world of rights and choices for all.

Dr Natalia Kanem
UNFPA Executive Director

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Introduction

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Introduction

This document charts a course for the integration of adaptive management throughout the organization, including the managing of projects and programmes.

As such, it represents the first time that UNFPA is defining **a conceptual model for adaptive management**, though adaptation itself is a long-standing practice. It introduces the A–Compass, in which "A" stands for "adaptation" and the four directions of the compass represent the four drivers of adaptation: learning, agility, collaboration and leadership. The A–Compass is a new model for use by UNFPA staff and partners as they operationalize adaptive management. A toolbox with 16 activities supports the approach. This document also introduces the concepts of adaptation and the drivers behind adaptation, and concludes by proposing paths for UNFPA to explore towards fostering ongoing adaptive culture within the organization.

The primary audience is all UNFPA staff. The A–Compass will also be helpful for UNFPA partners and other developmental organizations that expect to institutionalize adaptive management.

KEY MESSAGES

- Accelerating achievement of the three transformative results requires **adaptive management**

- Adaptation and continuous learning at the individual, interpersonal, team and organizational levels drives **results**

- **Adaptability is a soft skill**; learning to use the A–Compass is an "all in" exercise that is accessible to and achievable by everyone

- The A–Compass provides **direction**, guiding us towards realization of an adaptive culture

ADAPTATION: AN ACCELERATOR IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS

UNFPA embraces the vision set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the targets contained in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. UNFPA has organized its work around three ambitious, transformative and people-centred results in the period leading up to 2030:

a. ending preventable maternal deaths;

b. ending the unmet need for family planning; and

c. ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

The UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, identifies "**resilience and adaptation**" as accelerators to achieve the three transformative results. By prioritizing adaptation in the strategic plan, UNFPA acknowledges its importance in accelerating progress through its 6+6 framework with six interconnected outputs and six accelerators to achieve these outputs.

UNFPA implements its programming in an increasingly complex and turbulent environment. "Business as usual" does not support achievement of the three transformative results. Rather, the organization must move from a linear "analyse-to-predict" mindset to a systemic "learn-to-adapt"

> ❝ *The organization must move from a linear 'analyse-to-predict' mindset to a systemic 'learn-to-adapt' mindset*

mindset. A-Compass is the UNFPA tool to navigate this change. In a related effort, UNFPA has launched the **Learn to Adapt Initiative (L2A)** to introduce the concept of adaptive management and orient the organization in new directions along pathways to the 2030 goals.

INNOVATION AS ADAPTATION

Innovation and adaptation are closely linked. Innovation, another key accelerator of the UNFPA 6+6 framework, allows UNFPA to develop and facilitate dynamic solutions in a rapidly changing world. Developing innovative solutions is a way to adapt, and adaptation facilitates development of innovative solutions.

Innovation based on experimentation and iteration is often considered an adaptive management strategy. Both innovation and adaptation are based on iterative feedback loops of experimentation, and ultimately, on a deliberate effort to learn from these iterations. Innovation — with its aim to introduce

Table 1. UNFPA 6+6 framework

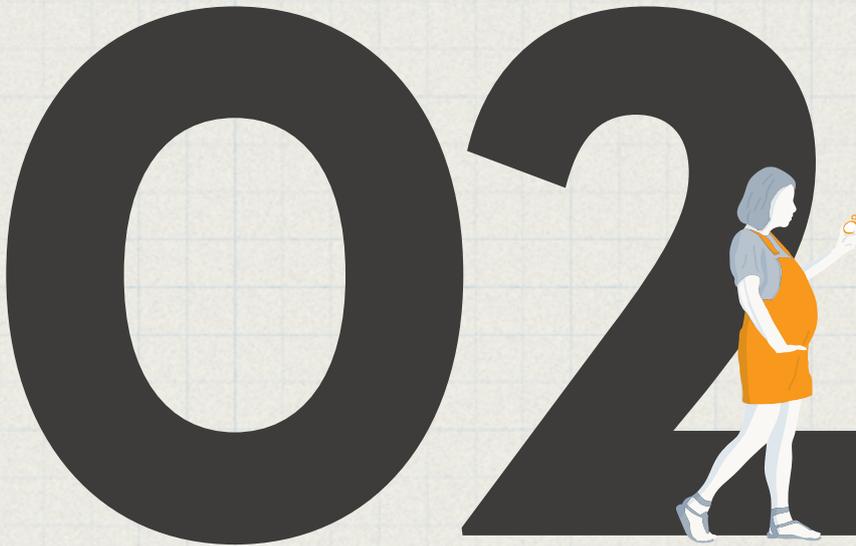| Six interconnected **outputs**	Six **accelerators** support the outputs
1. Policy and accountability **2.** Quality of care and service **3.** Gender and social norms **4.** Population change and data **5.** Humanitarian action **6.** Adolescents and youth Source: UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025	**1.** Human rights-based and gender-transformative approaches **2.** Innovation and digitalization **3.** Partnerships, South-South and triangular cooperation, and financing **4.** Data and evidence **5.** Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first **6.** Resilience and adaptation, and complementarity among development, humanitarian and peace-responsive efforts

"As we ease into a post-pandemic world, this has turned into a global call for development agencies to be more adaptive to increasingly recurrent and unpredictable changes.

new ideas, methods and products to change the existing set up — is a fundamental component of adaptation. The ability of the organization to innovate is part of adaptation and leads to long-term sustainability and efficiency.

The COVID–19 crisis exposed and reinforced the need to shift towards adaptive management and agile systems. The pandemic has also revealed the need — and the opportunity — to innovate beyond the solutions for the time being, but for the longer-term impact, that can benefit our Mission and stakeholders beyond the pandemic. As we ease into a post–pandemic world, this has turned into a global call for development agencies to be more adaptive to increasingly recurrent and unpredictable changes.

The components presented in this model culminate in a state called the "**A–Mindset**", which is critical for operationalizing adaptive management across UNFPA. The A–Mindset or "agile mindset" stands in stark contrast to the "bureaucratic" mindset. This A–Mindset is based on working with each other for impact, rather than competing with each other for power. ⊕

02

Background: Adaptive management within UNFPA

Adaptive management in UNFPA is a holistic management approach based on collective inquiry and timely action that uses information about the present, the past and the future simultaneously to make decisions.

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We live in a turbulent world, with increasingly higher levels of uncertainty, and in novel circumstances rife with ambiguity (**TUNA**), as exemplified by the COVID-19 crisis. This context makes it harder to achieve effective and impactful results using management approaches based on linear predictions, stable projections, and plans and programmes designed for controllable environments. Adaptive management is the new direction.

NAVIGATING TOWARDS RESULTS

The United Nations system as a whole has started a journey towards adaptation. In 2017, the High-Impact Model for Results-Based Management advocated a stronger emphasis on adaptive management to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This note by issued by the Joint Inspection Unit focuses on continuous learning and adaptation with due regard to the complex contexts and fast pace of development in today's world.

In April 2017, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) adopted the United Nations system leadership framework as a catalyst of culture change at the UN. It explicitly emphasizes adaptation to changes and the facilitation of inclusive group processes to co-create solutions as a critical component for transformational leadership. In addition, the operationalization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework introduced in 2019 encourages more agile ways of working and places adaptive programming and learning as the cornerstone of monitoring, reporting and evaluation across the implementation of the programme cycle. The Young UN report, "Navigating to the next UN: a journey full of potential", published in 2019, is a foresight exercise about the future of work in the United Nations system that envisions a type of work that requires the ability to learn and adapt constantly in a self-managing team environment.

In UNFPA, an organizational development process that started in 2018 formalized the decision to embrace adaptive management. The importance of adaptive management was a significant finding of the first corporate developmental evaluation of results-based management conducted in UNFPA (2018-2019), and moving towards adaptive management was a significant response of the agency. Neither is UNFPA alone in this shift: the movement towards adaptive management is a trend in the international development sector, where business as usual is no longer useful.

A mapping and consultation exercise conducted under the UNFPA culture initiative also revealed the importance of learning and adaptation. The exercise also proposed five guiding principles:

a. trust and respect;

b. team spirit:

c. collaboration;

d. commitment and accountability; and

e. innovation.

HOW UNFPA DEFINES ADAPTATION

Adaptive management in UNFPA is a holistic management approach based on collective inquiry and timely action that uses information about the present, the past and the future simultaneously to make decisions (adjustments, improvements and new developments). These decisions allow the organization to reactively adapt and proactively anticipate changes and generate new opportunities to achieve the desired results.
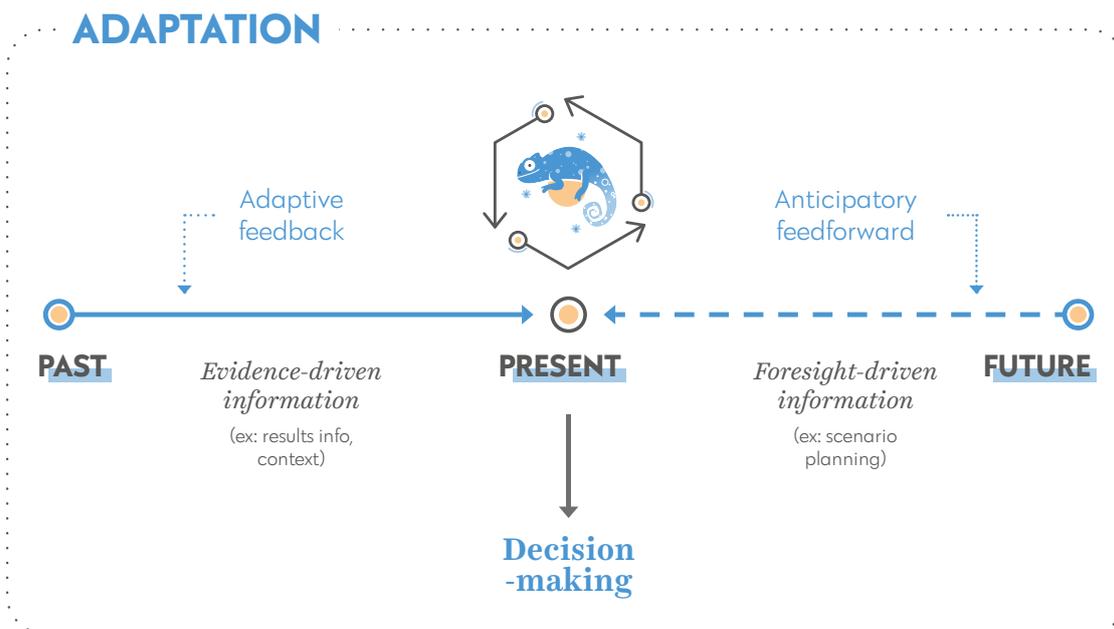
Adaptation is not new to UNFPA. Adaptation has long been a necessary component of UNFPA's work. Adaptation is now embraced as **an intentional approach** to reflective inquiry and action that uses information about the past, present and the future for organizational learning and decision-making.

⊕ ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AT UNFPA IS...

A holistic management approach based on collective inquiry and timely action that uses information about the present, the past and the future simultaneously to co-create decisions (adjustments, improvements and new developments). These decisions allow the organization to reactively adapt and proactively anticipate changes and generate new opportunities to achieve the desired results.

In the domain of adaptive management, collecting and interpreting evidence-driven information from the **past** (such as results information) along with foresight-driven information from the **future** (such as through scenario planning) are two interrelated learning processes that happen simultaneously. These processes nurture the decision-making process that allows the organization to reactively and proactively adapt in the **present**, at a given moment in time. Decision makers can also use

Figure 1. *The concept of adaptation*

> *The A–Compass model of adaptive management adds to the RBM model by including foresight-driven information (e.g. scenario planning) and a focus on the drivers of adaptation*

other sources of learning in the present, such as tacit knowledge.

Results-based management is also shifting in UNFPA. Integration of adaptability at UNFPA suggests a strategic shift in the way UNFPA conceptualizes results-based management (RBM).[1] RBM principles and standards were introduced by UNFPA in 2019. Adaptation arising from data-supported, results-based information is an assumed component of RBM. But more is needed.

The A–Compass model of adaptive management adds to the RBM model by including **foresight-driven information** (e.g. scenario planning) and a focus on **the drivers of adaptation:** leadership, collaboration, agility and learning. These four drivers will guide UNFPA as it navigates the turbulent, uncertain, novel and ambiguous environment[2] in which it operates. The A–Compass adds to the RBM principles and standards by offering a model to take adaptation a leap forward. This comprises an important change in how UNFPA conceptualizes adaptation. The A–Compass is the visual representation of the UNFPA Adaptive Management thinking.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) has adopted "adaptive programming", which is the application of adaptive management at the programme level.

The Framework recognizes that, in development in general and in fragile and conflict-affected settings in particular, the operational environment and risks are in constant flux, which requires programmes to take an adaptive approach. To the UNSDCF, the adaptive approach means learning from new information and evidence to make adjustments to achieve expected results in a changing environment.

HOW UNFPA WILL IMPLEMENT ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

To promote the concept of adaptive management and introduce the A–Compass model, UNFPA will implement the "Learn to Adapt Initiative". The Policy and Strategy Division, Evaluation Office and the Division of Human Resources at UNFPA headquarters act as the Secretariat for the initiative. UNFPA will establish a task team with the representation from all the divisions, regional and country offices to oversee the implementation of the **A–Movement** (see **Component 4**). ⊕

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1 For more information about RBM at UNFPA, including the Jellyfish Model of RBM Principles, please see www.unfpa.org/results-based-management-unfpa.
2 In management, rapid and unpredictable changes in the external environment are sometimes labelled with acronyms, most recently "TUNA". TUNA (Turbulent–Uncertain–Novel–Ambiguous) is the acronym an Oxford University Executive Education programme uses instead of the widely used VUCA (Volatile–Uncertain–Complex–Ambiguous).

Adaptation: the new RBM shift of UNFPA

The shift towards Adaptation 2.0 implies a strategic shift in Results-Based Management (RBM) in UNFPA. Adaptation is one of the core principles of RBM principles and standards introduced by UNFPA in 2019. Now adaptation will also include foresight-driven information (e.g., scenario planning) and a focus on the drivers of adaptation, the four critical processes that will guide UNFPA navigate the TUNA environment in which it operates. These four drivers are the central part of the A-Compass, which adds to the RBM principles and standards by offering a model (mindset, behaviours, tools) to take adaptation one step forward.

The 'Jellyfish Model'

Core Principle 1: Ensure that adequate and reliable results information is available when needed

Core Principle 2: Use results information to inform planning and reporting

Core Principle 3: Practice learning and adaptive management, using results information

Supporting Principle 1: Foster transformational leadership in results-based management

Supporting Principle 2: Promote and support a results-oriented culture

Supporting Principle 3: Build and maintain results-based strategic plans, operational plans and frameworks

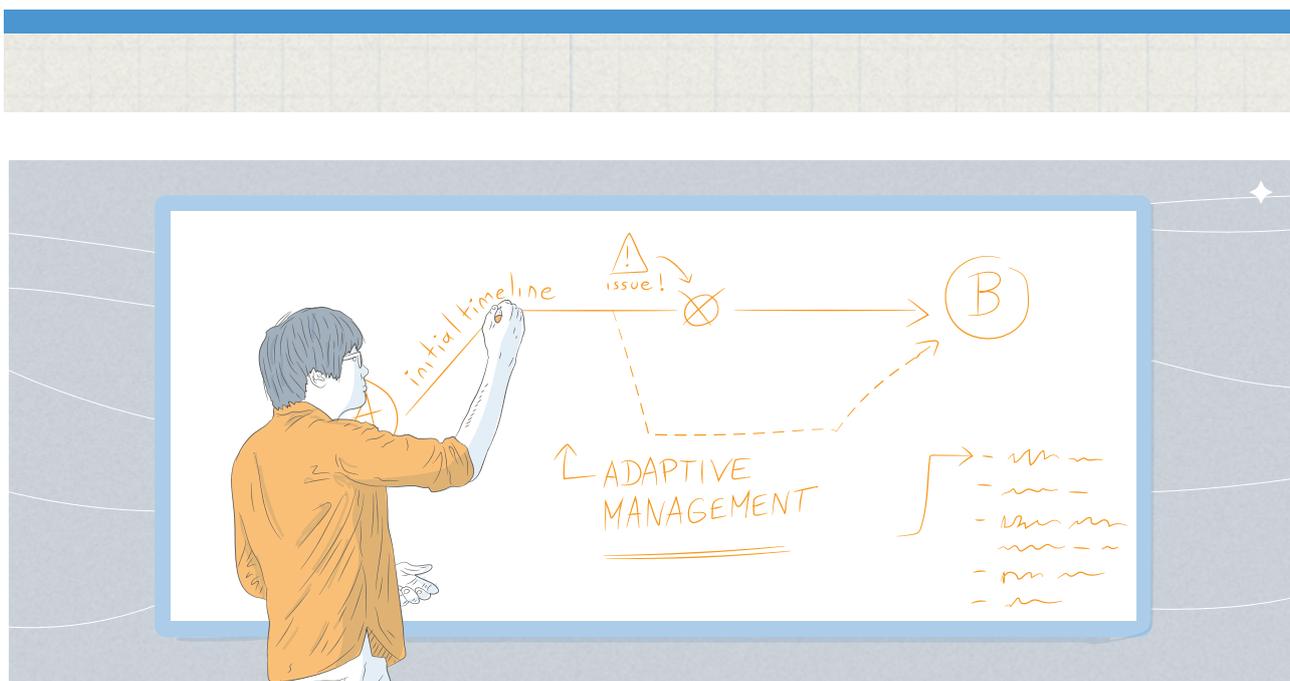**Supporting Principle 4:** Ensure effective partnerships for impact

Supporting Principle 5: Review and update office results-based management practices

Resources:
- Results Based Management at UNFPA
- UNFPA Results Portal

03

The A–Compass: The adaptive management model

The A–Compass is the adaptive management model for UNFPA.

The A–Compass: The Adaptive management model

The A–Compass is the adaptive management model for UNFPA.

The A–Compass helps UNFPA and partners to navigate the directions for learning and adaptation in the turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous (TUNA) contexts in which UNFPA operates. The A–Compass has four main components that define the way adaptation is understood and practiced in UNFPA:

- The **drivers of adaptation**, which set the context for the organization's ability to adapt: leadership, collaboration, agility and learning;

- The **adaptive moments**, which provide opportunities for adaptation;

- The **toolbox**, which presents the means to bring adaptability to bear on decision-making and action-taking; and

- The **Learn to Adapt Initiative**, which is how UNFPA will promote adaptation and the use of the A–Compass model. Integration of adaptive management culture provides pathways to more fully institutionalize the approach as well as engage in the monitoring and evaluation necessary to ensure that adaptive management itself remains ever green by adapting to results-based evidence and evolutions in management strategy.
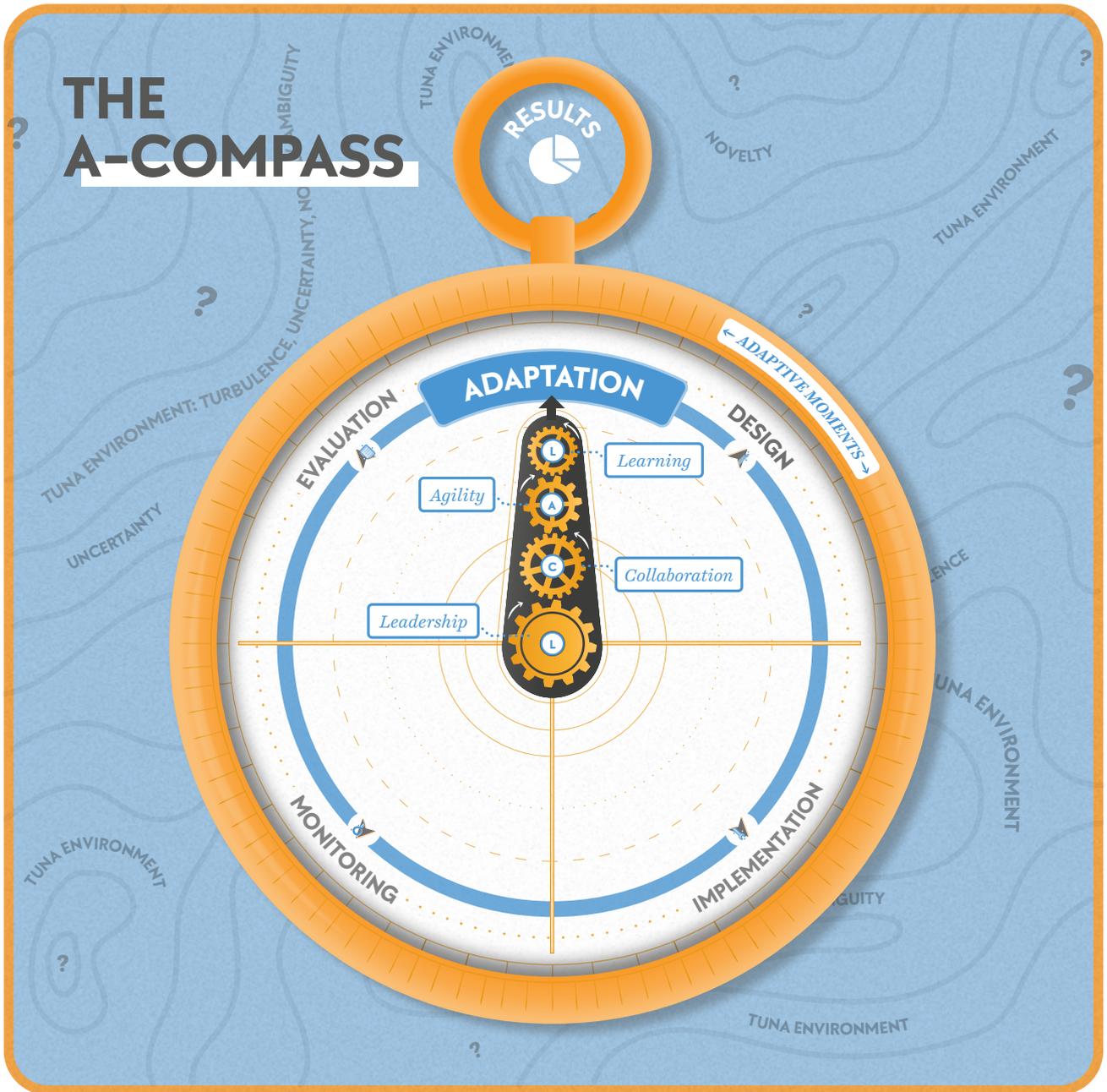
Figure 2. *The A–Compass: The Adaptive management model*

Why a compass? Adaptation takes place in turbulent, uncertain novel and ambiguous environments, and resembles navigating uncharted seas or walking through unexplored territories. In such environments, success is not about having a predetermined plan, but rather about direction. Compasses point to the North Star, which for UNFPA is the achievement of the results, more specifically the acceleration of the achievement of the three transformative results.

> *Success is not about having a predetermined plan, but rather about direction*

The A–Compass can be used at all levels of the organization by all types of business units, by internal teams and by implementing and government partners involved in the process of adaptation.

The A–Compass is also presented as **the updated programme cycle of UNFPA**. It illustrates the way in which adaptation is integrated throughout the programme cycle's phases.

The design of the A–Compass is based on principles that have guided the development of the adaptive management model in UNFPA:

- **Universality and people–centredness:** The adaptive management model is for everyone, and adaptation starts with everyone.

- **Simplexity:** The A–Compass presents the complex interactions of the four drivers of adaptation, which mutually reinforce and activate one another, in a simple and straightforward way.

- **Acceleration:** The A–Compass is a model that can apply to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results.

- **Practicality:** The model includes and fosters the practical use of approaches, tools and skills along the programme cycle through a toolbox.
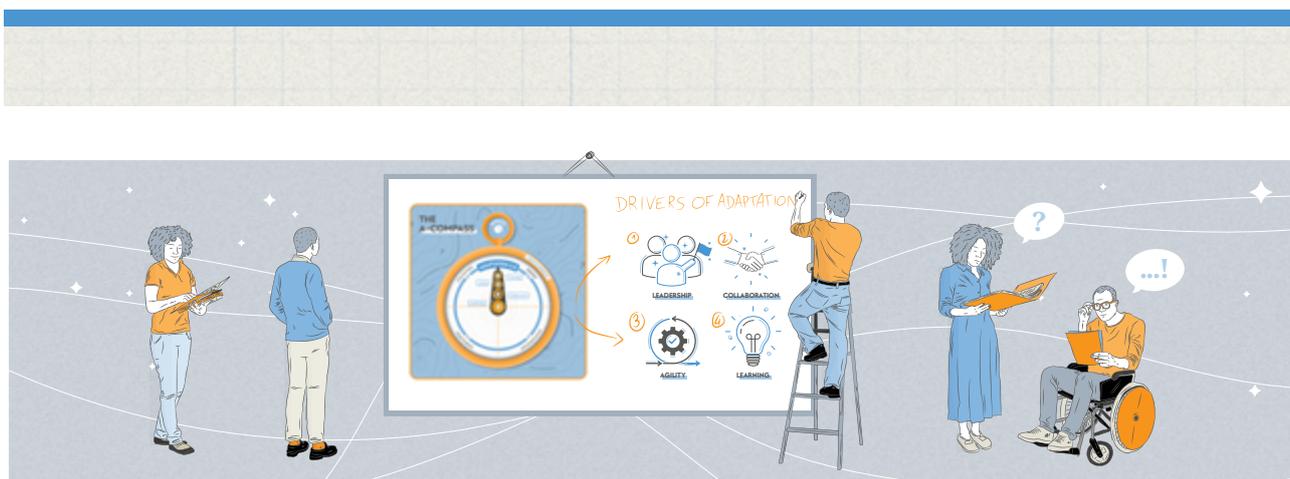
Organizational excellence focuses on empowering people and achieving the organization's full potential (optimizing organizational effectiveness and efficiency). ⊕

> *The design of the A–Compass is based on principles that have guided the development of the adaptive management model in UNFPA: Universality and people-centredness, Simplexity, Acceleration, and Practicality.*

04

Component 1: The drivers of adaptation

These drivers represent the four critical processes that help the organization, including people and teams, navigate and adapt in turbulent and unpredictable contexts.

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WHAT PROCESSES PROMOTE ADAPTATION?

Adaptation is the outcome of putting into practice four drivers:

- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Agility
- Learning

These drivers represent the four critical processes that help the organization, including people and teams, navigate and adapt in turbulent and unpredictable contexts. The interaction between these drivers is the process of change that drives adaptation.

How does this process of adaptation work?

- Each driver enables and enhances the next.
- Change occurs in a sequence of nested circles of activation: leadership > collaboration > agility > learning > adaptation (interdependence).
- This sequence of interdependence works for unleashing and optimizing the organization's full potential (in the context of organizational effectiveness and efficiency).
- The drivers of adaptation can be applied in any adaptive moment (see **Component 2**) that can occure at any stage of the programme cycle.

THE ADAPTATION MANIFESTO

LEADERSHIP » **COLLABORATION** » **AGILITY** » **LEARNING** » **ADAPTATION**

In an ever increasingly turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous (TUNA) context:

If we lead, we can collaborate

If we collaborate we can be agile,

If we are agile we can learn

If we learn we can adapt

Figure 2. *The A–Compass: The Adaptive management model*

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the capacity to develop the mindset and behaviours that allow a person to motivate themselves and others (teammates, colleagues and stakeholders) towards achievement of a common shared purpose, goal or desired result.

Essential mindsets and behaviours of the transformational leader include:

1. **Everyone is a leader, starting with yourself.** Some organizations adopt a cultural understanding of leadership associated with senior management or the positions and titles with a higher level of authority and hierarchy. In this driver, this understanding does not apply. Instead, everyone is a leader as everyone has the potential to influence their surrounding colleagues and stakeholders by thinking and acting; everyone can take action by contributing their expertise and in making decisions that positively impact the purpose of the organization.

2. **Take your work with an open mind.** Leaders envision, share and build a sense of purpose that engages people to work together towards achieving a common goal. They do it by avoiding predetermined answers and preconceptions. They approach and engage with others with a genuine learning mindset to enable sensing and questioning and encourage new perspectives and participation.

Stage in the programming cycle	Self-reflective questions for the work team
Planning/design	Are we engaged and motivated to proactively design and plan programmes that help address challenges and achieve results?
Implementation	Do we feel empowered, engaged and energized to consistently and proactively work on implementing the programmes to accelerate the achievement of results? Do we each feel connected to the purpose as we implement programmes?
Monitoring	Are we proactively allocating enough time and resources to regularly and timely monitor activities to better identify challenges and improvements throughout implementation? Are we each taking the lead in putting time aside to pause and reflect on what the monitoring data tells us, and taking actions accordingly?
Evaluation	Do staff involved in evaluations have a proactive attitude in the design and conduct of evaluations? Are evaluations led in a way that makes staff feel open to sharing concerns, feedback and ideas, seeing mistakes as part of a continuous learning process?

Table 2. *Self-reflective questions for leadership*

3. **Empower and support others.** Empower and support other leaders to self-organize and achieve the organizational goals, taking people's capabilities and potential into account. Start with appreciation, avoid judgment, set emotional connections, inspire and build trust.

4. **Be flexible and humble.** Be ready to change what you are doing if it is not getting you the results you are looking for. Detach from any personal ego-centric motivations that depart from the team or organizational purpose and results. Learn to let go and explore new ways and new options if things do not work as expected. Embrace change and open up to new opportunities.

5. **Be rigorous.** Use evidence, results-based findings and thorough information in a fully inclusive way to spark insightful conversations, design events and decision-making, looking backwards and forward.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the capacity of staff members and teams to co-create value within teams and engage and cooperate with broad networks of diverse stakeholders that commit and align to achieve a common purpose or desired results despite having different interests or perspectives.

Collaborative intelligence builds upon the following propositions:

- Teams enable a psychologically safe environment to speak freely, give feedback, share concerns, think critically and co-create solutions.

- In this collaborative environment, people mutually support each other, build trust and hold each other accountable without judging others for making mistakes.

- This collaborative environment fosters team flow and facilitates creativity and novelty, thus increasing team performance and unleashing collaborative intelligence in the team.

Practical tips to foster collaboration:

1. **Approach any opportunity to collaborate (meetings, joint work, etc.) with an open mind and open heart.** Collaborating with an open mind and open heart means having authentic interactions with your peers, inviting others' to participate and offer their perspective, listening to them with real interest and not judging or diminishing them for their feedback.

2. **Start meetings by reminding the team members or participants the purpose of the meeting, and by appreciating their contributions to the work that is being developed.** Aligning team members with the purpose or the reason why you are meeting and collaborating, alongside showing appreciation of their work highly contributes to open a safe space of collaboration and joint exploration.

Stage in the **programming cycle**	Self-reflective **questions** for the work team
Planning/design	Does our team co-create programmes engaging with stakeholders in a way that you feel trusted and psychologically safe? Are we looking for synergies across the different business units within our office and across country offices within our region?
Implementation	Does our team implement programmes with partners in a way that each supports one another, welcoming all perspectives and feeling trusted and psychologically safe along the journey?
Monitoring	Does our team create the time and space to monitor programme activities collaboratively? Does our team recognize everyone's work and celebrate quick wins over the progress?
Evaluation	Do our evaluations occur in a collaborative environment that fosters team flow, facilitates creativity, novelty, and unleashes the evaluations team's collaborative intelligence? Are our evaluations designed and conducted in a way that enables and fosters the engagement of multiple perspectives and feedback delivery in a trusted and safe environment for all involved? Do stakeholders freely and safely express their views?

Table 3. *Self-reflective questions for collaboration*

AGILITY

AGILITY

Agility is the capacity to rapidly address complex problems efficiently and deliver timely solutions amid fast-changing environments. Developing this capacity implies embracing new ways of working and redesigning current systems, roles, processes and procedures to make them more resilient, lean and flexible to changes.

Agility builds upon the following propositions:

- Agile teams accelerate the value delivery to intended users and target beneficiaries.

- Agile teams need agile systems and processes to timely and efficiently deliver value for agile bureaucracy.

- Value is most agilely delivered through decentralized, autonomous and empowered self-managed teams.

- Agile teams employ experimental and iterative methods of service and programme (re)design and delivery.

- Clearly defined and specifically trained agile team roles continuously promote the use of agile team practices and tools and serve as role models.

Stage in the **programming cycle**	Self-reflective **questions** for the work team
Planning/design	Does our team have planning and design systems, processes, and agile team roles in place, that are lean and flexible enough to allow us to design programmes that offer solutions which will reach intended users and beneficiaries? Are our design and planning processes and systems flexible and responsive enough to changes to ensure that solutions reach our users/ beneficiaries throughout the programme?
Implementation	Is our team flexible, autonomous, and empowered enough to adopt new ways of working that accelerate the implementation of our programmes and activities? Are our teams and implementation systems able to deliver value timely and efficiently in turbulent, uncertain, novel and ambiguous contexts?
Monitoring	Does our team have monitoring systems/processes allowing for quick, real-time access to data and feedback to assess progress and make timely adjustments? Does our data include inputs from beneficiaries (users)? Do we have the power and control to manage these systems?
Evaluation	Does our team have decentralized, flexible, and iterative evaluation approaches and tools, allowing us to set continuous feedback mechanisms to inform the evaluation of programmes throughout and after implementation? Are our evaluations flexible and responsive enough to ensure useful insights for decision makers in fast-changing contexts?

Table 4. *Self-reflective questions for agility*

Practical tips to foster agility:

1. **Develop self-managed teams.** The establishment of these decentralized network-based structures allow agile problem-solving throughout the programme cycle.

2. **Use sequences of short and regular feedback loops.** Feedback loops are points in time where monitoring and evaluation data and findings are presented and discussed within teams and with decision makers. Continuous loops of feedback ensure that insights inspire and inform the decision-making processes at the time the input is needed. Continuous feedback loops help deliver timely solutions in fast-changing environments, which makes them agile, especially when something unexpected occurs and we need to adapt.

LEARNING

Learning is the capacity to sense, capture, reflect and use the information (from the past and the future) to generate and achieve desired results.

Learning builds upon the following propositions:

- Agile experimentation allows agile teams to collect feedback and feedforward through experimental–based assessments iteratively.

- Agile teams constantly sense, capture and reflect the learning through developmental processes of real–time monitoring and evaluation.

- Having an internal coach and monitor helps accelerate team learning and subsequent adaptation of programmes.

- A developmental evaluative mindset facilitates systematizing learning for nurturing ongoing innovations. ⊕

Table 5. *Self-reflective questions for learning*

Stage in the programming cycle	Self-reflective questions for the work team
Planning/design	Are we co-creating, thus building learning from various stakeholders into our design and planning? Does each of us bring insights from the past and future opportunities into designing new programmes? (or) Do our programmes reflect what we have learned from the past and the opportunities we see in the future?
Implementation	Are we learning together as a team in order to build necessary programme implementation skills broadly? Do we have ways to capture new insights and better ways of working while we implement the programmes? Are we well equipped to avoid repeating the same old mistakes?
Monitoring	Do we take time–outs with an internal coach or facilitator to reflect as a team on what we need to learn in order to improve and adapt our programmes? Does our monitoring function capture change from activities to outcomes? Do we use quantitative and qualitative monitoring data to make course corrections throughout the programme? Does our monitoring function produce timely insights to inform the decision–making processes that enable us to adapt?
Evaluation	Are we using "lean" evaluation tools to be able to learn "just–in–time" what is not working and where we have to adjust programme quality? Do our evaluations translate into timely insights that help us adapt better (faster and through well–informed programme designs)? Do our evaluations focus on learning what works and what does not work beyond assessing performance at a point in time? Are our evaluations conducted throughout a programme and designed to produce insights that help us adapt?

05

Component 2: Adaptive moments

Adaptive moments set the four drivers in motion and ground them in UNFPA staff's everyday work. Teams or individuals pause and take the time to analyse, reflect and adapt by reading, assessing and acting on change signals collectively.

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WHEN SHOULD WE ADAPT?

Adaptive moments are the timely spaces that invite adaptation to happen systematically throughout the programme cycle.

An adaptive moment can be defined as the brief period in which reflective action may be undertaken. Adaptive moments set the four drivers in motion and ground them in UNFPA staff's everyday work. Teams or individuals pause and take the time to analyse, reflect and adapt by reading, assessing and acting on change signals collectively. Adaptive moments result in decisions that enable us to adapt (adaptive actions) and occur within and throughout the programme cycle but could also be used beyond it. Adaptive moments build around three elements: signals, pausing and taking reflective action to adapt.

An adaptive moment may lead to strategic actions or operational actions, depending on the scope of the issues at stake. Adaptive moments may result in any type of adaptation. Adaptive actions could thus be related to financial allocations, activities, modalities, stakeholders/partners, intended beneficiaries, location, staffing/resourcing, timings, modes of engagement, reporting and strategies/objectives.

Similarly, adaptive moments could be applied to already-established working processes in place regularly. Ideally, teams should have regular stand-up meetings that include the monitoring of short-term outputs ("sprints"), as well as the facilitation of learning from changing contexts and information, and coaching of any collaborative tensions within the team. In addition, the development of the Strategic Plan, the planning of a country programme document, the development or revision of an annual workplan, the design of a policy, the programming of a joint intervention, or the design of an evaluation are all opportunities to include adaptive moments for increased agility.

The duration of an adaptive moment varies. It may last a few hours, a few days or a few weeks. It depends on the issue, the depth of the inquiry, the breadth of the information to analyse, and the engagement and discussion dynamics, which may involve additional learning sessions, coaching for better co-creation, and the facilitation of inclusive discussions within one or several teams of a business unit or across several.
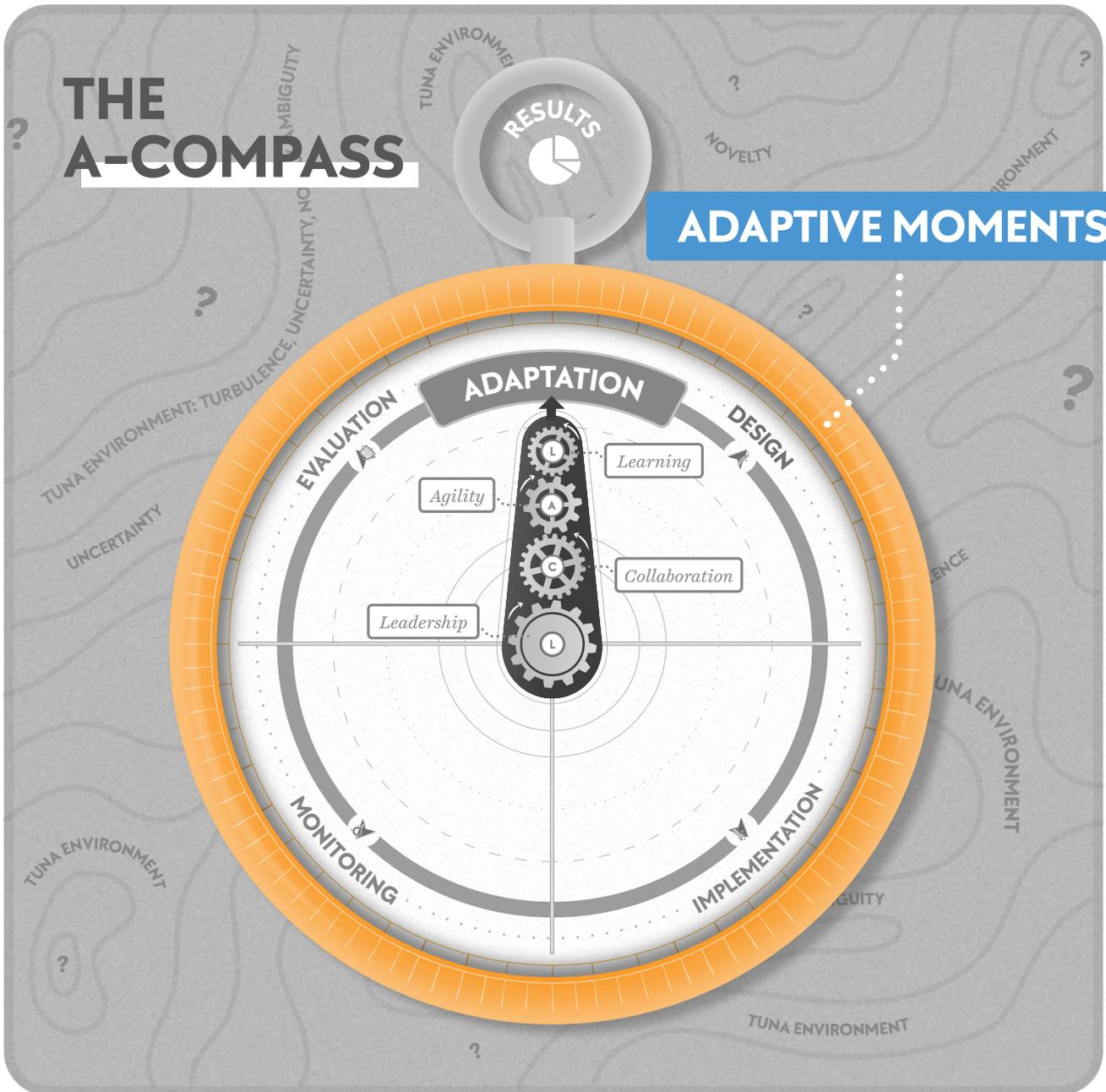
THE A-COMPASS

ADAPTIVE MOMENTS

Figure 4. Adaptive moments across the A–Compass

HOW DOES THE ADAPTIVE MOMENT WORK?

Signals are events causing us to pause. Signals can be intended or emerging. An intended signal would be a regular quarterly meeting to check whether we need to adapt and how. An emerging signal may be a change in a context such as a new policy, a new government or a new information flow coming from results, business intelligence or future scenarios.

Time-out means pausing or taking a time-out from implementation and stopping in a deliberate, structured manner to allow the time required for good quality, timely and appropriate adaptations. Questions stimulate reflection.

Triggering questions call for taking reflective action. This happens through applying the three triggering questions: *"What? So what? Now what?"* These three

Why?	Because we need to make sure we adapt to relevant internal and external changes and new flows of information in a systematic and structured manner. We know that to accelerate progress to achieve the three transformative results, we need to adapt.
What?	Adaptive moments are brief periods devoted to reflective action.
How?	An adaptive moment starts with a trigger, a planned or emergent event causing us to take time-out to pause and take reflection action, which pivots around three framing inquiry questions (what, so what, now what).
Who?	Adaptive moments can be conducted by all sorts of teams in any business unit and by staff on an individual basis.
When?	Any time within and throughout the programme cycle as well as beyond. The duration of an adaptive moment depends on several elements: the issue, the depth of the inquiry, the breadth of the information to analyse, and the engagement and discussion dynamics.
Where?	Anywhere across the organization.

Table 6. *Adaptive moments: summary of the basics*

questions[3] are the shorthand for the following:

1. **What changes and emerging futures do we see?** Identify patterns of change, trends – looking back, around and forward. Stop and spot.

2. **So, what are the implications for us, our partners and our beneficiaries?** Assess the implications (sense making). Reflect (think) and assess.

3. **Now, what should we do to stay relevant and effective?** What action should we take in order to adapt? Make decisions and take action. Decide and act.
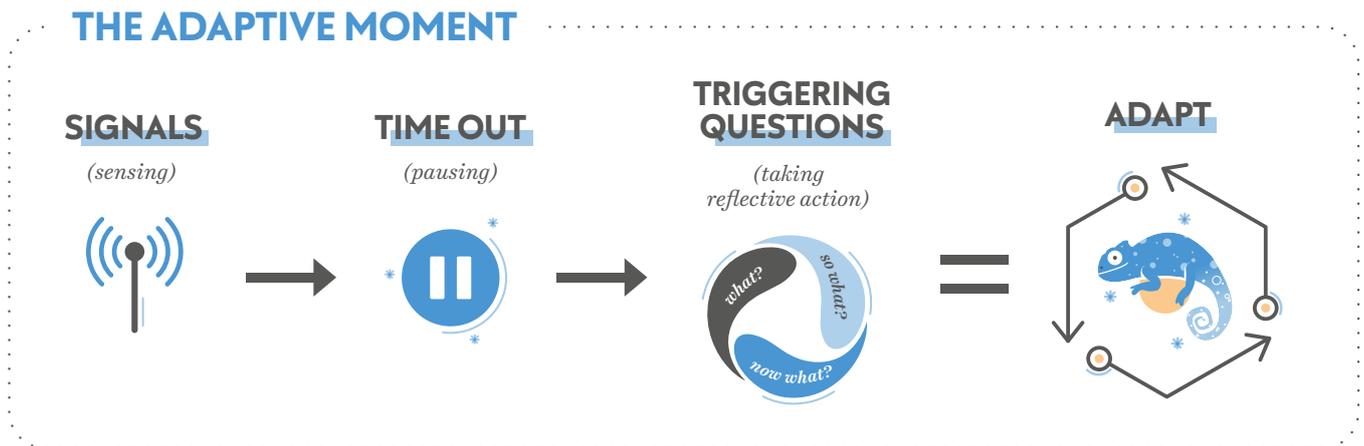
Apply and activate the drivers of adaptation before, during and after adaptive moments throughout the programme cycle.

- **Before the adaptive moments.** For adaptive moments to occur, staff needs to take the lead and feel empowered to sense, read signals from the context, and identify emergent triggers that may deserve launching an adaptive moment. Collaborative spaces and collaboration mechanisms should be in place for teams to bring diverse perspectives and information into the identification of triggers and the design of an adaptive moment. Similarly, agile sensing mechanisms and team arrangements bring on better adaptive moments' designs; and the practice of continuous learning through experimentation enables business units to constantly generate new information to feed the adaptive moments that led to adaptation.

- **During the adaptive moments.** Adaptive moments call for leadership, collaboration, agility and learning to generate decisions and actions that result in performance-increasing adaptations. For example, transformational and systemic leadership practice allows people and teams to feel safe, trusted, energized and ready to fully engage in adaptive moments. Collaborative spaces and arrangements during the "what – so what – now what" reflections are crucial to ensure the relevance of the adaptations. The practice of high-performing collaboration builds teams' cohesion and flow required to collectively analyse the "what", bring on the

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3 This well-known framework for critical reflection was described by Gary Rolfe and colleagues in their 2001 book *Framework for Reflective Practice*.

THE ADAPTIVE MOMENT

SIGNALS
(sensing)

TIME OUT
(pausing)

TRIGGERING QUESTIONS
(taking reflective action)

ADAPT

Figure 5. *How does the adaptive moment work?*

best of each participant, and co-create agile solutions (actions) that results in relevant adaptations. The "what – so what – now what" inquiry framework used in adaptive moments is commonly referred to as the learning cycle.

- **After the adaptive moments.** The actions resulting from an adaptive moment (the adaptations) have to be implemented to incorporate leadership, collaboration, agility and learning. When that occurs, adaptive moments are linked to one another through time, generating organizational learning. The follow-up on the consequences of the changes made (the adaptation) and how this learning feeds back into future adaptive moments calls for staff to take the lead, and very often, staff in teams, to set up joint mechanisms and cooperation structures with critical partners and other stakeholders (collaboration). The implemented actions often require agile processes and systems to become timely adaptations, allowing the organization to stay relevant and effective.

In the long term, teams and individuals should incorporate leadership, collaboration, agility and learning. Once the drivers of adaptation permeate people, systems and processes across the board, the organization becomes an adaptive organization. ⊕
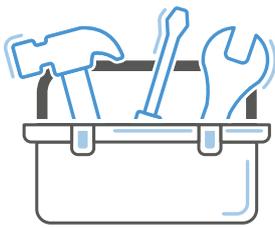
> *Once the drivers of adaptation permeate people, systems and processes across the board, the organization becomes an adaptive organization.*

06

Component 3: The A-COMPASS Toolbox

The A–Toolbox offers an initial set of tools to help UNFPA staff apply these new ways of working and develop in-house adaptive programming capacities.

Component 3: The A-Compass Toolbox

TOOLBOX

The A–Toolbox offers an initial set of tools to help UNFPA staff apply these new ways of working and develop in-house adaptive programming capacities.

HOW SHOULD WE ADAPT IN PRACTICE?

Managing programmes more adaptively requires specific skills and a specific mindset. The A–Toolbox offers an initial set of tools to help UNFPA staff apply these new ways of working and develop in–house adaptive programming capacities.

In the toolbox, the user will find **16 different tools**. She will have the following options for choosing the most appropriate tool or tools for adaptation:

1. Problem/challenge based: The user will see a list of problem–based questions. Based on the list, they can identify and relate to the problems or challenges they are experiencing.

2. By driver of adaptation: Users will see which tools of adaptations relate to each driver. Tools corresponding to leadership, collaboration, agility and learning will help the user to adapt, depending on their context and needs.

3. By stage of adaptive moments: The user will see which tools are more suitable to help the team facilitate each of the stages of an adaptive moment (what, so what and now what).

4. By phase of the programme cycle: The user will see which tools can help her adapt through the different phases of the programme cycle in which she is in need (Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation).
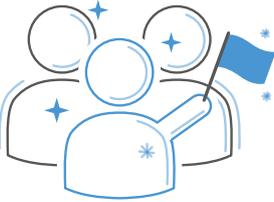
" *Managing programmes more adaptively requires specific skills and a specific mindset.*

The A–Toolbox features 16 tools, four tools for each of the four drivers of adaptation, as laid out in the table below.

The A–Toolbox is available online here. ⊕

Table 7. *Tools by category in the A–Toolbox*

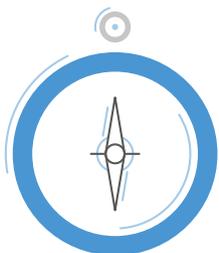| LEADERSHIP	COLLABORATION	AGILITY	LEARNING
• MAP (Mindful, Appreciative, Purposeful) • SEE (System-awareness, Engagement, Emergence) • Creative tensions • Psychological safety	• Six thinking hats • Iceberg • Theory U • Sensemaking	• Brandenburger 4Cs • Adaptive inquiry framework • Timely feedback loops • Sprint review	• Strategy testing • Outcome harvesting • Horizon scanning • Backcasting

07

Component 4: The Learn to Adapt Initiative

The Learn to Adapt Initiative (L2A) leads the work of operationalizing the adaptive management approach across UNFPA. Its primary objective is to inspire a "movement" for change, known as the A– Movement.

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WHERE TO? POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The present publication is the first step, serving to introduce the adaptive management model. Next, the aim is to launch some or all of the following elements over time to boost progress towards a more adaptive culture in UNFPA.

- A–Compass
- A–Movement (led by L2A)
  - A–Teams, with A–Managers, A–Monitors, A–Coaches and A–Experts
  - A–Labs
  - A–Journeys
  - A–Academy
- A–Mindset

THE A-COMPASS

A–COMPASS

The A–Compass is the **visual representation of the UNFPA Adaptive Management Framework**.
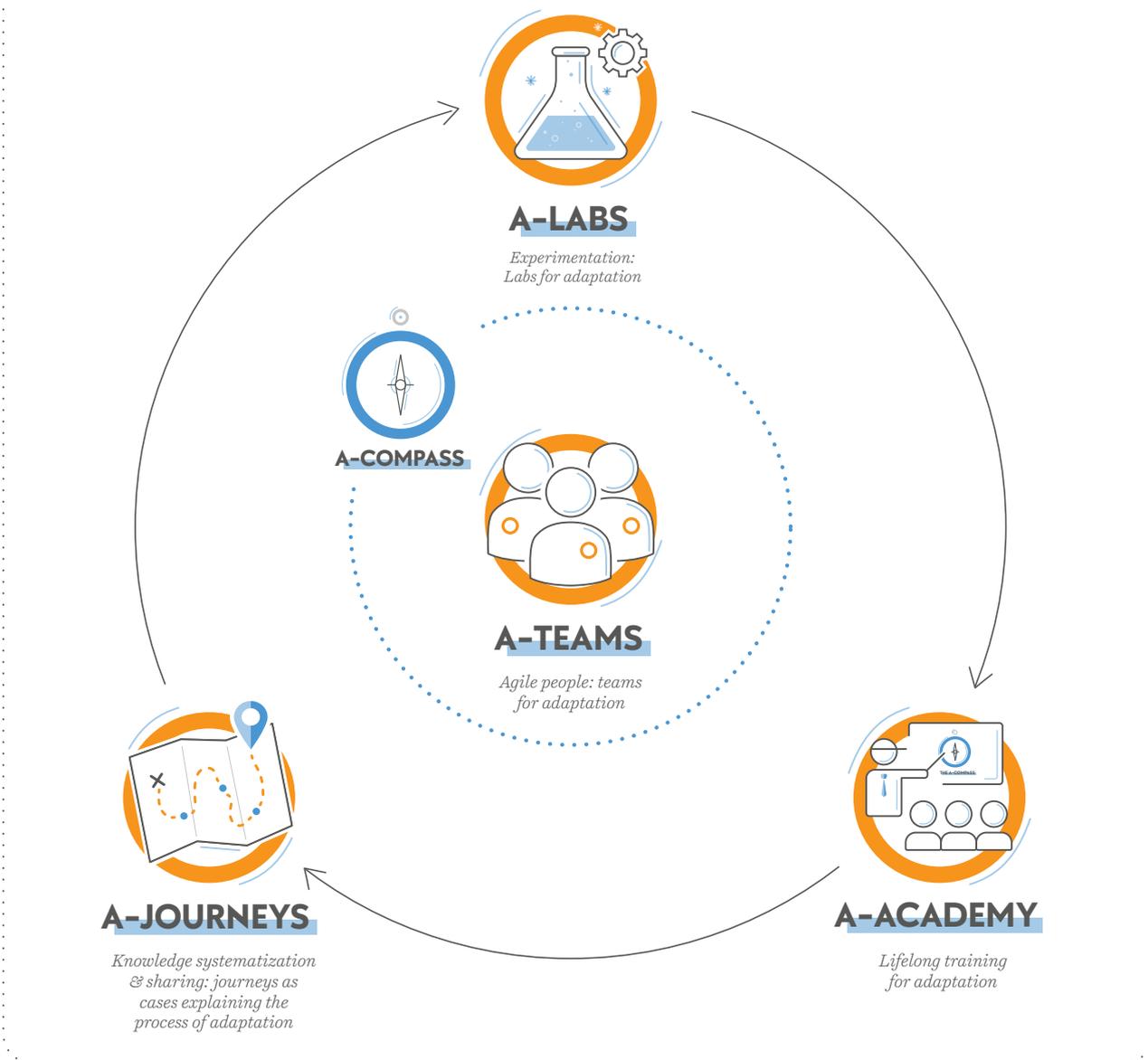

A-MOVEMENT

A–MOVEMENT

Approaching adaptation systematically implies changes in mindsets, behaviours and in systems. The A-Movement is **a group of people with a shared purpose who create change together**. In UNFPA, any business unit can institutionalize adaptive management. In other words it explains how the A–Compass will be operationalized within a business unit. It aims at accelerating the adoption of adaptive management as the management approach that guides the organization and its stakeholders to achieve the three transformative results.

THE A–MOVEMENT

Figure 6. *Elements of the A–Movement*

UNFPA believes in the power of the A–Movement to develop adaptive management and foster adaptation in the organization. Becoming an adaptive organization implies introducing new ways of thinking, behaving and working. Doing so is also a way to address and span boundaries to adaptation. To foster such culture transformation requires not just a mandate but also a corporate movement. A–Movement (figure 6) is the passionate commitment of the people in an organization who share a common purpose and thereby inspire and create change to achieve the desired results in the organization and its ecosystem (with its stakeholders).

The A–Movement encompasses interrelated components built upon premises that support the development of adaptive management in UNFPA: A–Teams, A–Labs, A–Journeys and A–Academy.

A–TEAMS

The adaptation process starts with **agile people organized in teams for adaptation**. These teams have the following characteristics:

- A–Teams are **open and inclusive change agent teams** that drive and facilitate continuous change towards adaptive management within the UN, starting with their local UNFPA Country Office.

- **Anyone can be part of an A–Team.** A–Teams should avoid hierarchical dependencies within the team but report directly to management. A–Teams have monitoring and coaching roles and are composed of team managers, Internal Team Coaches, monitoring & evaluation, programme, operations, communication staff, and other expertise as needed and members from outside of UNFPA (e.g. partners, other UN agencies, external consultants).

- A–Teams are supported through **a peer network of other A–Teams** and training and other professional support programmes on coaching, monitoring & evaluation, and other technical advice as needed.

  Teamwork is the natural domain of the A–Compass, as it is people-centred on agile or A–Teams. **The A–Compass applies to all kinds of teams:**

Teamwork is the natural domain of the A–Compass

- Classic intradivisional teams for their use in decision-making and creative processes;

- Interdivisional teams with staff collaborating across different business units or divisions;

- Multilevel teams with staff collaborating from different organizational levels at UNFPA;

- Inter-agency teams with staff from different United Nations agencies;

- **Outreach teams involving UNFPA and partners,** implementing partners from Regional and Country Offices, and donor partners at the HQ, regional office (RO) and country office (CO) levels.

✦ THE A–MOVEMENT BRAND IDENTITY: WHY "A"?

- *"A" is an inclusive and easy-to-remember brand that stands for adaptive management and includes first-related concepts that are a means to adaptive management, such as Agility, Anticipation and Acceleration.*
- *"A" also conveys the message of high performance, which is leveraged across the A's.*
- *"A" allows for brand endorsements to the key developmental components of adaptive management, which can evolve and adapt to new developments in the area.*
- *"A" is a clear and straightforward term to communicate the complexities of the adaptive management concept.*

For example, the Evaluation Office may use the A–Compass to design the new evaluation policy or design new training around the use and implementation of adaptive evaluation approaches. In another example, the A–Compass may be used for the decision-making process of interdivisional initiatives such as the Learn to Adapt Initiative's Secretariat, where three business units are involved (Policy and Strategy Division, Evaluation Office and Division of Human Resources). The A–Compass might also support the decision-making process of corporate initiatives such as the L2A involves a multilevel task force team comprised of staff working at HQ, RO and CO levels, or the Executive Committee.

In order to accelerate the achievement of results, shift from doing business as usual, and transform the organization, agile work teams need to become more accountable for continuous improvement, which means using the A–Compass for learning and adaptation.

A–Teams need leadership. **There are four key leadership roles in every A–Team**, which are the main drivers for adaptation in a new, continuous and sustainable way of working: A–Managers, A–Monitors, A–Coaches and A–Experts.

A–Managers ask "WHY are we doing this?"

A–Managers are managers of work teams and teams-of-teams who guide towards purpose and encourage and enable the full unfolding of the collective team potential and intelligence within a psychologically safe environment.

The UN Senior Leadership Commitments (2021) commit them to "encourage and enable teams to explore more autonomous ways of working and give them the information and decision-making power they need to do so". Furthermore, A–Managers are committed to "provide time, space and (where possible) funding to reflect, think critically and test new approaches to work and deliver." A–Managers assign accountabilities and focus on output quality and outcome impact in the interest of the organizational purpose and the "people we serve" (United Nations System Leadership Framework, 2017). They are therefore in a position to generate "psychological safety by nurturing a healthy culture where employees feel safe to be themselves and can speak their minds and where prompt action is taken in instances of misconduct, including sexual misconduct" (United Nations Senior Leadership Commitments).

A–Monitors ask "WHAT are we doing?"

A–Monitors are team members who regularly take stock of work outputs ("sprints") and help the work teams and teams-of-teams stay agile and adapt quickly for the highest possible impact. This can be a rotating function.

Continuous monitoring of work outputs is especially important in complex environments, so results can be achieved through short-term "sprints" before the context changes. Getting things done and achieving results step-by-step builds confidence of the team and - before all - trust from our partners and donors. A–Monitors ask for regular result updates in inclusive team "stand-ups" (regular, short and focused meetings) and focus the discussion on the need for quick adaptation rather than resting on what has been accomplished. A–Monitors hold the whole team behind the relevant outputs or outcomes accountable. This way team members can pull each other upward instead of passing the blame and

keeping each other down.

A–Coaches ask "HOW can we do this better?"

A–Coaches are internal agile team coaches who continuously facilitate, teach, mentor and coach work teams and teams-of-teams for better collaboration and learning. Internal Team Coaches should be prepared through UNFPA training.

Preferably in the moment during a "stand-up" meeting or after, A–Coaches help their teams to ask powerful questions like:

- Are you feeling psychologically safe enough to fully contribute your talent?

- What tensions are arising as a consequence of the current team result status?

- What possibilities do you see for the team, and what could we still learn?

- How can we improve our collaboration?

According to UNFPA's official Learning and Training Guidelines, "Internal Team Coaches are the focal points within a UNFPA team (normally UNFPA Regional Offices, Divisions, Country Offices, Cross-Functional Teams, or any other office and team) who support the team leader by providing coaching and training for the team. Their mission is to improve team effectiveness with regard to better collaboration, team culture and conflict management. The Internal Team Coaches are selected by their Supervisor and Head of Office or Director of Division/Region."

A–Experts

A–Experts are UN personnel at all levels called to lead in their fields of expertise advancing their team and team-of-teams outputs ("sprints") and outcomes through principled contributions.

The UN System Leadership Framework (2017) asks us to "break down our silos and fully embrace a new way of working to better connect our work across efforts at sustaining peace, human rights, sustainable development and humanitarian action." A–Experts build "context- and issue-specific networks, coalitions and partnerships, leveraging the diverse contributions of all relevant stakeholders within and outside the UN."

A growing number of expert communities and talent networks will enable A–Experts to find "just-in-time"

expertise for their A–Teams to learn from and adapt their programmes to. They will also make it easier for A–Teams to find "just-in-time" expertise through A–Experts on a short or longer-term basis.

Although the natural domain of the A–Compass is the team, individuals can also apply it. The thinking behind the drivers of adaptation, take the lead, work collaboratively, be agile and learn, can be used at the individual level, resulting in adaptive people.

Along the same lines, adaptive moments may occur when working in a team or individually. The same rationale can be applied to individual staff consider adapting. The only variation would be a slight adjustment in the formulation of the questions.

For an individual, this would go:

- **I STOP & SPOT:** What is new (look back, look around, look ahead)?

- **I REFLECT (THINK) & ASSESS:** So, what does it mean to my work?

- **I DECIDE & ACT:** What should I do differently to adapt to the new situation?

The A–Compass Toolbox also focuses primarily on tools that are commonly applied in a team environment. However, individuals can also use some of its tools and thinking frameworks. Some examples are appreciative inquiry, transformational and systemic leadership, mindfulness or non-violent communication.

Last but not least, individual staff can also apply the continuous learning spirit of the learn-to-adapt process. Learning to adapt is an attitude, a way of thinking, working and acting. It is about being attentive to triggers, wondering about the implications, thinking about actions forward, taking the lead, collaborating with those around you when needed, and being as agile as possible, making sure you learn from the process.

The A–Team movement and continuous development are coordinated by the cross-functional Learn to Adapt Initiative task force team.

A–LABS

A–Labs will be **a safe space for exploration, experimentation, learning and innovation**. A–Labs will enable us to find out what works, what does not work, why, and what further measures should be taken at different organizational levels to move towards adaptive management as an agile organization effectively. Besides, A–Labs will become a primary source of data, learning and innovation to inform the ongoing implementation, development, and improvement of the adaptive management model (the A–Compass) by ensuring it is deeply rooted in practical experiences. A–Labs will be the natural space for A–Teams to experiment, learn and innovate.

How can we bring A–Labs forward?

- **Enable virtual or physical spaces to explore ways to be more adaptive.** These spaces do not need to be new. You can use existing ones.

- Consider A–Labs as **safe spaces** where UNFPA staff (and their partners) are encouraged to think differently. They can be spaces where you can ask "What if " or "What can we do differently" to be more adaptive and explore creative solutions without being judged.

- Promote A–Labs as **spaces where you can try, pilot and test new ways to adapt**.

- **Link A–Labs to innovation.** If you already have innovation spaces or initiatives, link them with the A–Labs, connecting your current innovation portfolio with exploring innovative ways to adapt.

A–Labs will be the natural space for A–Teams to experiment, learn and innovate

A–JOURNEYS

A–JOURNEYS

A–Journeys will be **the knowledge management and sharing platform of adaptive management**. A virtual space where staff will find cases and stories of adaptation from colleagues across the United Nations system and beyond. Journeys of adaptation will explain the context, the challenges, the solutions, the how–to's and the takeaways from these experiences. They will aim at inspiring and providing guidance to colleagues that are looking for resources to adapt.

A–Journeys will aim at providing guidance to colleagues that are looking for resources to adapt

How can we bring A–Journeys forward?

• **Think about situations in which you adapted.** If you have a case of adaptation worth sharing with the rest of staff at UNFPA, write it down or record a video and share it through the Learn to Adapt Newswire.

• **A journey of adaptation may not always be full of successful stories.** Think about situations of adaptation in which you learned something worth sharing, even though you did not manage to achieve your expected results or objectives. We can learn a lot from failures, too.

• **Share situations in which you had to adapt** from sudden changes in context (i.e. emergence of COVID–19); **share the challenges you had to face** in order to adapt to a new situation; **share the solutions you came up with as a team**, and share the practical tips and tricks on how you manage to move forward.

A–ACADEMY

The A–Academy is **the hybrid space (virtual and physical) of lifelong learning for adaptation**. Through the A–Academy, UNFPA staff and partners will learn the knowledge, tools and skills required for fostering adaptation in UNFPA. It will encompass a diversity of learning methodologies tailored to the context and purpose of the adaptation and the needs, roles and responsibilities of staff, all-inclusive.

A–Labs is the hybrid space of lifelong learning for adaptation

How can we bring the A–Academy forward?

•   **Check for and join the available trainings aimed at fostering the capabilities of adaptive management**, such as the agile monitors, agile managers and agile coaching, as well as the training on adaptive evaluation.

•   **Ask for assistance to implement the Learn to Adapt Initiative**, in terms of coaching and mentoring, in piloting the adaptive tools that are available in the toolbox.

The culmination of efforts to operationalize the adaptive management approach across UNFPA is the A–Mindset:

A–MINDSET

The A–Mindset is critical for operationalizing the adaptive movement. The A–Mindset or "agile mindset" stands in stark contrast to the "bureaucratic" mindset. An A–Mindset is based on **working with each other for impact**, rather than competing with each other for power. It supports all elements of the A–Compass through the following set of attitudes:

- **Respect** for diverse contributions
- **Inclusiveness** in collaboration
- **Eagerness** to continuously improve
- **Openness** to learn
- **Ownership** for quality
- **Focus** on impact
- **Ability** to adapt

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