The practice of adaptive leadership

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This synthesis is only meant as a teaser to read the full book. Before to read it, we recommend to first read "Leadership without answers" by Ronald Heifetz which presents the concepts in a less formalized way, through historical cases which will touch your heart and stick in your head.

Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.

To be an adaptive leader, there are at least 4 pre-conditions:

1. ***Get rid of the broken system's illusion.***
   There is a myth that drives many change initiatives into the ground: that the organization needs to change because it is broken. The reality is that any social system is the way it is because the people in that system want it that way. In that sense, on the whole, on balance, the system is working fine, even though it may appear to be "dysfunctional" in some respects to some members and outside observers, and even though it faces danger just over the horizon. As Jeff Lawrence poignantly says, "There is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization, because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets." No one who tries to name or address the dysfunction in an organization will be popular. When you realize that what you see as dysfunctional works for others in the system, you begin focusing on how to mobilize and sustain people through the period of risk that often comes with adaptive change, rather trying to convince them of the rightness of your cause.

2. ***Learn to live in the Disequilibrium***
   To practice adaptive leadership, you have to help people navigate through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable, and as they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand. You need to be able to do two things: (1) manage yourself in that environment and (2) help people tolerate the discomfort they are experiencing.

3. ***Engage above and below the neck***
   If leadership involves will and skill, then leadership requires the engagement of what goes on both above and below the neck. Courage requires all of you: heart, mind, spirit, and guts. And skill requires learning new competencies, with your brain training your body to become proficient at new techniques of diagnosis and action.

4. ***Connect to purpose***
   It makes little sense to practice leadership and put your own professional success and material gain at risk unless it is on behalf of some larger purpose that you find compelling. What might such a purpose look like? How can you tell whether a particular purpose is worth the risks involved in leading adaptive change in your organization? Clarifying the values that orient your life and work and identifying larges purposes to which you might commit are courageous acts. You have to choose among competing, legitimate purposes, sacrificing many in the service of one or a few. In doing so, you make a statement about what you are willing to die for, and, therefore, what you are willing to live for.

The practice of adaptive leadership consists in 4 groups of interconnected activities (see next page).

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   - 5.2. Share responsibility for the organization's future
   - 5.3. Value independent judgment
   - 5.4. Build leadership capacity
   - 5.5. Institutionalize reflection and continuous learning

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   - 1.2. Reframe the group's default interpretations
   - 1.3. Generate multiple interpretations
   - 1.4. Audition your ideas
   - 1.5. Generate a diversity of interpretations
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   - 5.5. Institutionalize reflection & continuous learning

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I. Diagnose the system

1. Be ready to observe and interpret before intervening

The practice of leadership, like the practice of medicine, involves two core processes: diagnosis first and then action. And those two processes unfold in two dimensions: toward the organizational or social system you are operating in and toward yourself. That is, you diagnose what is happening in your organization or community and take action to address the problems you have identified. But to lead effectively, you also have to examine and take action toward yourself in the context of the challenge. In the midst of action, you have to be able to reflect on your own attitudes and behavior to better calibrate your interventions into the complex dynamics of organizations and communities. You need perspective on yourself as well as on the systemic context in which you operate.

The process of diagnosis and action begins with data collection and problem identification (the what), moves through an interpretive stage (the why) and on to potential approaches to action as a series of interventions into the organization, community, or society (the what next). Typically, the problem-solving process is iterative, moving back and forth among data collection, interpretation, and action.

To diagnose a system or yourself while in the midst of action requires the ability to achieve some distance from those on-the-ground events. We use the metaphor of "getting on the balcony" above the "dance floor" to depict what it means to gain the distanced perspective you need to see what is really happening. If you stay moving on the dance floor, all you will see will be the people dancing with you and around you. Swept up in the music, it may be a great party! But when you get on the balcony, you may see a very different picture. From that vantage point, you might notice that the band is playing so loudly that everyone is dancing on the far side of the room, that when the music changes from fast to slow (or back again), different groups of people decide to dance, and that many people hang back near the exit doors and do not dance, whatever the music. Not such a great party after all. If someone asked you later to describe the dance, you would paint a very different picture if you had seen it from the balcony rather than only from the dance floor.

When you move back and forth between balcony and dance floor, you can continually assess what is happening in your organization and take corrective midcourse action. If you perfect this skill, you might even be able to do both simultaneously: keeping one eye on the events happening immediately around you and the other eye on the larger patterns and dynamics.

Adaptive leadership is an iterative process involving three key activities:

- observing events and patterns around you;
- interpreting what you are observing (developing multiple hypotheses about what is really going on);
- designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified.

Each of these activities builds on the ones that come before it; and the process overall is iterative: you repeatedly refine your observations, interpretations, and interventions. In any case, resist the leap to action. Sorting through an adaptive challenge takes time and reflection. Resist the pressure to do something, and spend more time diagnosing the problem, even if taking that much time feels excruciatingly uncomfortable. Give yourself license to assess your own skills and to determine whether you are the right person to intervene or someone else would have a better chance of success.

2. Diagnose the system itself

The first step in tackling any adaptive challenge is to get on the balcony so you can see how your organizational system is responding to it.

2.1. Appreciate the elegance and tenacity of the status quo

Over time, the structures, culture, and defaults that make up an organizational system become deeply ingrained, self-reinforcing, and very difficult to reshape. That makes sense when things are going well. Many organizations get trapped by their current ways of doing things, simply because these ways worked in the past. Clearly, adaptive challenges comprise a tangle of interdependent threads. One of those threads is that your organization (as a system) reflects characteristics of the large system (the industry or sector) in which it is embedded. Understanding that you are operating in multiple systems at the same time is an essential component of identifying and addressing adaptive challenges. Every organization is not only one overall system but also a set of subsystems. Look at three components to start with as a way into a multidimensional look at what is happening around you. The components are structures (for example, incentive programs), culture (including norms and meeting protocols), and defaults (routine processes of problem solving and ways of thinking and acting). These subsystems powerfully shape how people respond to and try to deal with adaptive pressures.

2.2. Discover structural implications

An organization's formal structures create the playing field and rules for all activities that take place in the overarching system. For example, structures may reward certain behaviors or attitudes (such as not making mistakes or bringing in new business or customer satisfaction) and implicitly discourage other behaviors and attitudes (risk taking or increasing business from existing clients or focusing on improving employee morale).

2.3. Surface cultural norms and forces

An organization's culture is made up of its folklore (the stories that people frequently tell that indicate what is most important), its rituals (such as how new employees are welcomed into the company), its group norms (including styles of deference and dress codes), and its meeting protocols (like modes of problem solving and decision making). All of these cultural ingredients influence the organization's adaptability. Unlike structures, the culture of an organization is not usually written down or formally documented, so it may be hard to describe in precise terms. But like structures, culture still powerfully determines what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

2.4. Recognize default interpretations and behavior

In addition to structures and culture, an organization's problem-solving defaults can provide insights into the way your organization operates as a system – and its adaptability. Defaults are the ways of looking at situations that lead people to behave in ways that are comfortable and that have generated because they are familiar and they have proved useful for explaining reality and solving problems in the past. A default interpretation, leading to a default response, puts people on familiar ground and plays to their organization's strengths. But in several respects, it can also be a constraint. It can blind people to a wider array of solutions and ideas that might generate even more value.

3. Diagnose the adaptive challenge

Adaptive challenges are difficult because their solutions require people to change their ways. Unlike known or routine problem solving for which past ways of thinking, relating, and operating are sufficient for achieving good outcomes, adaptive work demands three very tough, human tasks: figuring out what to conserve from past practices, figuring out what to discard from past practices, and inventing new ways that build from the best of the past.

3.1. Determine the technical and adaptive elements

Leadership begins, then, with the diagnostic work of separating a problem's technical elements from its adaptive elements. The task is to appreciate, value, and take in what the experts say, but then go beyond their filters to take into account the cultural and political human requirements of tangible progress. How do you know whether you and your team are confronting an adaptive challenge? Look for two characteristic signals: a cycle of failure and a persistent dependence on authority:

- *A Cycle of Failure:* The most common leadership failure stems from trying to apply technical solutions to adaptive challenges. Authorities make this mistake because they misinterpret or simplify the problem, fail to see how the organizational landscape has changed, or prefer a "solution" that will avoid disruption or distress in the organization. Sometimes throwing a technical fix at the problem will solve a piece of it and provide a diversion from the tougher issue, though only temporarily.
- *Dependence on Authority:* Holding authority figures responsible for causing and/or fixing organizational problems makes sense when it's a technical problem that fits their authoritative expertise. But what happens when an adaptive challenge lurks beneath the surface? Authority figures typically try to meet these challenges just as if they were technical problems because that is what people expect of them, and that's also what they've come to expect of themselves.

Diagnosing an adaptive challenge is a challenge in itself. But there are a series of questions that you can raise and a series of identifying flags that can help you to diagnose it.

Concept	Identifying flag
1. Persistent gap between aspirations and reality.	The language of complaint is used increasingly to describe the current situation.
2. Responses within current repertoire inadequate.	Previously successful outside experts and internal authorities unable to solve the problem.
3. Difficult learning required.	Frustration and stress manifest. Failures more frequent than usual. Traditional problem-solving methods used repeatedly, but without success.
4. New stakeholders across boundaries need to be engaged.	Rounding up the usual suspects to address the issue has not produced progress.
5. Longer time frame necessary.	Problem festers or reappears after short-term fix is applied.
6. Disequilibrium experienced as sense of crisis starting to be felt.	Increasing conflict and frustration generate tension and chaos. Willingness to try something new begins to build as urgency becomes widespread.

3.2. Listen to the song beneath the words

To identify the adaptive challenges confronting an organization, look beyond what people are saying about them. That's listening to the song beneath the words. There is so much more data than just the actual words being said. Look for the body language, eye contact, emotion, energy. For example, pay as much attention to what is not being said as you do to what is being said.

3.3. Distinguish the challenge from four archetypes

Adaptive challenges come in many shapes and forms. Often, they represent complex shifts in the organizational landscape (such as changes in technology, customer preferences, or market dynamics) that require a complex response. 4 archetypes are particularly common:

- *Gap between Espoused Values and Behavior:* How you behave can at times differ from what you say you value and believe about yourself. Individuals and organizations alike come face-to-face with their real priorities when the gap between their espoused values and their behavior can no longer be ignored. You know whether you and your company really care about something when that value collides with preferred behavior.

- *Competing Commitments:* Like individuals, organizations have numerous commitments. And sometimes these commitments come into conflict. To resolve such competing commitments, organizational leaders must often make painful choices that favor some constituencies while hurting others. And this constitutes another adaptive challenge archetype. Because these decisions are so difficult, many leaders simply avoid making them, or they try to arrive at a compromise that ultimately serves no constituency's needs well. As a result, the organization's commitments continue to be in conflict.
- *Speaking the Unspeakable:* Whenever members of an organization come together and have a conversation, there are actually two types of conversation going on. One is manifested in what people are saying publicly. The other is unfolding in each person's head. Only a small portion of the most important content of those conversations (radical ideas, naming of difficult issues, painful interpretations of conflicting perspectives) ever gets surfaced publicly. Most of the time, the public discourse consists primarily of polite banter or debate that falls short of naming, let alone resolving, conflict. But getting people to share what seems unspeakable is essential for an organization that hopes to move forward in the face of changing priorities or external conditions. Only by examining the full range of perspectives can a group of people increase their chances of developing adaptive solutions.
- *Work Avoidance:* In every organization people develop elaborate ways to prevent the discomfort that comes when the prospects of change generate intolerable levels of intensity. For example, managers form a new subcommittee that has no real power or influence to effect the proposed change. Executives hire a diversity officer so no line manager has to take responsibility for increasing diversity in his or her own department. People blame external forces (fickle consumers, an unscrupulous new competitor) for the company's loss of market share.

  They change the subject or make a joke when someone insists on discussing the problem. Or they treat an adaptive challenge as a technical problem – for example, by moving a retail item to a more prominent position in a store when sales are down due to better competitor's products in the marketplace. These behaviors are all ways of avoiding the harder work of mobilizing adaptive change. Here's a list of work avoidance tactics:
  - *Diverting Attention*
    - Focus only on the technical parts of the challenge and apply a technical fix.
    - Define the problem to fit your current expertise.
    - Turn down the heat in a meeting by telling a joke or taking a break.
    - Deny that the problem exists.
    - Create a proxy fight, such as a personality conflict, instead of grappling with the real problem.
    - Take options off the table to honor legacy behaviors.
  - *Displacing Responsibility*
    - Marginalize the person trying to raise the issue—that is, shoot the messenger.
    - Scapegoat someone.
    - Externalize the enemy.
    - Attack authority.
    - Delegate the adaptive work to those who can't do anything about it, such as consultants, committees, and task forces.

Main difference between technical and adaptive challenges

Challenge	Problem definition	Solution	Locus of work
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Technical and adaptive	Clear	Requires learning	Authority and stakeholders
Adaptive	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders

4. Diagnose the political landscape

Understanding the political relationships in your organization is key to seeing how your organization works as a system. To think politically, you have to look at your organization as a web of stakeholders. For each stakeholder, you need to identify her:

- *Stake in the adaptive challenge at hand.* How will she be affected by resolution of the challenge?
- *Desired outcomes.* What would she like to see come out of a resolution of the issue?
- *Level of engagement.* How much does the person care about the issue and the organization?
- Degree of power and influence. What resources does the person control, and who wants those resources?

Equally important, you must identify each stakeholder's:

- *Values.* What are the commitments and beliefs guiding the behaviors and decision-making processes?
- *Loyalties.* What obligations does the person have to people outside his or her immediate group (such as long-standing customer or supplier relationships)?
- *Losses at risk.* What does the person fear losing (status, resources, a positive self-image) if things should change?
- *Hidden alliances.* What shared interests does the person have with people from other major stakeholder groups (for example, with peers in another department) that could lead the person to form an alliance that could build influence?

When you want to drive adaptive change in your organization, and others are getting in your way, it is natural to view in les s-than-charitable ways those who are impeding progress, as you understand it. To mobilize stakeholders to engage with your change initiative, you have to identify their strongest values and think about how supporting your program would enable your stakeholders to serve those values. No stakeholders operate solo. They have external loyalties, to people outside their group and to the people behind the ideas that matter to them.

For any stakeholder, having to disappoint his own constituencies is immensely difficult. One way to understand the challenges raised by external loyalties is to use the metaphor of a vegetable stew. To make a good vegetable stew, you have to cook the ingredients just enough that they give up some of their original color and taste; otherwise, you'd have a pot of crunchy vegetables, not a stew. But if you cook the vegetables too much, each of them will lose so much of its distinctive qualities that you will end up with a pot of undifferentiated mush. Imagine these vegetables as stakeholders, and suppose you get the stew just right. When those carrots and onions go back to carrot-land and onion-land, having sacrificed some of their distinctiveness in the interests of contributing to the stew, their old friends and family at home will notice they have changed. "You ... smell like an onion," the carrots will say. "You're not one of us anymore. You've sold out. We sent you there to represent us and champion our views to the others, not come back contaminated with their juices on you. What did they do to you there?" That presents a real problem for those well-intentioned returning carrots. Reentry would be a lot easier if the carrot came back completely unchanged, if it could mask what had changed, or if it could quickly revert to its old familiar carrot self. For each stakeholder in your change initiative, the knowledge that he is going to have to return to "carrot-land" (or "onion-land" or "lentil-land") can put up a huge barrier to collaboration.

In leading adaptive change, broaden your focus beyond just the people in the room, the players most directly involved. Take into account the people outside the room about whom the players care. And consider how you might help each stakeholder in the room to engage their constituencies outside the room in the questions and solutions you are exploring at the table.

Exercising adaptive leadership requires distributing significant losses. The people you are asking to make changes experience your initiative as a threat to something they value. What they value might be some deeply held belief about right and wrong or about the way the world works or should work. Or it may be nothing deeper than a desire to maintain what is stable, predictable, and familiar in their lives. Resistance to change stems from a fear of losing something important. Identifying the losses is not easy. Review the following list of potential losses to begin getting some ideas:

- Identity
- Competence
- Comfort
- Security
- Reputation
- Time
- Money
- Power
- Control
- Status
- Resources
- Independence
- Righteousness
- Job
- Life

When you are trying to lead adaptive change, you can expect to encounter hidden alliances between people from different stakeholder groups, alliances that can make or break your change initiative. Identifying these connections can help you figure out ways to leverage supportive alliances and soften opposing ones. How can you identify and generate hidden alliances to lead adaptive change?

Look at your enterprise's organization chart. The boxes in it represent the stakeholder groups (such as divisions and functions) that are most obvious and formal. Identify subgroups within each group that may have something in common that crosses the formal reporting lines, functions, and hierarchical levels in the chart. Fill in the following the following table:

Stakeholder (individual or group)	Relationship to the issue?	Preferred outcome?	Noblest values?	Loyalties?	Potential losses?

4.1. Uncover values driving behavior

When you want to drive adaptive change in your organization, and others are getting in your way, it is natural to view in less-than-charitable ways those who are impeding progress, as you understand it. To mobilize stakeholders to engage with your change initiative, you have to identify their strongest values and think about how supporting your program would enable your stakeholders to serve those values.

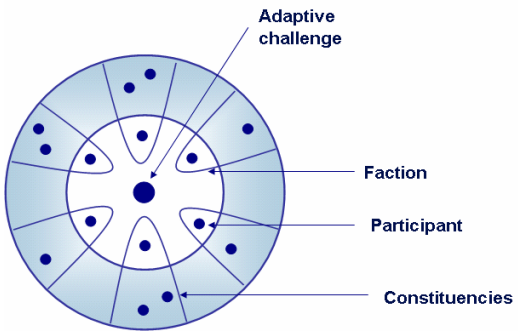
4.2. Acknowledge loyalties

No stakeholders operate solo. They have external loyalties, to people outside their group and to the people behind the ideas that matter to them. For any stakeholder, having to disappoint his own constituencies is immensely difficult.

4.3. Name the losses at risk (see above)

4.4. Realize hidden alliances

When you are trying to lead adaptive change, you can expect to encounter hidden alliances between people from different stakeholder groups, alliances that can make or break your change initiative. Identifying these connections can help you figure out ways to leverage supportive alliances and soften opposing ones. How can you identify and generate hidden alliances to lead adaptive change? Look at your enterprise's organization chart. The boxes in it represent the stakeholder groups (such as divisions and functions) that are most obvious and formal. Identify subgroups within each group that may have something in common that crosses the formal reporting lines, functions, and hierarchical levels in the chart.



5. Understand the qualities that makes an organization adaptive

What makes some organizations more adaptive than others? There are five key characteristics:

- Elephants in the room are named
- Responsibility for the organization's future is shared
- Independent judgment is expected
- Leadership capacity is developed
- Reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized

5.1. Name the elephants in the room

In a highly adaptive organization, no issue is too sensitive to be raised at the official meeting, and no questions are off-limits.

5.2. Share responsibility for the organization's future

In an organization with a high capacity to adapt, people share responsibility for the larger organization's future in addition to their identification with specific roles and functions.

5.3. Value independent judgment

An organization will be better equipped to identify and grapple with adaptive challenges if its people do not expect the CEO and other senior authorities to always have the answers.

5.4. Build leadership capacity

Organizations enhance their ability to handle adaptive challenges by ensuring a healthy pipeline of talent. This is not about sending people to seminars. A commitment to individualized professional development comes from understanding that the courage to make needed change resides in people who have a long-term perspective and a stake in the organization's future.

5.5. Institutionalize reflection and continuous learning

Adaptation requires learning new ways to interpret what goes on around you and new ways to carry out work. It's not surprising, then, that in organizations with significant adaptive capacity, there is an openness and commitment to learning.

Survey: How adaptive is your organization?

Adaptability criteria	Description	Rating (1 means "very low"; 10 means "very high")
Elephants in the room	How long does it take for conversations to get from inside people's heads to the coffee machine and then to meeting rooms? How quickly are crises identified and bad news discussed? Are there structures, incentives, and support for speaking the unspeakable?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Shared responsibility	To what extent to people in your organization, especially those in senior management, act from the perspective of an for the betterment of the whole organization, as opposed to worrying about and protecting their individual groups or silos?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Independent judgment	To what extent are people in your organization valued for their own judgment rather than their capacity to divine the boss's preferences? And when someone takes a reasonable risk in service of the mission and it doesn't work out, to what extent is that seen as a learning opportunity rather than a personal failure?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Develop leadership capacity	To what extent to people know where they stand in the organization and their potential for growth and advancement? Do they have an agreed-upon plan for how they are going to reach their potential? And to what extent are senior managers expected to identify and mentor	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Institutionalized reflection and continuous learning	Does the organization carve out time for individual and collective reflection and learning from experience? To what extent does the organization allocate time, space, and other resources to get diverse perspectives on how work could be done better?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

II. Mobilize the system

1. Make interpretations

Effective visions have accuracy and not just imagination and appeal. Providing thoughtful, accurate interpretations that get at the essence of the complex reality you observe in your organization is enormously helpful to people. An incisive statement of the key issues that underlie a messy, complex discussion orients people and helps focus attention productively.

1.1. Notice when people are moving toward technical or adaptive interpretations

People gravitate toward interpretations that are technical rather than adaptive, benign instead of conflictual and individual rather than systemic. You can begin by noticing when members of your organization are doing this, and simply by pointing it out.

This kind of comment …	Suggests that people see the problem as …	You can encourage a shift by asking questions such as …
"If we only had better direction from the CEO …"	A deficiency in the authorities, not the organization's vision, mission or strategy	"What pressures is the CEO up against? What are his constituencies, and what do they expect him/her to deliver?
"We'll have this worked out in no time …"	Short-term, not long-term	"Do you think we have the will to try to deal with the causes of the problem rather than the symptoms?"
"This will be an easy fix."	Technical, not adaptive diagnosis	"Maybe this is a problem that a consultant cannot fix?
"We can't seem to carry out our good ideas."	Incompetent execution, not a problematic business model	"Maybe our product, even though we love it, is not what the market wants?"
"This will be a win-win."	No one needs to suffer any pain to solve this problem	"What losses to the people who oppose this step think they are going to take?"

1.2. Reframe the group's default interpretations

If your group has a high level of tolerance for difficult conversations, name the default interpretation you are seeing, and invite people to explore how it inhibits their creativity and adaptability. Otherwise, use a less direct approach: ask questions that stimulate a conversation that might surface other interpretations.

1.3. Generate multiple interpretations

If people have arrived at only one interpretation of the situation, the options for action are often severely limited; any one interpretation will tend to drive toward a single solution or a small set of solutions. To expand the array of options, encourage people to come up with more than one possible interpretation. Use what-if questions; for example, "What if we found that customers do not value the kinds of features we're adding to our products? What might that suggest about the causes behind our loss of market share?" It is always possible to come up with multiple interpretations of any situation. Sometimes a simple structural change can generate and legitimize the airing of different views.

1.4. Audition your ideas

You have your own default interpretations and thus are going to be drawn to certain interpretations over others. To combat this tendency, think of yourself as in the role of auditioning your interpretation rather than advocating it energetically.

1.5. Generate a diversity of interpretations

Adaptive work involves orchestrating multiple and passionately held points of view. In an ideal world, people would not be threatened by the existence of contrasting viewpoints. Instead, they would view them simply as different pieces of the larger picture that everyone needs to see. The more different pieces of the puzzle are laid out on the table, the more you know what you are really dealing with, and the better equipped you are to generate interventions that will help you sequence and solve the most pressing shared difficulties.

2. Design effective interventions

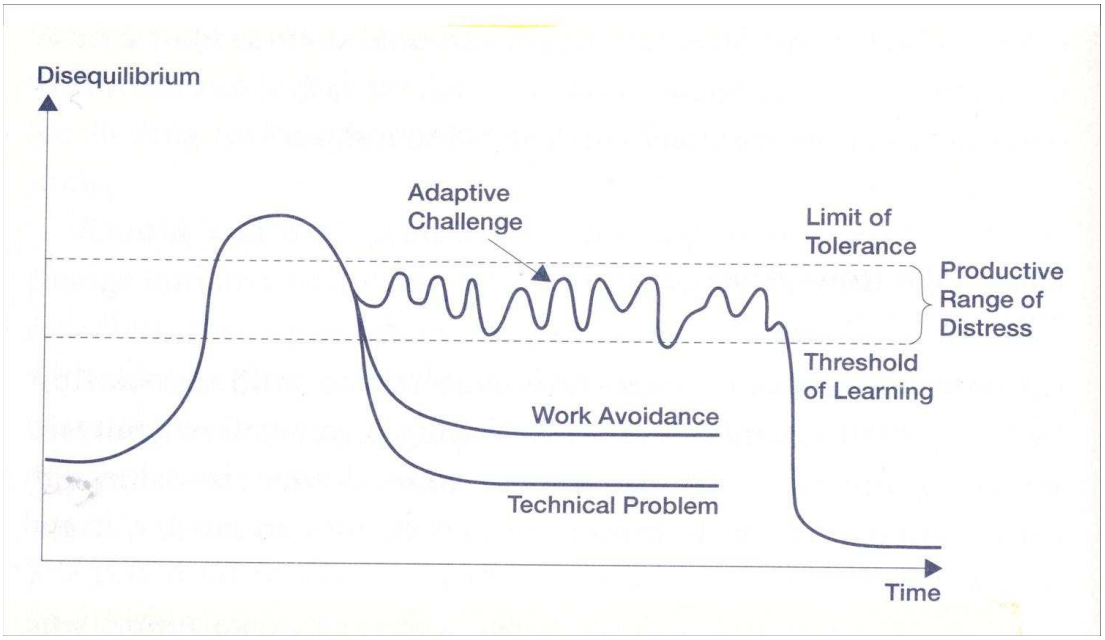
Effective interventions are based on interpretations of the situation in the adaptive, conflictual, and systemic characteristics of the organization's challenge. There are 7 steps to design such interventions.

2.1. Get on the balcony

Observe what is going on around you. Stay diagnostic even as you take action. Develop more than one interpretation. Watch for patterns. Reality test your interpretation when it is self-serving or close to your default. Debrief with partners as often as you can to assess the information generated by your actions, and the interventions of others, in order to think through your next move.

2.2. Determine the ripeness of the issue in the system

Where would you put your group or organization on the disequilibrium diagram? How resilient and ready are people to tackle the issue? An issue is ripe when the urgency to deal with it has become generalized across the system. If only a subgroup or faction cares passionately, but most other groups in the system have other priorities on their mind, then the issue is not yet ripe. Determining ripeness is critical because a strategy of intervention to ripen an issue that is only localized is different from a strategy to deal with a ripe issue that is already generalized.



2.3. Ask "Who am I in this picture?"

How are you experienced by the various groups and subgroups? What role do you play in them? What perspectives on the adaptive issues do you embody for them? Because they are comfortable with the way you usually act, they are probably quite proficient at managing you in that role to ensure that you do not disturb their equilibrium. Consistency is a high value in management but a significant constraint in leading adaptive change. You will have to be less predictable to get their constructive attention and make progress on an adaptive issue.

2.4. Think hard about your framing

Thoughtful framing means communicating your intervention in a way that enables group members to understand what you have in mind, why the intervention is important, and how they can help carry it out. A well-framed intervention strikes a chord in people, speaking to their hopes and fears. That is, it starts where they are, not where you are. Think about the balance between reaching people above and below the neck. Some groups and some people need data first, before the emotion. For others, it is the reverse. Connect your language to the group's espoused values and purpose.

2.5. Hold steady

When you have made an intervention, think of it as having a life of its own. Do not chase after it. The idea will make its way through the system, and people will need time to digest it, think about it, discuss it, and modify it. Once you have made an intervention, your idea is theirs. You cannot control what people do with your intervention. So as this process unfolds, resist the impulse to keep jumping in with follow-ups like "No, what I really meant is …" or "Didn't you hear me?" or "Let me say that again" or "You misinterpreted what I said." Let people in the system work with your idea without your getting too attached to it. Listen closely to how various subgroups are responding to your idea, so you can calibrate your next move. Watch for the ways and the elements of it that are taking hold. Watch for avoidance mechanisms, like an allergic-like immediate rejection, or silence. Your silence is itself a form of intervention. Holding steady is a posed and listening silence. Holding back communicates too.

2.6. Analyze the factions that begin to emerge

As people in your own close-in group begin to discuss your intervention, pay attention to who seems engaged, who starts using your language or pieces of your idea as if it were their own. Listen for who resists the idea.

2.7. Keep the work at the center of people's attention

Avoiding adaptive work is a common human response to the prospect of loss. It is not shameful; it is just human. It falls to you, your allies, and others who lead in the system to keep the work at the center. Begin by trying to understand the impact of new directions on the constituents behind the people in your working group, and how their pleasure or displeasure is then going to play out in their behavior. Then think about how you can help with their problem, even if it is a problem they do not want to acknowledge. Another strategy is to help the resisters interpret their constituents' resistance in terms of threat and loss rather than intransigence, cowardice, or lack of creativity. Finally, get allies to share the burden of keeping the work at the center of people's attention.

Social function	Challenge	
	Technical	Adaptive
Direction	Authority provides problem definition and solution	Authority defines adaptive challenge, provides diagnosis & questions about problem definitions & solutions
Protection	Authority protects from external threat	Authority discloses external threat
Role Orientation	Authority orients	Authority disorients current roles, and resists pressure to orient people in new roles too quickly
Controlling conflict	Authority restores order	Authority exposes conflict, or lets it emerge
Norm maintenance	Authority maintains norms	Authority challenges norms, or allows them to be challenged

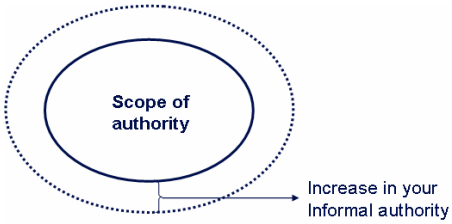
3. Act politically

"Thinking politically" describes the leadership task of understanding the relationships and concerns among people in an organization. People who think politically discern the formal and informal exercise of power and influence among individuals in their organization. "Acting politically" means using your awareness of the limits of your own authority, and of stakeholders' interests, as well as power and influence networks in your efforts, to integrate and defuse opposition, and to give valuable dissenting voices a hearing as you adjust your perspective, interventions and mobilize adaptive work.

3.1. Expand your informal authority

The more informal authority you have, the less you will need to transgress expectations, with all the risks that it entails, to lead adaptive change.

- Strengthen your relationships. In particular, forge strong connections with people who have big stakes in the challenge, whatever their perspective on it.
- Score some early wins. Solve some of the technical aspects bundled with the adaptive challenge.
- Address interests unconnected to the adaptive challenge.
- Sell small pieces of your idea. Take small steps, run pilot projects, and try experiments related to your intervention idea, rather than pitching a large rollout of a program that comes with major costs and losses.



3.2. Find allies

Before you go public with your initiative (whether through making a big announcement or simply raising the subject at a meeting), you need to line up enough support to keep your intervention (and you) alive once the action starts. Allies operate across boundaries and therefore have another set of loyalties beyond their loyalty to you or your perspectives. They may well be close personal and family friends, but operating across an organizational boundary means they will sometimes have competing loyalties. Understanding their loyalties allows you to protect these very good and sometime long-standing relationships. In any case, don't do it alone. Sounds easy and obvious, but, over and over again there are people ending up out on a limb all alone while trying to do the right thing. It is not only lonely out there; it is dangerous. Those who see your good works as a threat will find you a much easier target if you are out there by yourself.

3.3. Stay connected on the opposition

Once you've identified the opposition, stay close to them, spend time with them, ask for their input on your initiative, listen closely to their reality (especially where it differs from yours), and take their temperature to assess how much heat you are putting on them and how desperate they are becoming. Authentic empathy has consequences. Empathizing with your opponents might lead you to ask yourself, "Am I really doing the right thing?" If you start doubting your cause, you may end up revising your plan or even abandoning it, or undermining the confidence of some allies. So why force yourself to spend time with your resisters?

- First, you will never seem as evil in person as you can be in people's imagination. Simply spending time in their presence can help take the edge off their hostility and thus soften their determination to block your efforts.
- There is another reason to make yourself spend time with resisters: by meeting with them, you can acknowledge the sacrifices you are asking them to make and how difficult and painful those sacrifices may be. For some people, that is all they need to hear in order to begin feeling less hostile toward you and your idea.
- Finally, spending time with the opposition enables you to assess firsthand how much pressure they feel from your initiative. You can then calibrate your tactics accordingly.

3.4. Manage authority figures

Your boss and other senior authority figures are essential to any intervention you try to lead. To sustain their support, you need to do more than just figure out how they feel personally about the adaptive issue you are seeking to address. First, you need to prepare them for the disequilibrium you are going to generate in the organization. Second, once the disequilibrium sets in, you must "read" them for signals suggesting how much heat the organization can stand.

3.5. Take responsibility for casualties

Adaptive change results in casualties: people in the organization who lose something they value, whether it is a familiar way of doing things, status, jobs, or in the military, their lives. If you are trying to exercise adaptive leadership, you will need to shoulder responsibility for these inevitable casualties. That means paying attention to them: spend time with them, acknowledge your role in their difficulties, and find ways to help them endure the experience or get on with their lives in another way.

3.6. Protect and engage the voices of dissent

The voices of dissent are naysayers, the skeptics, who not only question this initiative but question whatever is on the agenda for today. They are princes of darkness, often resting on the negative. But they are valuable for implementing adaptive change because they are canaries in the coal mine, early-warning systems, and because in addition to being unproductive and annoying much of the time, they have the uncanny capacity for asking the really tough key question that you have been unwilling to face up to yourself or that others have been unwilling to raise. How can you protect the voices of dissent? If you have formal authority in your organization, keep in mind that when someone expresses a contrary idea or asks a disturbing question during a meeting or conversation, everyone will observe your response to decide how they should react. Thus it is vital to demonstrate openness to seemingly subversive or revolutionary ideas. If you are not in an authority role, you can still protect dissenters by taking them seriously and listening to them, trying to find the useful insights in what they're saying without necessarily endorsing their perspective.

Worksheet: strategies for acting politically

1. Allies

Who might be your allies?	Why might they be allies?	What's their main objective? (Support you? The initiative itself? The organization?)	How can this ally best help you successfully implement your intervention?

2. Opponents

Who might be your opponents?	Why might they be opponents?	What do they stand to lose if your initiative succeeds?	How might you neutralize their opposition or get them on your side?

3. Senior authorities

Who are the senior authorities most important to your intervention's success?	Why are they important?	What signals are they giving about how the organization perceives your intervention?	What might you say or do to secure their support as your initiative is being implemented?

4. Casualties

Who will be casualties of your intervention?	What will they lose?	What new skills would help them survive the change & thrive in the new org.?	How might you help them acquire those skills?	Which casualties will need to leave the organization?	How could you help them succeed elsewhere?

5. Dissenters

Who are the dissenters in your organization – those who typically voice radical ideas or mention the unmentionable?	What ideas are they bringing forth that might be valuable for your intervention?	How might you enable their ideas to have a hearing?	How can you protect them from being marginalized or silenced?

4. Orchestrate the conflict

Forward motion in organizations and communities is also a product of differences that generate creative tension and that, properly orchestrated, will resolve into a more integrated whole. The voices and perspectives that do not sound quite right together, and may never sound quite right together in isolation, are woven into a larger composition, and as part of the whole picture, they become essential. The working through of their differences provides the hope that some new synthesis will emerge, a new experiment and new capacity. People learn by encountering different points of view, not by staring at themselves in the mirror or engaging just those with consonant views. If you want to generate progress on adaptive issues, you have to seek out, surface, nurture, and then carefully manage the conflict toward resolution, rather than see it as something to be eliminated or neutralized. Orchestrating conflict requires courage, to different degrees for different people. Here are some suggestions to do so:

- *Push the boundaries of your own tolerance for conflict:* Orchestrating conflict requires tolerating a high degree of conflict yourself, perhaps more than you are comfortable with.
- *Play with the bad guys:* You will have to interact with hostile or antagonistic factions, and engage them on their own terms, not yours, even when their terms make no sense to you.
- *Accept support from people whose reasoning you would reject:* Bringing antagonistic groups together often means allowing them to voice arguments you may personally find distasteful or even abhorrent.
- *Adapt your communication style:* Orchestrating conflict successfully can mean having to change your communication style to help adversarial factions work through the issues.

The practices discussed below can help you surmont these difficulties and boost your chances.

4.1. Create a holding environment

A holding environment consists of all those ties that bind people together and enable them to maintain their collective focus on what they are trying to do. All the human sources of cohesion that offset the forces of division and dissolution provide a sort of containing vessel in which work can be done. The pressure cooker is an analogy for the holding environment; and as anyone who has ever used a pressure cooker knows, some are stronger than others (domestic versus industrial strength), depending on the strength of the steel and the locking lid. In doing adaptive work in organizations, you need to create or strengthen the holding environment to provide safety and structure for people to surface and discuss the particular values, perspectives, and creative ideas they have on the challenging situation they all face. There are some common elements that serve to strengthen the bonds of cohesion and offset the tensions as they are surfaced in any culture. Some of these are:

- Shared language
- Shared orienting values and purposes
- History of working together
- Lateral bonds of affection, trust and camaraderie
- Vertical bonds of trust in authority figures and the authority structure
- At the micro level for a working group, a meeting room with comfortable chairs, a round table, and rules of confidentiality and brainstorming that encourage people to speak their minds.

4.2. Select participants

Just as you select ingredients to throw into a stewpot before you turn up the heat, you need to select carefully the individuals who will take part in a conversation about the conflict you are seeking to orchestrate on the issue you are trying to work through. Here are some key questions to consider:

- Who needs to learn what, to make progress on this challenge?
- Does a party represent a constituency whose changes are critical if the larger community is to make progress?
- Does any party's perspective generate so much distress that including it would disrupt the effort to build any kind of coalition?
- Are there parties whose presence is important in the medium or long term but not in the short term, so that they might be excluded initially?

4.3. Regulate the heat

Humans are temperature sensitive. Think about the many things you do each day to be comfortable: put on a sweater if the room feels cold, turn up the air-conditioning if it is too warm, and take a cold drink to cool off after exercise. Similarly, people take steps to lower the "heat" in their organizational lives. To orchestrate conflict effectively, think of yourself as having your hand on the thermostat and always watching for signals that you need to raise or lower the temperature in the room. Your goal is to keep the temperature- that is, the intensity of the disequilibrium created by discussion of the conflict- high enough to motivate people to arrive at creative next steps and potentially useful solutions, but not so high that it drives them away or makes it impossible for them to function.

To raise the temperature…	To lower the temperature…
1. Draw attention to the tough questions.	1. Address the aspects of the conflict that have the most obvious and technical solutions.
2. Give people more responsibility than they're comfortable with.	2. Provide structure by breaking the problem into parts and creating time frames, decision rules, and role assignments.
3. Bring conflicts to the surface.	3. Temporarily reclaim responsibility for the tough issues.
4. Tolerate provocative comments.	4. Employ work avoidance mechanisms such as taking a break, telling a joke or a story, or doing an exercise.
5. Name and use some of the dynamics in the room at the moment to illustrate some of the issues facing the group – e.g., getting the authority figure to do the work, scapegoating an individual, externalizing the blame, and tossing technical fixes at the situation.	5. Slow down the process of challenging norms and expectations.

4.4. Give the work back

For people in authority roles, one of the most difficult aspects of orchestrating conflict is resisting the temptation to take the conflictual elements of the adaptive work off of other people's shoulders and putting it on your own. Giving the work back in organizational life often requires going against the grain of expectations that you're supposed to maintain equilibrium or restore it quickly when people get knocked off balance. When you have authority, people expect you to provide direction, protection, and order, which include delineating their individual roles and responsibilities. Typically, the more clarity you provide, the more comfortable they are. What they do not expect is for you to give them work you have customarily been doing for them. But to build your team's adaptive capacity, you need to push them beyond their comfort zones.

5. Build an adaptive culture

Although building adaptive capacity is a medium- and long-term goal, it can only happen by moving on it today and the next.

5.1. Make naming elephants the norm

The capacity for naming elephants in the room, tough issues that no one talks about, is a common and defining characteristic of an organization with extraordinary adaptability. What does it take to strengthen an organization's ability to name its elephants?

- *Model the Behavior:* People at the top of an organization are always sending out clues that indicate what behavior is acceptable. And that is nowhere more critical than in naming elephants.
- *Protect Troublemakers:* They are contrarians, often pointing out an entirely different perspective or viewpoint when the momentum seems to be swinging in one direction. But some of the time, they are the only ones asking the questions that need to be asked and raising the issues that no one wants to talk about. Your task is to preserver their willingness to intervene and speak up.

5.2. Nurture shared responsibility for the organization

To what degree do people feel responsible for the whole organization where you work, as distinguished from their own piece of that whole (such as their team, department, business unit, or division)? Here are some signals suggesting that people feel a shared sense of responsibility for the organizational overall:

- Rewards (financial and otherwise) are based at least in part on the performance of the entire organization
- People lend some of their own resources to help others in the organization who need it.
- People share new ideas, insights, and lessons across functional and other boundaries in the organization.
- Individuals who advance to positions of authority have worked in a wide range of departments or divisions in the organization.
- People take time to "job shadow", following colleagues around to understand what those in other parts of the organization do all day, to see what kinds of challenges they are dealing with, and to identify practices and norms that could help them in their own part of the company.

5.3. Encourage independent judgment

In an organization with an adaptive culture, people in authority do what only they can do and make decisions only they can make. Other tasks and decisions are handled by others capable of doing so. This is not about palming off unpleasant chores to underlings. It is about investing in people's independent judgment and resourcefulness, in addition to their technical skills.

5.4. Develop leadership capacity

Although training, coaching, and support from human resources and external sources can be invaluable, nothing can replace the development potential of high-quality day-to-day supervision. One way to foster line responsibility for leadership development is to establish a norm of developing succession plans;

5.5. Institutionalize reflection and continuous learning

Several practices can help you institutionalize reflection and continuous learning in your organization or team.

- *Ask Difficult Reflective Questions*
- *Honor Risk Taking and Experimentation*
- *Send the Right Signals to Your People:* One way to think about smart risk taking is that people are willing to extract lessons from whatever results or non-results they produce, getting smarter because they took the risk. Try some of the following techniques to signal to your subordinates that it is okay to take smart risks:
  - Ask subordinates to think of several small experiments in new ways of doing things that support the organization's mission.
  - When you approve an experiment that could generate new knowledge, give it time and resources by clearing something else from the to-do list of those responsible for conducting the experiment and extracting its lessons.
  - When people are struggling with an experiment, acknowledge how hard it is to learn from failure and success. Give them resources to figure out the lessons.
  - During regular performance reviews, evaluate employees' ability to take smart risks (low-cost, high-learning). Make increases in smart risk taking a goal for the coming year, encouraging some specific experiments that employees could run.
  - Take risks yourself, and report your failures as well as your successes to your people.

- *Reward Smart Risk Taking:* You need to base rewards on criteria other than measurable outcomes, such as how committed people are to experimentation, how many small experiments they have run, and how well they extract lessons from the efforts, their risk assessments, and the mistakes they have made. Otherwise, only successful experiments are rewarded, and people will go underground with the ones that are not, and take fewer risks altogether.
- *Foster a Taste for Action*: Anyone contemplating a risky experiment may feel compelled to mitigate the risk by spending too much time meticulously planning the experiment. But often, the outcomes, however well planned, are unpredictable because the experiment engages a complex world in a new way. So action is the only way forward. One just has to run the experiment to find out. Often, then, it is better to sidestep analysis paralysis in planning and move forward on extracting lessons from taking action. This goes hand in hand, of course, with the idea of running many small experiments, each of which has less to lose, than a few larger ones.
- *Run Parallel Experiments:* To maximize knowledge gained from risk taking, run parallel experiments.

III. See yourself as a system

1. Identify who you are

1.1. Identify your many identities

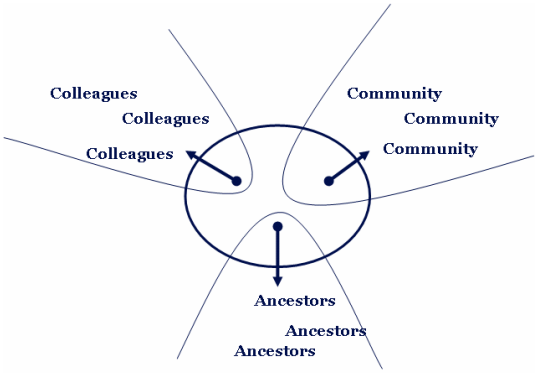
You are not a perfectly clean machine. Like the organization you are trying to lead, you are a complex individual with competing values and interests, preferences and tendencies, aspirations and fears. Whenever you are trying to lead a group or organization through an adaptive challenge, you may experience conflicts among your various loyalties. That is because you are a system (an individual) within a system (your organization). Within yourself as a system, your interests, your fears, your various loyalties all interact and affect your behaviors and decisions. Understanding the system that is yourself can help you make the personal changes needed for you to lead adaptive change successfully in your organization. Like everyone else, you have your own default settings: habits of interpreting and responding to events around you. It is essential to know what those default settings are to gain greater latitude and freedom to respond in new and useful ways. The clarity that comes from getting on the balcony to see yourself as a system can give you courage, inspiration, and focus-all vital resources when the distractions, displacements, and conflicting loyalties common in struggling organizations start to crop up. The notion of understanding yourself as a system challenges the idea that we each have one "self." Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, that's just who I am-take it or leave it"? Maybe you've said something like that to others at times. However, you are actually made up of several role identities, multiple and not always clear or consistent values, beliefs, ways of being, and ways of doing. Accepting that you are actually multiple "yous," that you have more than one self within you, is critical to exercising adaptive leadership, but it can feel uncomfortable. When you understand that you have more than just one identity, you begin seeing possibilities you could not see before. Who you are probably changes depending on the situation. You do not behave entirely the same way around your spouse, children, friends, and colleagues. And even with one of these groups, you likely do not behave the same way every time you are with them. People who lead adaptive change most successfully have a diagnostic mind-set about themselves as well as about the situation. That is, they are continually striving to understand what is going on inside, how they are changing over time, and how they as a system interact with their organization as a system. So how do you maintain a diagnostic mind-set regarding yourself as a system? You need to accept that there are different but authentic selves required for you to be effective in each role you play. You can develop greater freedom by understanding three types of default settings within your system: your loyalties (your feelings of obligation toward your colleagues, community, and important figures from your past feelings that can come into conflict when you are dealing with an adaptive challenge); your personal tuning (how your "harp strings are tuned" to respond to challenges and opportunities. Your tuning includes those things that trigger disproportionate responses in you such as your unmet personal needs, your susceptibility to carrying other people's hopes and expectations, and your level of tolerance for the chaos, conflict, and confusion that accompany adaptive change); your bandwidth (your repertoire of techniques for leading adaptive change and the self-imposed limitation you place on your range of resources by staying in your own comfort zone).

1.2. Identify your loyalties

To better understand yourself as a system, examine three circles of your loyalties:

- Colleagues
- Community
- Ancestors

To identify the factions within each circle of your loyalties, start with your colleagues, move to your community, and end with your ancestors. The process gets increasingly difficult with each category. At times, the loyalties in these categories will pull you in multiple directions.



1.3. Prioritize your loyalties

There are multiple players within each of these loyalty categories. And not all loyalties are equal, of course. Some you honour above others when your loyalties come into conflict. You can help identify your primary loyalties in each category by asking yourself some of these questions: To whom do I feel most responsible? Who would react most vigorously if I did something out of the routine? Whom am I trying hardest to please or impress? Who would I most disappoint? Whose support do I most need? Recognizing how you have prioritized your loyalties is an essential step in exercising adaptive leadership. You will then begin to be able to identify which of those loyalties are holding you, and inhibiting your leadership, rather than you holding them. One of the best ways to diagnose how you have prioritized your loyalties is to rely less on what you say to yourself and others about your loyalties and to begin watching what you do.

1.4. Name your unspeakable loyalties

In any organization or community for which you are trying to exercise adaptive leadership, you own a piece of the problem at hand. If you are part of the organizational system, you must be part of the problem. This does not mean that you are responsible for the whole mess. It only suggests that there is an element of the problem, however small, that stems from what you believe and how you behave, from the loyalties that are holding you. For example, if your organization struggles with being more transparent, you may be contributing to the problem by not sharing information widely about salaries because you know that some people will be angry at you, knowing how much money you make. And you may not like people being angry at you. Typically, the loyalties you have that are getting in the way of the goals you are trying' to accomplish are not ones you tell everyone about. They are not on your résumé. Think of them as unspeakable loyalties; they are just as powerful as the people and values you talk about all the time, but not as apparent. Often these unspeakable loyalties come from some need, protection, or insecurity. They are part of being human and can contribute as forcefully as our noble values to the ways we interact with the world. Identifying your part of the problem, "your piece of the mess", has two key benefits. First, doing so creates the opportunity to fix at least one element of the problem, the one that is more or less under your own control. Second, it models the accountability' you are asking others to demonstrate in tackling the adaptive challenge at hand. Thus it may inspire your colleagues to face up to their uncomfortable loyalties and take responsibility for their own part in those problems. Discovering your piece of the mess is by its very nature an uncomfortable process. You are identifying, and accepting responsibility for, your role in getting in the way of the progress you say you are trying to achieve. The exercises below can help. Answer the following questions to personalize the adaptive challenge.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
What things, if they happened more frequently, or less Frequently, would help make progress on the adaptive challenge I am working on?	What loyalties or values underlie your column 1 responses? For each response in column 1, complete this sentence: « This response Suggests that I am Loyal to … »	Pick the two loyalties or commitments in column 2 that are most important to you. For each of them, answer this question: « What am I doing, or not doing, that is keeping me from more fully honoring this commitment? »	For each behavior you listed in column 3, identify the commitment driving that behavior by completing this sentence: « I may also be loyal to… »	Identify what bad outcomes you are protecting yourself from by engaging in the behaviors you listed in column 3. Ask, « If I did not do (column 3 behavior), then (list of horrible things that would happen). »
Example: We were more open with each other at work.	Example:I am loyal to the value of transparency and to my professional colleagues.	Example: I consistently oppose sharing salary information.	Example: I may Also be loyal to the Value of not having People be angry at Me and the idea That money is a Private matter, Both of which my Spouse deeply Believes in.	Example: people would be angry at me, and my spouse would be embarrassed and eisappointed in me.

2. Know your tuning

How are you tuned is another default setting in the system that is yourself. Each person is like a stringed instrument, tuned in a slightly different way from everyone else. Those strings vibrate continuously, communicating to those around you who you are, what is important to you, where your sensitivities lie, and how you might be vulnerable. For many people, the idea that you are always powerfully influenced by your surroundings and history challenges dearly held notions of free will. Yet if you can get on the balcony and observe the forces acting on you, you actually are exercising free will. You have acknowledged the reality that you are embedded in a web of relationships and are influenced by those relationships, so you create more freedom for yourself to act with understanding of those influences rather than merely to react unthinkingly to them. Like other default settings, your unique tuning is both a resource and constraint. When you are finely tuned to something that is happening, you see it coming before anyone else does. But you may also see things when they are not there. Finally, when others know how you are tuned, they have more power to entice you to partner with them to support their own interests or to derail you from yours. This becomes all the more difficult when current circumstances pluck at your strings so sharply that you react impulsively, causing you to make the wrong diagnosis and take the wrong action. These sharp experiences can evoke something in your past or unrelated issues in your current life, and then completely dominate the present moment. To characterize the power these situations have over you they are called "triggers."

2.1. Know your triggers

Being triggered is a common experience. How often has someone "pushed your buttons" or "hit a nerve"? Your bright, strategic, graceful, attentive self is no longer there, temporarily eclipsed by your more primal, defensive self. If you are good at getting on the balcony, you probably notice when others are being triggered. If you are very good at it, you may notice when you are triggered as well. Recognizing when you are being triggered is the first step at controlling the trigger rather than having it control you and throw you into an unproductive move.

2.2. Pay attention to your hungers and others' expectations

From our experience, there are two categories of triggers to which it is important to pay special attention: hungers and carrying other people's water. Your hungers can make you particularly vulnerable. If you find yourself feeling out of control, irrelevant, or unloved, you can fall prey to people who soothe those unmet needs, either innocently or specifically to manipulate you out of leading an adaptive change intervention that they do not support. From the time we are born, other people load us up with their expectations, their hopes, aspirations, fears, and frustrations. As a young person, you undoubtedly benefited from this, as many of these expectations from parents, teachers, and mentors became sources of wisdom, encouragement, and guidance as you matured and made your way in the world. But when you are an adult, other people's hopes can also take the form of other people's unresolved problems that you unwittingly take on as your own and thereby create enormous vulnerability as you feed their expectations for easy answers. Being inclined to carry other people's water can become a major way that you are tuned. Of course, wanting to ease the load for others you care about is an admirable goal. But when you carry too much of someone else's water or carry the water of too many other people, you will only end up feeling overwhelmed. Understanding what is wearing you down is the first step toward relieving yourself of the burden and getting others to carry their own water.

3. Broaden your bandwidth

In addition to your loyalties and your tuning, your bandwidth— that is, your repertoire of techniques for moving adaptive change forward in your organization—is a key element in the system that is yourself. These techniques span a spectrum, from graceful and inspired rhetoric to in-your-face confrontation. Depending on the situation and people involved, you have to be able to mix and match techniques as needed. That requires a broad bandwidth. As John Wooden, Bobby Knight, and many other great coaches of college and professional sports have suggested, you've got to coach each player differently. Some players are going to require gentle prodding. Others are going to require a lot of hand holding and nursing. And some are going to require a two-by-four.

3.1. Discover your tolerances

Exercising adaptive leadership requires that you be willing and competent at stepping into the unknown and stirring things up. Most people prefer stability to chaos, clarity to confusion, and orderliness to conflict. But to practice leadership, you need to accept that you are in the business of generating chaos, confusion, and conflict, for yourself and others around you. This suggests that building up your tolerance for disorder, ambiguity, and tension are particularly important in leading adaptive change. Your current tolerance constitutes another "string" in how you are tuned. Will you be able to stay in the game, even when you're not sure you are doing the right thing, or doing it the right way? Similarly, how comfortable are you watching or even helping other people fight (constructively, of course) over deeply held values? Expanding your bandwidth is not easy. It means moving out of your comfort zone into a space where your incompetence may show.

4. Understand your roles

Context counts. In addition to your own values, priorities, and sensitivities, you embody your organization's values, priorities, and sensitivities. So does every team or group in the organization. Each person and group contains a piece of the larger picture that is the organizational system. Depending on the situation, different elements become activated at different times. The roles you play and your behavior in those roles depends on the values and context of any given situation. Likewise, in some situations, you may embody the value of equity— for example, by advocating for equal pay for women employees. But in other situations, you may represent the value of courage and risk taking.

4.1. What roles do you play?

Groups of all kinds (families, teams, departments, factions, companies) create clarity and order by assigning roles to members, usually implicitly. In your organization, maybe you were assigned the role of holding people accountable for the bottom line when you were promoted to a vice presidency after being the comptroller. However, you are more than any role assigned to you. And you have some freedom, but not complete freedom, to choose whether and how to play any assigned role. You can also decide to play more roles than those you have been assigned. Whatever role you are playing at any one time, that role does not represent all of who you are, even if it feels that way. You may indeed put your heart and soul into the role, as many people do in the role of parents, for example. But still, the role is not the same as yourself. It is what you're doing at a particular moment in time, hopefully with the purpose of making things better for your family, organization, or community. When you make a distinction between the roles you play and yourself, you gain the emotional strength to ignore personal attacks your opponents hope will stymie your initiative. Distinguishing between your roles and yourself also helps you ward off unwarranted flattery, which is often designed (consciously or not) to lull you into inaction. If the flattery begins to turn into idealization, that is, people really begin to believe that you are indispensable, you're on a slippery slope. Idealization will tempt even the strongest person. To withstand the dependency, it helps to remember that this is a way people displace responsibility onto someone's shoulders when they feel overwhelmed by the challenge at hand. The implicit message is that you have the magic and they do not. So your task then is to stay focused on developing distributed responsibility for others to come up with new experiments and new solutions. Adaptive leadership generates capacity, not dependency.

4.2. Identify your scope of authority

In every role you play, whether in your professional, personal, or civic life, you have a scope of both formal and informal authority. Your scope of formal authority consists of what your formal authorizers (usually those above you in the hierarchy) have authorized you to do, what they expect you to do, and how they expect you to do it. In addition to your formal authorizers, you have informal authorizers. They may be people lateral to and below you on the organization chart, people above you who do not have formal authority over you, and people outside your organization, all of whom look to you in some way to meet their needs and whose support you may need to accomplish your job. Your scope of informal authority is not spelled out anywhere. And your formal scope of authority probably does not map exactly to this informal authority. As you begin to map your own authorizing environment, laying out your various authorizers and their expectations for you, you may see your professional life becoming more complicated if these various groups have conflicting views about your scope of authority. The wider your scope of informal authority in any of your roles, the better positioned you are to achieve your objectives because there is greater likelihood that those circles will overlap. Diagnosing your scope of authority helps you discern people's expectations, assess your resources and latitude for authorized action, and answer a host of important practical questions, such as whether you are the best person to intervene in a particular situation, what allies you will need, whether the time is right, which issues to tackle first, where the land mines are likely to be, and which tactics are most likely to succeed. The diagnosis of your authorizing environment also reveals ideas for further enhancing your informal authority. Finally, understanding your scope of authority helps you more easily manage the emotional baggage you may carry when it comes to dealing with authority figures. Negative experiences with authority figures in the past can leave scars that affect our dealings with those in authority in the present. By mapping your scope of authority, you begin to see people in authority not as obstacles or threats but as parts of a larger system in which they carry a mixed load of heavy expectations.

Authorization chart

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Authorizer	Formal authorization	Informal authorization	Potential boundary of their authorization of you	Signs of limits to their authorization of you
Boss				
Peers (may be multiple scopes of authority from different factions of peers)				
Subordinates				
Spouse				
Externals (such as customers and suppliers)				
Friends				
Others?				

5. Articulate your purposes

Taking on adaptive challenges is difficult and dangerous work. The only reason you would want to do this kind of work is to serve purposes that matter to you deeply. Identifying your higher (orienting) purpose—figuring out what is so important to you that you would be willing to put yourself in peril—is a key element in the process of understanding yourself as a system. Your purposes help you allocate your time. At the end of each day, you can ask yourself, "What did I do today to further my purposes?" But purposes are not static. Your orienting purpose may change as circumstances change. For example, there may be times when you are willing to put your professional life at risk in order to nurture your personal and family life. At other times, you may decide to make personal relationships less of a priority so you can respond to a professional purpose that seems overriding. How do you know what your orienting purpose is at a particular point in time? Again, a useful strategy is to watch what you do, rather than listen to what you say. Think about the choices you've made recently, not just big decisions, but also small daily decisions that reveal patterns when seen over time. In defining direction in your setting, you can move up and down levels of abstraction to test the coherence of your organization, from its orienting values and mission to its daily tasks and operating culture. You can then find your place in it and see if your role makes sense. At the higher levels of abstraction, the folks at the accounting firm talk about “being the world’s premier firm” by providing services that are highly valued by clients. Move to a less abstract level, and the purpose becomes more strategically defined: “In light of the changing and challenging business environment, we need to have deeper personal engagement with our clients so the firm can move from a purveyor of products to a provider of trusted counsel on clients’ most complex financial challenges.” At that level, everyone in the company can begin to assess what they do every day and how well it serves that purpose. Exercising adaptive leadership is at its heart about giving meaning to your life beyond your own ambition.

5.1. Prioritize your purposes

You probably have multiple purposes, each of which matters to you. And understandably, you probably want to think that you are honoring all of your purposes, all the time. But like our loyalties, our purposes are not created equal: some of them mean more to us than others at particular times. And prioritizing them can be trying. But taking real risks on behalf of one of them reveals to you and the world that the others are less important to you, at least at that moment.

5.2. Test the story you tell yourself

Stories are the explanations you tell yourself and often to others to show why things happen the way they do and to convey their meaning. Take the perspective that people don't live in reality—we live in the story we tell ourselves about reality. When you tell your stories to others, such as colleagues, family, and members of your community, the stories also let you explain your actions to these loyalty groups in ways that make you appear sensible, acceptable, or impressive to them, or at least provide a rational explanation for the situation and your role in it. To lead effectively, you have to make your stories explicit and then test their underlying assumptions against reality. What other possible explanations for the current situation might there be? In what ways does your explanation serve some of your needs? How might you test it and then revise the assumption and tell yourself a different story? With enough practice at testing and revising the assumptions underlying your stories, you become open to more interpretations of the dynamics and events around you. You thus open yourself to a wider range of possible courses of action. Equally important, you create stories that do more than rationalize tough situations.

IV. Deploy yourself

Adaptive leadership takes you out of your daily routine into unknown territory, requiring ways of acting that are outside your repertoire, with no guarantee of your competence or your success. It puts you at risk because you cannot rely on the tried-and-true expertise and know-how you use for tackling technical problems. And as a consequence, you cannot take on an adaptive challenge without making some changes, some adaptations, yourself. Part V is about the types of adaptations you might need to make.

There is a bit of a paradox here. On the one hand, you are trying to lead on behalf of something you believe in that is beyond your individual interest. On the other hand, in order to be most effective in doing so, you need to pay attention to how you manage, use, gratify, and deploy yourself. You need to recognize that you are moving into an unknown space and then act accordingly. It is not self-indulgence; it is smart leadership.

1. Stay connected to your purposes

Your purposes provide the inspiration and the direction for your actions. There are five practices to keep your purposes alive as you lead adaptive change.

1.1. Negotiate the ethics of leadership and purpose

A question permeates this book: "In what new ways of thinking and acting are you willing to engage on behalf of what you believe most deeply?" That question in turn raises the corollary: "What will you not do on behalf of what you believe most deeply?" For example, is it ethical to communicate a greater level of confidence in an initiative than you actually have in order to encourage the enthusiasm needed for the effort? How do you calibrate appropriate lines to draw? If you would engage in this level of deception but your colleague would not, does that make her "more ethical" than you or just less effective? There are three ways to think about these issues.

- First, calculate your intervention's potential damage to others. Many adaptive change efforts create losses, if not casualties, but the extent of the damage wrought raises ethical questions. Just how much damage are you willing to inflict? Few people enjoy causing others pain, even for noble purposes. Yet those who practice adaptive leadership must invite into their lives the discomfort that comes with knowing that their good works are causing distress (or worse) for other people.
- Second, assess the damage to your self-image and your espoused values. To what extent would leading an adaptive change initiative in certain ways violate your loyalties and long-held values that guide the way you behave and treat people? To lead successfully may demand that you take actions that do not feel right to you (even if you have the capacity for the behavior).
- Third, keep the question itself alive in all its forms. Do the means justify the ends in this instance? What data am I using to evaluate the consequences? On whom and on what processes of reality testing can I rely to keep me from self-deception and rationalization? How will these short-term decisions generate longer-term consequences? By keeping your heart and mind open to these questions, you increase the odds of taking thoughtful risks and fewer regrettable decisions.

Worksheet: Serving your purpose

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Things I'm doing now:	New things I might do:	Things I'd never do:

1.2. Keep purposes alive

Our purposes often become eclipsed by everyday tasks, crises, and requests from colleagues. When you lose touch with your purposes, you lose your capacity for finding meaning in your life. So it is vital to connect your everyday life with your sense of purpose. You can help maintain this connection through physical reminders and rituals.

- *Physical reminders*. A physical object that you see every day can remind you of the reasons you seek to lead in spite of the difficulties.
- *Rituals*. Every organization of human beings has rituals, practices repeated over and over again that become part of the cultural DNA; for example, the way people begin staff meetings, socialize new hires, cluster into the same groups at lunch, and gather around the water cooler after a meeting ends.

1.3. Negotiate your purposes

You have a particular mix of purposes and priorities for your organization, your vision of where you think the enterprise should move. But many purposes are alive and well in the organization, most notably those espoused by different members of the board and other senior authorities. Your purposes may differ from those other purposes. Adaptive leadership often requires reconciling those differences so that multiple purposes do not cancel each other out. To manage this process, you need to understand others' purposes. You also have to put your purposes out there and let others chew on them and challenge them. That means accepting that to make progress in the directions you deeply want, you may end up in a different place than your original purposes would have taken you. For example, the vice president for environmental affairs in an automobile company may feel passionately committed to the development and production of green cars, but may have to accede to the competing commitment to short-term profitability needed to keep the company alive. Many people avoid this process of negotiating purposes entirely. Compromise feels like disloyalty to their purposes and to the individuals who share and support those priorities. It is hard to decide which parts of your purposes are negotiable and which are not. Another way to negotiate your purposes so that others support them is to translate them into a language that others understand and respond to favorably. Translating your purposes for others becomes even more critical when you are presenting them to people who oppose them. In addition to negotiating and translating your purposes, you need to make them tangible. That means being specific about their operational implications: objectives, plans, strategy, timelines, and so forth. Important purposes take time. You are not abandoning your purposes when you take an angled step toward them rather than move along a straight line.

1.4. Integrate your ambitions and aspirations

You can have both ambitions and aspirations, and you can actively serve both. The best presidents of the United States have been highly ambitious men, skilled in the political artistry required for public leadership. They have also had noble aspirations for doing what was best for their country. Their ambitions and aspirations were integrated, not mutually exclusive. In the business world, people are just as capable of integrating their ambitions and their aspirations as in politics. Of course, at times you will have to make trade-offs between your ambitions and aspirations. Temper the guilt you may harbor regarding your ambitions and the embarrassment you may feel about your aspirations.

1.5. Avoid common traps

Your purposes provide the inspiration and energy you need to survive leadership's choppy ride. But they can also become a constraint if you fall into one or more common traps. The traps are:

- *Going blind and deaf.* The passion and commitment that flow from having noble purposes can also make you blind and deaf.
  The more single-minded you become, the more difficult it will be to see and hear contrary data and to notice signals suggesting the need for amendment and midcourse correction.
- *Becoming a martyr*. People who have a noble purpose to which they are solidly committed are vulnerable to dying unnecessarily for that purpose.
- *Appearing self-righteous*. If you are loudly and relentlessly certain you are on the right path, you may come across as self-righteous. And that can trigger resistance in others.
- *Being the self-appointed chief purpose officer*. Reminding people in your group or organization of the collective, larger purpose behind a major intervention is important when you are leading adaptive change. But do not overdo it. Some day-to-day events and decisions are just not related to the group's overarching purpose.

2. Engage courageously

2.1. Get past the past

To lead adaptive change, you have to refashion loyalties; that is, have a conversation both in your heart and in person with people to whom you have loyalty in which you explain to them why the current situation requires you to sift through their expectations of you, honoring many of them but not all. That can be difficult at best, dangerous at worst. In leading adaptive change in your own organization, your loyalties influence the questions you ask, the possibilities you entertain, and the views you are willing to hear. Loyalties powerfully affect, sometimes in unproductive ways, the way you interpret the problem at hand and the actions you decide to take. How can you ease the constraint presented by your loyalties?

- *Step 1: Watch for Gaps between your words and actions*
- *Step 2: Stay in the present:* When you hear yourself justifying your own current attitude or behavior based on something that happened a long time ago, you are likely having trouble putting the past to rest.
- *Step 3: Identify the Loyalties You Need to Refashion:* Determine the expectations of specific colleagues, community members, and ancestors that you will need to revisit and possibly refashion to create for yourself the latitude to deviate from the past and move forward.
- *Step 4: Conduct the Needed Conversations:* Go to these individuals and discuss how you need some of their expectations to change. Some of these conversations will be difficult. You will be asking people to tolerate behavior on your part that violates the spoken or unspoken contract that exists between you.
- *Step 5: Create Rituals for Refashioning Ancestor Loyalties:* If the conversation you need to have is with a deceased ancestor or with a faction you can no longer reach, create a ritual that will help you put the unproductive aspects of that loyalty behind you. Throw away the book or the memento that symbolizes that loyalty. Go to the person's grave site and let the person know that you are going to breach aspects of what you understand to be the contract. Apologize, and ask for forgiveness even though you know there will be no verbal response. Write a letter, explaining why you have to do what you have to do.
- *Step 6: Focus on What You Are Conserving:* Remind yourself that you are remaining true to core principles and values even as you depart from perspectives that are no longer healthy. You are not throwing over all of those loyalties, just the elements of them that are impeding your progress. Even if people are accusing you of betrayal, in time they may come to realize how hard you have tried to honor your loyalty to what is essential and enduring in their perspectives.

2.2. Lean into your incompetence

Leading adaptive change requires you to step beyond your default behaviors into an unknown situation and to learn something new. That means experiencing a period of incompetence. How do you lean into your own incompetence, so you can put yourself into a state of discovery?

- *Find structured and challenging learning opportunities:* To diminish the common experience of disorientation and embarrassment as you move past your frontier of competence, find opportunities to try your hand at developing a set of demanding new skills in a structured, safe environment that has nothing to do with the adaptive challenges in your professional or vocational life. Find a low-risk context in which to experience being incompetent. Seek out challenging new ideas. New ideas exist everywhere, in every bookstore and every place where people are sharing their viewpoints and insights. Look into a discipline other than your own. When you learn about several different disciplines, you can begin to think in terms of metaphors, see how ideas, inventions, and findings in one area of expertise can be applied in another.
- *Reframe truths as assumptions:* Every day you make sense out of reality by connecting facts together and interpreting those facts to create stories. In stories you tell about the challenges facing your organization, or about a change initiative you would like to lead, the same process of making meaning unfolds. Because you choose which facts to highlight and include in your story and what those facts mean to you, your story is just one possible "truth" about reality. Other people will construct different stories by selecting different facts about the same challenge or initiative, or by selecting the same facts as you but interpreting them differently. Result? A large number of different "truths." Treating stories as truths blinds us to the possibility of alternative versions of reality. That in turn prevents us from connecting with other people where they are, and generating the widest set of options for action. To lean into your incompetence, practice viewing your stones about reality as just that, stories, and treating them as assumptions, not truths. Then test those assumptions, and revise them if your findings suggest that they are not quite on target. The two factions arguing over the compensation system might be able to get together to devise a low-risk test to see which assumption is closer to the mark.

2.3. Fall in love with tough decisions

Leadership is a difficult practice personally because it almost always requires you to make a challenging adaptation yourself. When you take responsibility for the choices you make, you understand a little more about who you are. Choices between values are not matters of right and wrong, but moments of clarification, painful as those choices may be to make. The sign of being an adult is saying a hard no once a day. Saying a hard no is a clarifying act, a step toward self-knowledge, a commitment to stand up for something even when it is hard to do so. Finding the joy in making such a personal, purposeful declaration is the flip side of grieving for what you will have give up to lead adaptive change. How do you strengthen your capacity to embrace the tough decisions that come with leading adaptive change?

- Accept that you are going to have to make some tough decisions your whole life.
- Nothing is forever. Rework your decision. If you are struggling with a decision, then all the options likely have some merit.
- Tough does not necessarily mean important. Fortunately, few decisions are so important that everything depends on them.

What makes a tough decision?

Characteristic	Example
It is a close call	Two potential interventions for tackling a particular adaptive challenge have different (and seemingly equally important) strengths and weaknesses. And you can implement only one of them.
You must choose between the known and the unknown	You believe things could be better. But you know the current reality, how to navigate it, how to make it work for you, what the rules and rewards are. The other choice, the unknown, is a mystery. It might be better, but it might be worse. So you cannot decide whether to embark on a change initiative.
Doing the right thing would incur significant losses	The intervention you have in mind for tackling an adaptive challenge will incur losses for you and/or those around you. You are not sure whether those losses will be worth it, or whether you are capable of managing the casualties. For example, you believe you need to divest a business division that's underperforming. But you are worried that the resulting layoff would seriously erode morale in the rest of the organization.
Several of your values are in conflict	Several values that you believe in strongly are in conflict, and you would need to subordinate one of them to move your change initiative forward. For example, you believe in consensus decision making, but your team is deadlocked on an issue that is critical to the future.

2.4. Get permission to fail

Sometimes people hold back from leading adaptive change because they just cannot tolerate knowing that they might fail. Lowering your standards will not help you lead adaptive change, because leading adaptive change requires an experimental mind-set, involves risk, and brings the real possibility of failure. So you need to give yourself permission to fail.

- Broaden your definition of success on a particular adaptive change intervention. Judge your initiative on criteria beyond the binary "it worked" or "it did not work."
- Prepare your constituents. Manage the expectations of those around you to prepare the ground for possible failure of your effort.
- Conduct small experiments. Small failures are easier to stomach than large, expensive ones.

2.5. Build the stomach for the journey

Adaptive work generates what can feel like maddening digressions, detours, and pettiness. People often lose sight of what is truly at stake or resort to creative tactics to maintain equilibrium in the short run. All of this can leave you deeply discouraged. Building resilience is similar to training for a marathon. Marathoners in training use benchmarks. You can track your progress if you have clearly defined short-term goals along the way. To further build your stomach for the adaptive leadership journey, keep reminding yourself of your purposes. Runners look forward, not down. Building a strong stomach requires relentlessness. You probably have a limit to how hard you are willing to push an initiative forward. If opponents of your intervention sense that limit, they will know exactly how hard they have to resist. One of the best practitioners of leadership used to say at the beginning of tough meetings when everyone knew this was going to be a difficult conversation, "I am willing to stay in this meeting as long as necessary." Leading adaptive change will almost certainly test the limits of your patience. Where are you supposed to find the necessary patience? You can find it by tapping into your ability to feel compassion for others involved in the change effort. Compassion comes from understanding other people's dilemmas, being aware of how much you are asking of them. Your awareness of their potential losses will calm you down and give you patience as they travel a journey that may be more difficult for them than it is for you.

3. Inspire people

Do you inspire people? The root of the word inspire means to take breath in, to fill with spirit. Inspiration is the capacity to move people by reaching in and filling their hearts from deeper sources of meaning. To lead your organization through adaptive change, you need the ability to inspire. Adaptive challenges involve values, not simply facts or logic. And resolving them engages people's beliefs and loyalties, which lie in their hearts, not their heads. Inspiration is not an innate capacity reserved for the rare and gifted charismatic individual. To see that everyone already has this capacity, take a walk through the children's unit of a hospital, and the everyday ability of people to inspire will surround you. With practice, anyone can strengthen this skill and deploy it for leadership. As an inspirational person, you must speak with a unique voice shaped by the purposes that move you, the particular challenges facing your organization and world, and your own style of communication. The way you connect contributes to your unique voice. Some conditions require inspiration: when people have forgotten their purpose, when factions are reaching the limits of their tolerance for each other, when the community is beginning to lose hope, or when a better future is beyond anyone's imagination. At those crucial moments, your inspiration taps hidden reserves of promise that sustain people through times that induce despair. You enable people to envision a future that sustains the best from their past while also holding out new possibilities.

3.1. Be with your audience

In leading adaptive change, you ask people to open their hearts to you and the purposes that you believe you share with them. Demonstrate the same openness to them and their sense of purpose. Don't resent them when you deliver a message that isn't easy for them to hear and their eyes begin to glaze over or they resist. In addition to hearing your own emotions, listen for signs that there is something else going on in the group beneath what people are saying. Think about what that something else might be. The art is to listen for the subtext, the song beneath the words, to identify what is really at stake for the others. What is causing the distress you are hearing? What conflicts or contradictions in your group's values or current way of working does this distress represent? What is the history of these contradictions and conflicts? What perspectives do the senior authorities in the group embody, according to the various factions now in conflict? In what ways are the emotions you're sensing mirroring a problem in the larger environment? Here are some guidelines for strengthening your ability to listen from the heart.

- *Listen with Curiosity and Compassion, Beyond Judgment:* It is not enough to say, "I hear what you are saying," or to repeat it back. Try to "walk in their shoes" to feel something akin to what they are feeling, and then tell them what you have come to understand.
- *Allow for Silence:* Most people who get neutralized in leading adaptive change go down with their mouths open. They get taken out of action because they keep talking beyond the point where key parties are listening. People rarely get taken out because they have spent too much time listening. How tolerant are you of silence? People differ in how much silence they can stand before they feel compelled to say something. But silence has a purpose. Silence gives people time to absorb what you have just said. Silence is also useful for holding people's attention, particularly when you are in the authority role. Silence also has content. Silence can contain tension, relief, peace, or curiosity.
- *Resist the pressure to fill the vacuum when you are in authority:* Listening from the heart is particularly difficult when you are in a position of authority. Indeed, by the time you rise through the organizational or political system to a higher-level role you have probably been trained to talk more than listen. You may feel a lot of pressure to fill that vacuum when there are long silences during a gathering at which you are the authority figure. It is hard to keep sitting with the silence; holding steady is not what the people around you want or expect. You are the one who is supposed to come up with decisive direction, whether you have it or not, and whether or not your answer would help your group tackle the challenge at hand.

3.2. Speak from the heart

In addition to listening from the heart (understanding what others are feeling), inspiring people calls for you to speak from the heart (expressing what you are feeling). If you care deeply about the challenges facing people, find a way to tell them. You need to be moved yourself at the same time you seek to move others. Why speak from the heart? It communicates the values at stake, the reasons that make it worthwhile for people to suffer and stay in the game. It sustains them through the ebb and flow of hope and despair that often come when people tackle tough challenges. Your ability to speak from the heart is reflected just as much in the "music" of your voice and your demeanor as it is in the particular words you say. Speaking from the heart requires being in touch with your own values, beliefs, and emotions. Yet in your professional life, this may conflict with pressures to be rational - that is, to "be in your head." But when you are leading people through adaptive change, it is their hearts (not their heads) that hold them back. And they will not let you into their hearts if you are not willing to let them into yours. So when you are leading adaptive change, you need to open up more of yourself than you might usually display in a professional setting.

How do you open yourself in this way? Being on the edge of your own comfort zone emotionally may make you feel at risk of being out of control. But putting yourself out there in that way also enables you to engage your listeners' hearts.

- *Hold yourself and others through the emotion:* When you are speaking from the heart, you are allowing yourself to be moved in the service of moving others. But this requires holding yourself and your audience through the emotion. What does this mean? Many people rupture the moment by stopping or holding back and repressing the feeling when they are suddenly overcome with emotion during a presentation. Some even prematurely end the speech and walk offstage or out of the meeting room. The challenge is to allow yourself to be emotional while also seeing your presentation through. By doing this, you let your listeners know that the situation is containable, that you can stay with the emotion and that therefore they can, too. You give your audience permission to also be moved by permitting yourself to both feel the emotion and remain poised, even as you might momentarily appear overcome. Rudolph Giuliani illustrated this ability when he spoke so plainly and truly to the tragedy of 9/11. At times, his voice broke with emotion, which, as New Yorkers knew, was uncharacteristic of their tough mayor. Yet he kept speaking despite his emotion. And by so doing, he gave voice to millions of people's experience. That inspired them to find meaning in their despair and sustain hope.
- *Speak musically:* As infants, we interpret messages from our parents and elder siblings through the tone of their voices and the modulation of sound and silence. One way you can inspire people is to speak musically, attending to a number of aspects of your voice, such as cadence, pitch, volume, and tone. You may tend to use your voice differently when you are in a position of authority than when you are a subordinate or peer. This will be shaped by the culture you live in. In contrast, when you are not in a position of authority, you may worry that no one is listening to you. When you are the authority figure facing an adaptive situation, you have four basic choices: you can be strong in both your tone and message (the usual default), tentative in both tone and message (rare), tentative in just the tone of your message, or tentative in just the content of your message. Be tentative in only the content of your message. Your challenge is to speak with that authoritative presence people want to see so they can be reassured that what you are asking them to do can be done. But don't just make authoritative pronouncements and assertions, caving in to pressure to reduce the disequilibrium and provide certain answers. Instead, raise questions in a calm, assertive way, authoritatively claiming the challenge and legitimizing the uncertainty inherent in the adaptive process of discovering and implementing new solutions. When you are leading change without authority, the task is the same, though your challenge will be different. You may find it easy to raise questions without having answers, but resist the urge to become overly strident or urgent (or unduly self-effacing) because you think people are not going to listen to you otherwise. Instead, assume that people are going to listen to you otherwise. Instead, assume that people are going to listen, and imagine that they will be paying attention. People tune out when a speaker starts talking in an overly urgent, anxious tone. If you are confident that people are going to listen to you, then you will naturally sound confident. And people listen to those who are confident.
- *Make Each Word Count:* In speaking from the heart, make each word count, clearly communicating the one overarching point that you care most about and making one supporting point at a time. However impressive and credible you may sound by making many points at once, people cannot generally absorb rapid-fire arguments. Making each word count also means understanding and using wisely the different meanings that certain words can have. Value-laden or historically weighted words will touch on many of the sensitivities that need to be engaged if your group hopes to tackle the adaptive challenge at hand, but they can also backfire if you activate these sensitivities unwittingly and don't then follow through artfully. Knowing whether you have selected the right word for your intended meaning is a process of trial and error. People tend to choose their words intuitively, based on the meanings a word has for them. But a particular word may have different connotations for different listeners. Discover which words will produce which reactions by saying them and then observing your audience.

4. Run experiments

Everything you do in leading adaptive change is an experiment. Many people, however, choose not to see it that way, feeling and succumbing to the enormous pressure to produce certain results from their actions. Framing everything as an experiment offers you more running room to try new strategies, to ask questions, to discover what's essential, what's expendable, and what innovation can work. In addition, an experimental frame creates permission and therefore some protection when you fail. When you view leadership as an experiment, you free yourself to see any change initiative as an educated guess, something that you have decided to try but that does not require you to put en immovable stake in the ground. Your intervention is evidence of your commitment to your purposes, but it is not your final word on how to get from here to there. When you are at a meeting, practice using an experimental mind-set. Resist chasing after every idea you throw out there, every plan you suggest, or every intervention you make. Do not rush to defend or explain. Present an idea, then stand back and observe what the group does or does not do with it. To suggest you bring an experimental mind-set to work does not mean you must always tell everyone that you are running an experiment. Particularly if you are in a senior authority role, people will be looking for answers and clarity. They may be highly uncomfortable with the fact that you are not absolutely certain your initiative will work out well for them, especially if it calls for significant sacrifice on their part. So you may have to calibrate how much of your experimental mind-set you want to share with those you are seeking to lead through adaptive change. If you think people will support an initiative framed as an experiment, call it an experiment. If you think the only way to get people on board is to make them believe your idea will work, you may have to call it a solution, express your confidence in it, but be prepared to explain. You have to manage expectations according to the situation, disabusing people of the certainty they may need at a rate they can absorb. Here are two rules of thumb as guidelines to determine whether you should frame your intervention as an experiment or a solution:

- If your organization or community is in a state of emergency and the level of distress has reached overwhelming proportions. Frame your effort as a solution rather than an experiment. But you have to quickly manage the unrealistic expectations you've just reinforced. So as soon as the acute distress abates, start informing people that midcourse corrections will be necessary as results (including possibly unintended outcomes) become apparent. Moreover, use the aftermath of the emergency to help people understand that the acute phase of the crisis was merely a symptom of an adaptive challenge. Explain that as the real underlying problem comes into focus, they will need to make additional (and perhaps even more difficult) changes.
- If your group or organization is not in a state of emergency or overwhelming disequilibrium. Frame the effort as an experiment (for example, a pilot project) from the outset. Except in desperate circumstances, people will be more willing to explore new and untested options when their level of distress is not too high.

Overall experiment and take smart risks smartly: when you are dealing with adaptive challenges, there is no obvious answer to the question “What is going on here?” Trying to define the problem at hand is a contentious act in itself. Managing this ambiguity requires courage, tenacity, and an experimental mind-set: you try things out, see what happens, and make changes accordingly. Live life as a leadership laboratory. Opportunities to exercise adaptive leadership come before you every day. They come at home with your family; at your workplace; and in your civic, religious, and community life. Look for them, and try to take advantage of them.

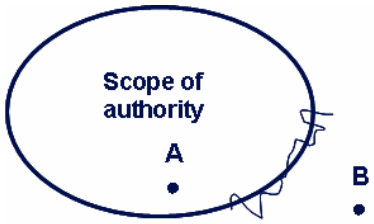
4.1. Take more risks

An experimental mind-set will mean taking greater risks than you are used to taking. Suppose that previously you have been willing to take, say 50-50 risks on behalf of an important purpose. That is, you were just as likely to succeed as to fail. If you changed that ratio to, say, 45-55 risks, where the likelihood of failure was slightly more than the likelihood of success, you would be exercising leadership in situations where you would have held back in the past. Summon up the courage to engage in riskier behavior on behalf of issues you care deeply about. Confront the fear that understandably has been holding you back and test the limits for your tolerance and your concerns about worst-case scenarios. Start wherever you are on the risk-averse spectrum. This does not mean you should go from 50-50 to 10-90 odds. Just increase your tolerance for a slightly higher level of risk taking than what you have been comfortable with before.

4.2. Exceed your authority

Thoughtfully exceed your authority. The exercise of adaptive leadership is dangerous in part because you always dance on the edge of your scope of authority, at least with respect to some of your authorizers— whether they are your superiors, peers, subordinates, or people outside your organization. You push the limits of what others think you ought to be doing. The need to go beyond what you are authorized to do, both formally and informally, is what distinguishes adaptive leadership from good management But it is tricky. Your authorizers may experience you as subversive when you deliberately exceed your authority. But unless you purposefully and carefully dance on the edge of your scope of authority and risk the pushback, you may never move your organization or community forward through adaptive change.

As long as your authorizers can keep you in the box they want you to stay in, real, deep change will not happen; your authorizers are the architects of the status quo. They want solutions at a minimum cost to them. Exceeding your scope of authority is difficult in another respect: you can never be certain where the boundary lies. The extent of your authority was probably never articulated in precise terms when you were hired or promoted. Your first sense of encountering a boundary to your authority likely came when you started doing something you thought you were supposed to be doing and someone said, "That's not what you were hired to do." Sometimes people with the most investment in the status quo will tell you that “you’re pushing things too hard” when you are actually well within your scope of authority (point A in the figure). And sometimes people who would like to see you fail (and those who want you to keep shouldering the difficult work for them) will encourage you to keep going when you are so far outside your scope that you are vulnerable to being taken out (point B in the figure). The challenge is further complicated because the boundary is not fixed in stone. The only way you know that you are dancing on the edge of your scope of authority is by the degree of resistance you encounter when you make a move. No resistance means that the status quo is holding its own, which in turn suggests that you are not really exercising adaptive leadership. Some resistance suggests that you are on the edge of your scope of authority. And intense resistance indicates that you have moved way beyond the boundary of what people expect you to do.



4.3. Turn up the heat

Most people do not aspire to the role of troublemaker. Exercising adaptive leadership more often than you currently do inevitably will expose you to just that charge. That is particularly true when you raise the heat in your organization by focusing people's attention on issues and responsibilities they find troubling and therefore avoid. At times, turning up the heat is essential for leading adaptive change, even if you are labeled a troublemaker. Adjust the heat in your group or organization and test how far you can push people to stimulate the changes you believe are necessary for progress.

4.4. Name your piece of the mess

Identify your contribution to the difficulty your organization has in doing its adaptive work and acknowledge it to others. Demonstrate that you take responsibility for your piece of the mess, that you are willing to make tough sacrifices, just as you are asking them to do. For example, a CEO who takes a significant pay cut when asking employees to forgo some benefits they thought were secure is much more likely to have a receptive hearing for his proposed changes. You send a powerful message that you are in the same game with the people you are trying to move when you name your piece of the mess and make painful sacrifices yourself.

4.5. Display your own incompetence

You may have risen in the ranks in part because you can solve people's problems and provide answers. People who give you authority, formal and informal, from whatever direction, do not want you to display your ignorance or incompetence. But no one learns anything by repressing their ignorance or incompetence. And when people in an organization do not push past the frontier of their competence, they do not learn what it will take to resolve the adaptive challenges facing them. You need to make the first move to foster a culture of learning. You can do this by experimenting with displaying your own incompetence. Acknowledge what you do not know, or explicitly try on a new role where everyone knows you are new to that effort. By doing this, you let people know you are willing to do whatever it takes to master the new skills needed to tackle your organization's thorniest challenges. And you inspire them to adopt the same openness and courage to push the frontier.

5. Thrive

Take care of yourself not as an indulgence, but to help ensure that the purposes you join have the best chance of being achieved, and that you are still around to enjoy the fruits of your labors.

5.1. Grow your personal support network

Without moral support and counsel from others, you become vulnerable to your own weaknesses and to opponents who are challenged by your perspective. Resilience comes not only from your inner "shock absorbers," but also from sustaining relationships. Cultivate a personal support network outside of the system you are trying to change. You can do this in three ways:

- *Finding confidants:* Confidants can take the form of close friends, family members, consultants, coaches, or therapists. They help you distinguish your role from yourself and tell you when you are falling into a default mode of operating that will not help advance your purposes. Share your vulnerability with your confidants to get the most useful support from them, difficult as that may be for you. This is essential. You might test the waters by sharing one or two smaller vulnerabilities or uncertainties and then go further.
- *Satisfying your hungers outside work:* If you satisfy your hungers in your private life, you will not be as likely to act them out in your organization. If you yearn to be liked, for example, you will be more likely to back down from an aggressive opponent, unless you have other reasons to do so. Having family, loved ones, friends, and support systems from your community can aid you in staying purposeful and productive on days when you feel like you're walking on a high wire. With your hungers satisfied and under control, you can focus on the work at hand when you go into the office, rather than look around for other sources of warmth, recognition, or praise.
- *Anchoring yourself in multiple communities:* Leading an adaptive change effort will take everything you are willing to give it, all your time, energy, attention, and care. The environment you are immersed in will not set the boundaries for you. Anchor yourself in a number of communities outside of your organization, such as family life, sports, hobbies, civic organizations, and spiritual communities to keep the effort from consuming you. Getting involved in these communities brings an additional benefit as well: you gain multiple insights and skills that you can bring to the adaptive work of your organization.

5.2. Create a personal holding environment

Your body is essential. You need stamina, and for the practice of leadership, you need to be in close enough touch with your body so that you can read yourself for clues to the emotional undercurrents in the system in which you are taking action. You cannot use yourself as a mirror for the dynamics in the system if you are not in tune with your body. When you are in the midst of a leadership initiative, you are taking on additional stress. During those times, what may seem like expendable luxuries of self-care - like going on regular walks, workouts, or dates - are in fact essential. You owe them to yourself, and to the purposes for which you are trying to lead. Do you regularly cordon off some space and time to reflect on what has happened over the past few days and prepare yourself for what lies ahead? Sanctuaries can be anything that works for you: a couple of hours on a Sunday night to set priorities for the week, a long walk every Friday at lunchtime to clear your head and transition into the weekend, a half hour of meditation every morning, or a house in which to worship with your community. A sanctuary provides the opportunity for you to get away from conflict and recalibrate your own internal responses. Sanctuaries not only help you process your professional challenges, they enable you to restore yourself. Sanctuaries are spaces (physical or mental) where you can hear yourself think, recover yourself from your work, and feel the quieter inclinations of your spirit.

5.3. Renew yourself

Thriving is much more than survival; thriving means growing and prospering in new and challenging environments. To thrive you need resilience (shock absorbers to remain steady over the bumps of the journey), robust strength (health and stamina), and renewal. Renewal is an active process of removing the plaque of tough experiences and scars from the journey and returning to the core of your values and being. Renewal requires transformation of the heart and guts as well as the head.

How do you renew yourself to thrive in a rapidly changing environment?

- *Have a balanced portfolio:* Invest your need for meaning in your life in more that one place. Look for meaning in multiple places in both your personal and your professional life. Find it in your community life and in the care you take to exercise your mind and body to keep them both functioning at a high level as you grow older. Find it in the friendships that sustain you at difficult moments and provide a means to share and amplify your life's joys.
- *Find satisfaction daily and locally:* Don't get lost in the grandiosity of your dreams. There is tension between the grand visionary expeditions that touch your heart and the tangible small transformations you have the opportunity to make every day. Pay attention to what you are doing to improve the lives of people within your personal reach. It will take more than a lifetime to achieve your highest and most noble aspirations for your community, your organization, and the world. Yet, you can accomplish something in the right direction every day, in the micro-interactions between you and the people who work with you, in the empathy you display for that telephone solicitor who interrupts your dinner but is just trying to make a living and feed a family, in the way you model in front of your children the values you espouse to and for them. From that vantage point, you can see the impact of what you do and be renewed to the present moment and its meaning, and thereby thrive in the locality of your day.
- *Be coolly realistic and unwaveringly optimistic:* Practice both optimism and realism. Some people would have you choose one or the other. Believing in one or both is a choice. By holding on to them both, by being unwaveringly optimistic and coolly realistic at the same time, you keep that optimism from floating off into naïveté and the realism from devolving into cynicism. Some groups and individuals are able to retain their optimism in the journey despite frustration and setbacks. How do they keep optimism alive? First, they take time to renew their faith that things do not have to be the way they are. They find ways to be reminded that, though they live in a complex environment with rich histories and pressures, different and better is possible. They do not have to settle. Second, they maintain the self-discipline to reflect on their efforts, when they work out and when they do not, as they engage. They expect to make mistakes and they give themselves permission to keep learning in action. And third, they stay alive to the opportunity to contribute—to add value to the lives of other people— every day. The best of them keep finding ways to give and love right up to their last days when people around them learn from them how to bless one another and say good-bye.