

Practical Adaptive Leadership

David Mantica
VP & GM SoftEd
davidm@softed.com
919-656-9751

SOFT
ED

1

Agenda

- What is Adaptive Leadership
- Types of Challenges
- Learning / Learning to Learn and Unlearn
- Mindset and How Adaptive Leaders Work
- Adaptive Leadership Growth
- Critical Skills

2

What is Adaptive Leadership?



“Adaptive Leadership is a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organisations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is being able, both individually and collectively, to take on the gradual but meaningful process of change. It is about diagnosing the essential from the expendable and bringing about a real challenge to the status quo.”

~ Cambridge Leadership Associates

3

WHAT ADAPTIVE LEADERS REALLY DO

“They don’t make plans; they don’t solve problems; they don’t even organise people. What leaders really do is prepare organisations for change and help them cope as they struggle through it.”

John P. Kotter



4

Types of Challenges

5

TECHNICAL VS. ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Kind of Challenge	Problem Definition	Solution	Locus of Work
Technical (Complicated)	Clear	Clear	Authority (expert) will implement existing structures and roles
Technical & Adaptive	Clear	Requires Learning	Authority will have to consult with stakeholders
Adaptive (Complex)	Requires Learning	Requires Learning	Stakeholders (Shared Leadership)

6

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Unlike technical problems where the “know how” already exists, Adaptive challenges require learning to overcome the conflicts in values or reduce the gap between the espoused values and reality. Changes in values, attitudes, and habits of behaviour are necessary for one to properly overcome Adaptive challenges.

7

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE FLAGS. TEST = 3 OR MORE

- **No known solution**—There is a gap between the current reality and your aspirations that you do not have the skills or knowledge to close.
- **People would rather avoid the issue**—Balancing two ideas is not possible; therefore, working on the challenge at hand creates tension and conflict.
- **Reason and logic alone will not get you there**—There are either competing values at play, or there is a gap between people’s words and their actions. For example: “Is there an issue that you/your team/your organisation continually talks about but can not solve?”.
- ***Recurring problem***—*Challenge reappears after fix is applied. For example: “Have you tried to fix a problem the same way multiple times but it keeps coming back?”.*
- ***Emotional response***—*Working on this challenge makes people feel uncomfortable; they experience an emotional response such as a feeling in their gut or a knot in a muscle. For example: “When does an emotional reaction shut down an issue?”.*
- **Failure to resolve competing priorities**—You are being asked to do more with less instead of making tough trade offs.
- **Moving forward feels risky**—Making progress on this challenge means putting your reputation, relationship, and job at risk.
- ***Casualties***—*In order to move forward, some people may be left behind.*
- **People must work across boundaries**—No one person or group can fix the problem alone.
- **Progress is not linear**—No direct path to get to a better outcome; trial and error are necessary.

8

OUR PREDICT-AND-PLAN LEADERSHIP (FIGHTING AGAINST)

Assumes That:

- The future is predictable
- Events and outcomes are stable
- We are capable of anticipating all relevant variables in any situation ahead of time
- Cause and effect are stable and linear to create value....

As Leaders We:

- Plan everything ahead of time
- Make most of our decisions ahead of time
- Break down large institutional initiatives into smaller pieces
- Each of these pieces fall within separate organisation responsibility areas (functional and departmental silos)
- We create org and management systems, processes, structures and controls that operationalise and enable these assumptions and activities and plans...

9

9

TECHNICAL VERSUS ADAPTIVE EXAMPLE

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

1. Easy to identify
2. Often lend themselves to quick and easy (cut-and-dried) solutions
3. Often can be solved by an authority or expert
4. Require change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries
5. People are generally receptive to technical solutions
6. Solutions can often be implemented quickly—even by edict

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

1. Difficult to identify (easy to deny)
2. Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, & approaches to work
3. People with the problem do the work of solving it
4. Require change in numerous places; usually cross organizational boundaries
5. People often resist even acknowledging adaptive challenges.
6. "Solutions" require experiments and new discoveries; they can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict

EXAMPLES

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take medication to lower blood pressure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change lifestyle to eat healthy, get more exercise and lower stress |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement electronic ordering and dispensing of medications in hospitals to reduce errors and drug interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage nurses and pharmacists to question and even challenge illegible or dangerous prescriptions by physicians |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase penalty for drunk driving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raise public awareness of the dangers and effects of drunk driving, targeting teenagers in particular |

10

FIVE KEY IDEAS ABOUT COMPLEX SYSTEMS

- Complex systems are composed of independent, decentralised agents.
- These independent agents, in the absence of centralised control, will self-organise.
- Self-organisation will create complex behaviour and emergent results that are not evident from studying the agents themselves.
- Rich information flows in an ecosystem balanced at the edge of chaos, defining the most effective pattern for generating emergent results.
- Simple, generative rules guide the creation of complex behaviours.

11

A NOTE ON RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

- People love change only when they know it is a good thing (the reality is people always hate change)
- People resist when change involves real or potential loss
- Resistance to loss is the most common adaptive failure
- Adaptive Leadership always puts you in the business of assessing, managing, distributing and providing contexts for losses that move people through these losses to a new place
- As in nature, a successful adaptation enables an organisation or community to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history into the future

12

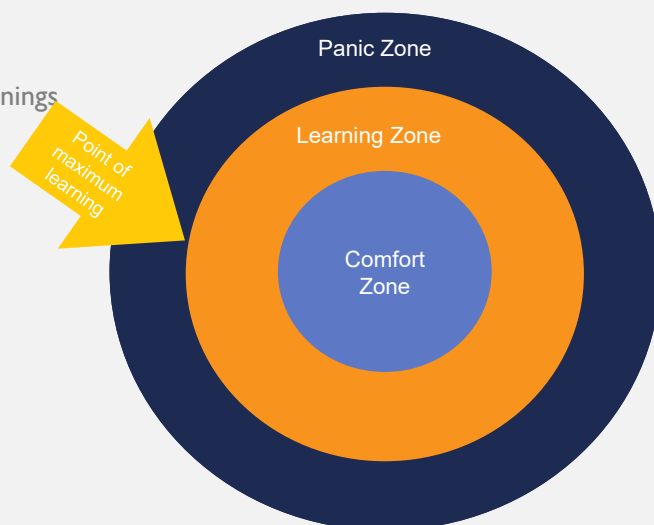
TACTICS TO STAY IN THE ZONE

Increase heat in the System	Decrease heat in the system
Give more responsibility – give the problem to the system	Address technical aspects
Bring conflict to surface	Employ structure
Protect dissenting voices	Reclaim responsibility temporarily
Seek other perspectives	Slow down the process

15

LEARNING AMPLIFIERS

- Opportunities to practice new learnings
- Immersion experiences
- Experimentation
- Time for reflection
- Energy
- Time for cultivating imagination
- Opportunities for exploration
- Challenges
- Safety to fail



16

The Power of Unlearn

A doctor is faced with a complete refresh of information in five years:

- Where does that old information go?
- Think of a water bottle getting overfilled
- Ties to underlying beliefs (break those to begin unlearning process)
- Go into it like you don't know anything

What has made you successful in the past/currently does not promise to continue to bring you success in the future

Ref: Barry O'Reilly and Stephen Dowling

17

Questions and thoughts at this point?

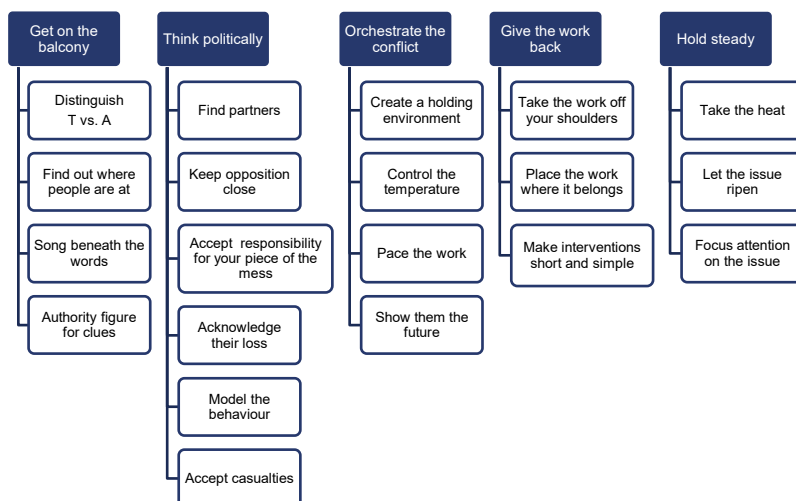
- What's the one thing that may be difficult to change, but that will make the most significant difference in accelerating my Adaptive Leadership?
- What will I do differently?
- What do I do when I don't know what to do?

18

Mindset Shifts

19

Adaptive Leadership Action and Strategy Map



Heifetz and Linsky, 2002

20

Essential Mindset Shifts

Adaptive Leaders should serve as a living example of how one can thrive with a **shift in mindset**. The leader should focus on:

Team improvement
over specific individual
results

**Business value-driven
delivery** over meeting
targets

Guiding principles over
rules and procedures

Curiosity and trust
over judging or
manipulating

**Learning and
empowerment** over
“doing it for them”

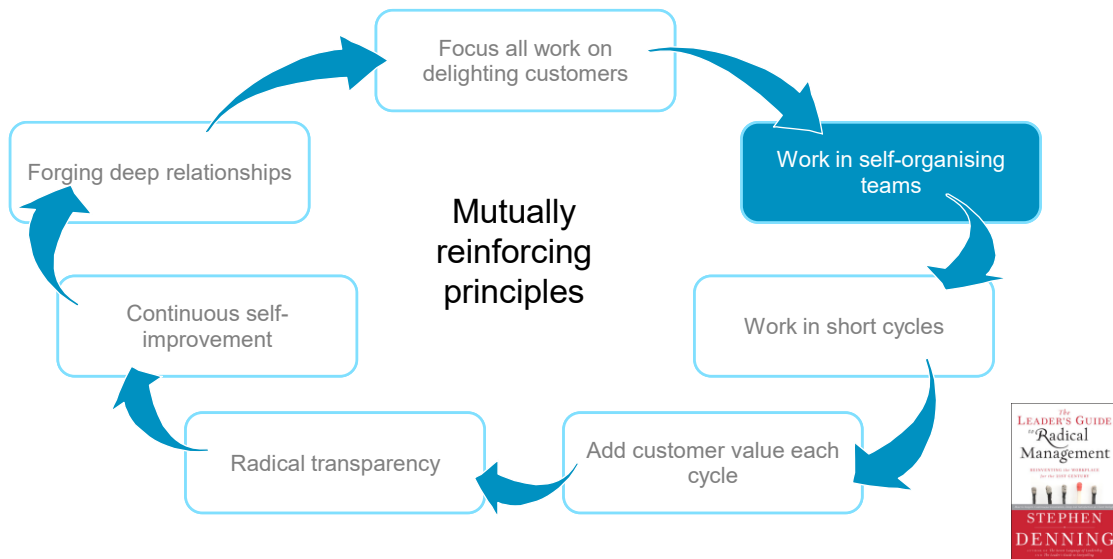
“Servant as leader” style
over management by
“telling” style

21

Adaptive Leadership Growth

22

The Upward Spiral of Adaptive Leadership



23

Self-Organisation

- Ability of a system to spontaneously arrange its components or elements in a purposeful (non-random) manner, under appropriate conditions, but without the help of an external agency. It is as if the system knows how to 'do its own thing.' Many natural systems such as cells, chemical compounds, galaxies, organisms, and planets show this property.
- Animal and human communities alike display self organization: in every group a member emerges as the leader (who establishes order and rules), and everybody else follows him or her, usually willingly

Source: BusinessDictionary.com

Why do human communities tend towards a leader?

How does this impact self-organization and the value it provides?

Zappos example,
Holacracy push and attrition impact

24

Ladder of Leadership

Level	Worker Says	Boss Says	Further Questions
7	I've been doing ...	What have you been doing?	What more can you do, where is your most value at?
6	I've done	What have you done?	
5	I intend to ...	What do you intend to do?	Is it technically correct and safe to try? How does it support the goals of the organisation? What should be done first?
4	I would like to ...	What would you like to do?	What are your suggestions? What are the options?
3	I think ...	What do you think?	How sure are you? How strongly do you feel or support this?
2	I see ...	What do you see? Tell me more.	Tell me about that? What do you see here? Tell me more? And what else?
1	Tell me what to do.	I'll tell you what to do?	

25

Exercise: Building Leaders at Every Level

Over a 24 hour period, record and document conversations in the workplace about decisions

- Evaluate where you and your staff are on the ladder
- Provide feedback and alternative scripting to move people higher up the ladder

Advanced discussion points:

- What factors are causing you to operate at that point on the ladder?
- What factors do you find worked best to move people higher up the ladder?
- Start small movements up the ladder first



Small steps video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h25znxZEL3g>

26

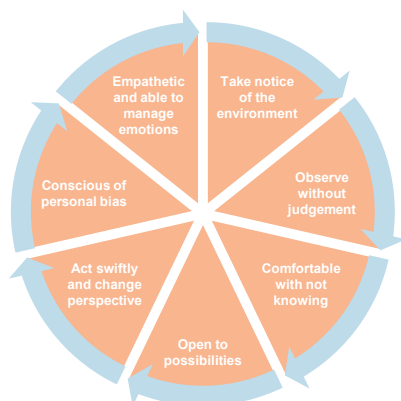
Critical Skills for Adaptive Leaders

SOFT
ED

27

Presence

Presence can be seen as being
“fully conscious and aware in the moment”.

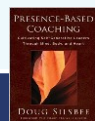


“

Presence is a state of awareness, in the moment, characterised by the felt experience of timelessness, connectedness, and a larger truth.

Doug Silsbee

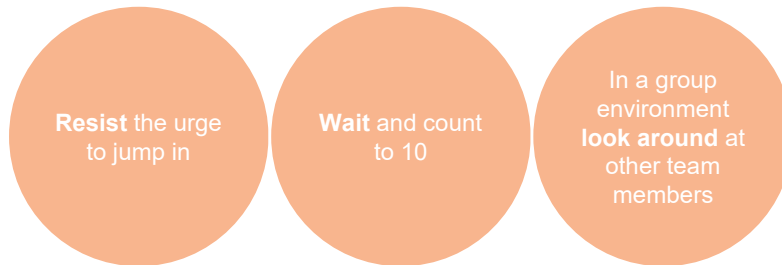
Learn more...
Doug Silsbee, *Presence Based Coaching*



28

Silence

Sometimes the response to a powerful question will be silence. This may mean that they do not understand the question, or they are simply **thinking about the answer**.



Waiting shows your coachee that **they have the answers**; you are not there to provide the answer for them.

31

Critical Thinking

Thinking about one's thinking:

- To organize and clarify
- Raise efficiency of thinking
- Recognize errors and biases
- Improve process of thinking, Not to solve problems



Critical thinking is essential if we are to get to the root of our problems and develop reasonable solutions. After all, the quality of everything we do is determined by the quality of our thinking."

www.criticalthinking.org

32

Critical Thinking

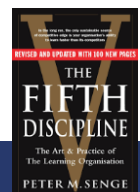
Deep Literacy: <http://www.deep-literacy.com/>

- Taking the time to read something “deeply”
- Processing what is being said
- Thinking about the points
- Writing counter points into the margins
- Debating the ideas
- Complex and complicated programs can’t be solved by sound bites and tweets. It takes thought and competing ideas: Can you deal with this (more to come on it)

33

Systems Thinking

- Technique, problem-solving mindset
- Set of general principles
- See patterns instead of snapshots
- View “problems” as parts of an overall system
- See interrelationships instead of seeing things
- Gives us perspectives on problems and what we might do differently
- Treat organizations as systems, e.g. team



Source:
Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*

34

The 21st Century Business Model: Digital Transformation



35

35

Radical Candor

Radical Candor is the ability to **challenge directly** and **show you care personally** at the same time.

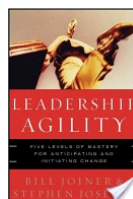
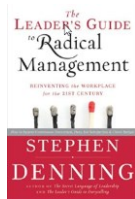
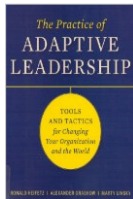
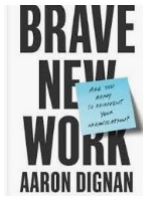


Learn more...
Kim Scott, *Radical Candor*



36

Recommended Reading



37

Thank You!

38