

## Navigating Uncertainty: A Key Skill in Today's Workplace?

### Do you ever feel like you're trying to move your projects forward in a fog?

You start the day with a clear plan, and then a new priority suddenly emerges. One of your projects changes direction. A decision is postponed because there isn't enough information. A reorganization is announced. A new technology changes the way you work.



And meanwhile, you still have to keep moving forward, make decisions, collaborate, and achieve your goals despite limited visibility.

If this experience feels familiar, you are far from alone.

Research in occupational psychology, along with my experience as a coach, suggests that many professionals, managers, and

leaders are not lacking in skill or motivation. Rather, they are facing a challenge that has become the norm: adapting to environments marked by complexity and uncertainty.

### Why is uncertainty becoming such a defining feature of today's workplace?

The workplace has always evolved. But several recent shifts have significantly accelerated the pace of change.

Digitalization is shortening transformation cycles.

Artificial intelligence is gradually reshaping certain tasks and roles.

Organizations must adapt to increasingly volatile markets.

Teams are collaborating in

more decentralized ways, and the line between work and personal life has at times become more blurred.

In this context, waiting until you have all the information before acting is often no longer realistic.

Professionals are regularly expected to make decisions with incomplete information, navigate competing priorities, and keep moving forward

even when some variables remain unknown.

From a psychological perspective, however, this is far from insignificant.

Research shows that human beings naturally seek predictability and coherence in their environment<sup>1</sup>. When information is limited or ambiguous, the brain tries to reduce that uncertainty by constructing explanations, sometimes at the cost of increased stress, rumination, or cognitive overload.

In other words, uncertainty is not just an organizational issue. It is also a psychological challenge.

### When uncertainty starts to take a toll

You may recognize yourself in some of these situations:

- You spend a long time analyzing a situation without being able to decide.
- You put off difficult conversations.
- You find it hard to separate facts from interpretation.

- You feel mentally drained even though your workload has not necessarily increased.
- You search for the perfect decision rather than one that is good enough to move things forward.

Several studies show that prolonged exposure to ambiguity, conflicting demands, or a lack of visibility can increase mental load and perceived stress<sup>2</sup>.

Over time, this constant drain on cognitive and emotional resources can affect self-confidence, engagement, the quality of decision-making, performance, and overall well-being at work.

### **What makes the difference: learning to navigate rather than control**

When we face uncertainty, our first reflex is often to try to regain control. Yet a significant part of our energy may end up being spent on things that lie largely outside our influence.

Research on resilience and psychological flexibility shows that the people who adapt best to complex environments are not those who eliminate uncertainty, but those who develop the ability to act effectively in spite of it<sup>3</sup>.

In particular, they learn to:

- recognize and regulate their emotional responses;

- clarify what they are experiencing;
- distinguish facts from imagined scenarios;
- identify the areas where they still have influence;
- keep moving forward step by step, even without ideal conditions.

This capacity is closely linked to what psychologists call psychological flexibility: the ability to stay engaged in actions aligned with one's goals despite uncertainty, doubt, or emotional discomfort<sup>3</sup>.

The good news is that these skills can be developed.

### **How professional coaching can help**

Contrary to some common assumptions, coaching is not about providing ready-made answers. A certified professional coach offers a structured space for reflection that helps people gain perspective, clarify what is at stake, strengthen metacognition when needed, and identify action strategies suited to complex or ambiguous situations.

The benefits can be wide-ranging. For example:

- faster, calmer decision-making;

- better management of stress and mental load;
- greater confidence in ambiguous situations;
- more effective communication;
- a stronger ability to support change;
- lasting growth in resilience and self-efficacy.

These resources also help reduce the risk of burnout when contextual



demands become particularly high<sup>2</sup>.

And the benefits of this process are not limited to professional life. They can also enhance

quality of life, energy levels, and the sense of being able to respond effectively to the challenges you face.

### **A first concrete step**

To help you step back when uncertainty starts to feel overwhelming, I offer a reflection tool entitled "[Navigating Uncertainty](#)".

In about ten minutes, these questions can help you:

- clarify how you understand the situation;
- identify what truly deserves your attention;
- better understand the emotions at play;

- determine your next concrete step;
- regain a sense of momentum and agency.

You can download it for free and use it on your own, with your team, or as a reflection tool before a coaching session.

Because the goal is not to eliminate uncertainty. The goal, rather, is to build the capacity to move forward thoughtfully and effectively, even when some answers are still missing.

### And you?

How is your organization helping its people navigate uncertainty and ongoing change?

I work with leaders and teams to address the challenges they face and identify the factors that strengthen adaptability, resilience, and sustainable performance.

Feel free to contact me to learn more or discuss how I may be able to support you.

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### Références

- <sup>1</sup> Carleton, R. N. (2016). *Fear of the unknown: One fear to rule them all?* Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 41, 5-21.
- <sup>2</sup> Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). *The Job Demands-Resources Model: State of the Art.* Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22(3), 309-328.
- <sup>3</sup> Kashdan, T. B., & Rottenberg, J. (2010). *Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health.* Clinical Psychology Review, 30(7), 865-878.