

THE ADAPTIVE PROCESS

Adaptive Spiral

From reality to response — and back to a changed reality

A disciplined method for connecting perspectives, understanding organizational systems and designing responses that remain aligned with reality.

The logic remains stable. The understanding evolves. The response changes reality.

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01 — PURPOSE

Why a Spiral, Not a Circle

Adaptive Thinking is not a sequence that returns to its starting point unchanged.

The Adaptive Spiral is a recurring movement from reality to response. Every intervention generates new information, reshapes the system and deepens the next cycle of understanding.

A circle implies repetition. The Spiral represents progression: the method repeats its logic, while the reality, available information and appropriate response continue to evolve.

CORE DISTINCTION

The Spiral repeats the logic, not the answer.

What remains stable

- The disciplined path: Reality → Perspectives → Relationships → System Understanding → Adaptive Response.
- The requirement to connect different views before drawing conclusions.
- The commitment to test understanding through action and feedback.

What evolves

- The observed reality and the information available to the organization.
- The relevant relationships, assumptions and understanding of the system.
- The response required by the current conditions.

02 — ARCHITECTURE

The Method, Its Enablers and Governance

Adaptive Thinking is the map. The method moves from preparation through the Spiral to planning.

01 PREPARING THE GROUND	Creates the conditions for seeing the system clearly: Shared Understanding, Permission to Challenge, and Multiple Perspectives, One Reality.
02 ADAPTIVE SPIRAL	Moves from Reality through Perspectives, Relationships and System Understanding to an Adaptive Response, then learns from the New Reality.
03 ADAPTIVE PLANNING	Applies the Spiral to decisions: connect perspectives, make the system logic explicit, choose a response and adapt as evidence changes.
ENABLERS	Business System Architect makes cross-functional dependencies visible. AI provides cognitive support for exploring information and testing understanding.
CROSS-CUTTING EMBEDDED GOVERNANCE	Keeps decision rights, accountability and oversight connected to the work throughout the method.

Preparation creates shared understanding. The Spiral builds and tests it. Planning turns it into adaptive decisions.

03 — THE FIVE STAGES

One Turn of the Adaptive Spiral

The stages describe where attention is directed. New Reality begins the next turn.

01	Reality	What is actually happening — before the situation is simplified into a preferred problem or solution?
02	Perspectives	How does the same reality appear from different positions across the system?
03	Relationships	What dependencies, tensions and assumptions connect those observations?
04	System Understanding	Why does the system generate its current outcomes and behaviours?
05	Adaptive Response	What responsible intervention follows from the present understanding of the system?

NEW REALITY

The altered system state is not a sixth project phase. It is Reality at the beginning of the next turn — informed by what changed and what was learned.

04 — MOVEMENT

Five Transitions, Five Disciplines

The transitions describe how understanding moves. The disciplines protect the quality of that movement.

REALITY → PERSPECTIVES

Observe Before Framing

Do not allow the initial framing to determine which parts of reality are permitted to matter.

PERSPECTIVES → RELATIONSHIPS

Connect Before Concluding

Treat different perspectives as partial views of the same system, not competing versions of reality.

RELATIONSHIPS → SYSTEM UNDERSTANDING

Explain Before Optimizing

Understand why the system produces its outcomes before attempting to improve them.

SYSTEM UNDERSTANDING → ADAPTIVE RESPONSE

Intervene Without Freezing

Create enough commitment to produce change while retaining the capacity to learn and adjust.

ADAPTIVE RESPONSE → NEW REALITY

Learn Without Defending

Use feedback to update understanding rather than to defend the original decision.

05 — QUALITY

Transition Gates

A gate is a test of thinking quality, not another approval committee.

Reality Gate	Observation is separated from interpretation; the initial narrative has not closed the inquiry.
Perspective Gate	All perspectives material to system behaviour have been included — including inconvenient ones.
Relationship Gate	Dependencies, tensions, assumptions and cross-functional consequences are visible.
Understanding Gate	The current outcomes can be explained, not merely described.
Response Gate	The intervention follows from system understanding, creates observable signals and can be adjusted.
Learning Gate	The organization evaluates what changed in reality, not only whether the original plan was delivered.

Move forward when understanding is sufficient to act — not when certainty is complete.

06 — INTERVENTION

The Anatomy of an Adaptive Response

System Understanding becomes actionable when its logic is made explicit.

01	Intended Change	What specifically should change in the behaviour of the system?
02	System Hypothesis	Why should this intervention produce the intended change?
03	Observable Signals	What expected, unexpected and displaced effects will reveal how the system responded?
04	Capacity to Adjust	What can be changed, slowed, stopped or redesigned if reality behaves differently?

Minimal response statement

- We intend to change...
- We believe this will work because...
- We will observe...
- We will reconsider the response if...

Delivery confirms that an action occurred. Signals show what the action changed.

07 — LEARNING

Reading the New Reality

Monitoring execution is necessary. Adaptive learning asks a different question: how did the system actually respond?

Expected Effects	Did the intended change occur?
Unexpected Effects	What happened outside the original prediction?
Displaced Effects	Did the problem or cost move into another part of the system?
Changed Assumptions	Which parts of the previous understanding no longer hold true?

Three possible decisions

CONTINUE — the response is working in line with current understanding.

ADJUST — the direction remains valid, but the intervention requires correction.

REFRAME — new information challenges the previous understanding and requires another turn.

Monitoring asks whether the plan was executed. Adaptive learning asks whether our understanding was correct.

08 — APPLICATION

One Logic, Different Scales

The scope and tempo change. The method does not.

Scale	Typical scope	Typical horizon
Enterprise Spiral	Strategy, operating model or enterprise-wide transformation	Months and years
Initiative Spiral	A programme, system implementation, integration or new business model	Weeks and months
Decision Spiral	A material decision requiring connected perspectives	Days and weeks

What triggers another turn

- The result of an earlier intervention or a system response different from what was expected.
- A material market, regulatory, technological or behavioural change.
- A new perspective that exposes a gap in the current understanding.
- An unintended consequence appearing elsewhere in the organization.

The Spiral turns when reality provides information that matters.

09 — COMPLETE MODEL

The Adaptive Spiral v1.0

A stable logic for working responsibly with changing organizational reality.

**Reality → Perspectives → Relationships → System Understanding →
Adaptive Response → New Reality**

A complete turn ends with four questions

- What changed?
- What did we learn?
- What no longer holds true?
- What requires another turn of the Spiral?

What the model does

It connects fragmented observations into a shared understanding of the system, translates that understanding into a responsible intervention and uses the system's response to update the next decision.

What comes next

The core model is complete. Further development should focus on practical applications, business cases and evidence from real organizational contexts — not on adding more layers to the framework.

Adaptive Thinking does not eliminate uncertainty. It increases the organization's capacity to respond to it.

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