



Written by Cris Wildermuth, Ed.D.

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The content of this booklet is adapted from *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky



Building an Adaptive Culture

LEADERSHIP CAPACITY: FOCUS ON BUILDING THE FUTURE



The Situation

I designed this booklet to help you apply the concepts of this class to other situations you may encounter as a leader. First, use the space below to describe your leadership situation:



Building an Adaptive Culture

LEARNING: DO NOT SETTLE FOR CURRENT KNOWLEDGE



Building an Adaptive Culture

INDEPENDENCE: PEOPLE SEEK THEIR OWN ANSWERS



The Stakeholders

Describe the key groups of stakeholders in your situation.



The Challenge

What adaptive challenges are involved in this situation? First, jot down your initial thoughts. What do you think is really bothering people? What losses are they likely to fear?



Building an Adaptive Culture

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: SILOS ARE DISCOURAGED



Building an Adaptive Culture

OPENNESS: NAMING ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM



The Archetypes

Next, consider the four “archetypes” that characterize adaptive challenges.


Gap Between Espoused Values & Behaviors

Are people behaving in a way that is consistent with the expressed values? If not, where do you see gaps? What are the *real* values then?



Competing Commitments

Do key stakeholders need to make painful choices as they favor this or that group of constituents?



Building an Adaptive Culture

Adaptive cultures are prepared to face adaptive challenges head-on. Heifetz et al. suggested that adaptive cultures are characterized by:

1. Openness—“elephants in the room” are uncovered and discussed, taboo topics are challenged. Courage is a key value. Dissenting voices are protected.
2. Shared responsibility—members of adaptive organizations feel responsible for the entire *system*—not only for the smaller pieces under their control. Silos are discouraged.
3. Independence—members of adaptive organizations do not expect persons in positions of authority to make all decisions and have all answers. Instead, members of adaptive organizations are encouraged to *think for themselves* and own their problems.
4. Learning—adaptive organizations are also learning organizations. Members continuously challenge themselves to discover new solutions. Those who make mistakes are seen as “teachers.” Members capitalize on mistakes.
5. Emerging leadership—adaptive organizations are committed to building a leadership pipeline. Leadership development and succession is a key adaptive task.

Use the following pages to plan ways to *gradually* encourage the strengthening of these five characteristics in your organization.

Designing Interventions

PART VI: EXPERIMENT & PILOT


It is often useful to try some interventions on a limited basis. This allows you to hold several ideas at once (useful at this stage) and to test ideas prior to full-blown implementation. Piloting ideas also helps you gather support from other stakeholders. What ideas can you pilot? How will you accomplish that goal?

Unspeakables

Have you noticed a certain number of "taboo" topics? What are the elephants in the room? What do people talk about privately but never in a meeting room? What are "untouchable" topics?

Work Avoidance

Heifetz et al. explain that people go through great lengths to avoid dealing with an adaptive challenge. For instance, people may focus only on the technical problems (rather than on the adaptive challenges), deny that a problem exists or find a "scapegoat" - a person or group of persons "to blame." What, if anything, are stakeholders doing to avoid addressing this/these adaptive challenge (s)?



Designing Interventions

PART V: REFLECT—Cont.



Designing Interventions

PART IV: REFLECT

Use this space to take note of discussions, ideas, and potential solutions that emerge.



Diagnosing the Politics

Now you need to consider the *people* involved in this program. What do they want? What losses do they fear? How powerful are they? To whom are they loyal?

Stakeholder / Group of Stakeholders 1



WANTS	POTENTIAL LOSSES
LEVEL OF POWER	LOYALTIES

Diagnosing the Politics

Stakeholder / Group of Stakeholders 2	
WANTS	POTENTIAL LOSSES
LEVEL OF POWER	LOYALTIES
NOTES	

Designing Interventions

PART III: FRAMING
Think of the frame of a picture—and how it changes the way the picture looks. How can “frame” the communications around this project in thoughtful and positive way?

Designing Interventions

PART II: URGENCY

*Is the problem ripe? Do people perceive its urgency? If not...
how can you "ripen the problem"?*

Diagnosing the Politics

Stakeholder / Group of Stakeholders 3

WANTS

POTENTIAL LOSSES

LEVEL OF POWER

LOYALTIES

NOTES

Diagnosing the Politics

Stakeholder / Group of Stakeholders 4	
WANTS	POTENTIAL LOSSES
LEVEL OF POWER	LOYALTIES
NOTES	

Designing Interventions

Use the pages that follow to plan possible interventions. Remember, however, that you *don't need to do this on your own*—you should involve other stakeholders in the process of making interpretations and designing solutions.

PART I: SELF AWARENESS & PERCEPTIONS

What kind of person are you? Are you the kind of leader who wants to "jump in and solve the problem? If so, you may be tempted to make all decisions and interfere too fast. How can you stop yourself from doing that?

Most importantly... how do others perceive you? Do they see you as someone who will take over and solve the problem on his/her own? If so... how can you change that perception?

Orchestrating Conflict

Mobilizing your System

Stakeholder / Group of Stakeholders 3

Leaders cannot solve adaptive challenges on their own. In order to reach the ultimate adaptive objective, you will need to mobilize the entire system—in other words, you will need to help other stakeholders see the adaptive challenge *as an adaptive challenge* (rather than a technical problem), generate multiple solutions, and design

Acting Politically

Now that you've identified your key stakeholders, it is crucial to take them into consideration before any interventions are planned. How can you find allies? How can you connect to those who may oppose you? How can you increase your level of influence? Use the next few pages to plan your political steps.

INFORMAL AUTHORITY

Consider ways in which you can increase your circle of informal influence. How can you strengthen relationships with key stakeholders? How can you help stakeholders solve minor problems—even if those problems are not directly connected to this challenge? How can “sell” small pieces of your ideas?

Orchestrating Conflict

Use the space in the next two pages to take notes of any conflicts and make plans to solve them appropriately. Remember to “bake a larger pie” - encourage your followers to think of additional solutions that will accommodate the needs of the various stakeholders. However, accept that solving adaptive challenges does imply in losses—a “win-win” may be impossible if the challenge is to be addressed head-on.

Orchestrating Conflict

SAVING FACE

Allowing certain stakeholders to "save face" is often an important technique in conflict resolution. What small wins can you allow certain parties in order to help them save their dignity and power?



Acting Politically

ALLIES

How can you find allies? How can you connect to unusual sources of support? What can you DO for your allies in order to encourage their support? How can you INVOLVE your allies in the process?



Acting Politically

OPPOSITION

How can you keep in touch with those who may oppose you so as not to risk ignoring their perspectives? What can you do to find common ground with those who may oppose you? And, most importantly... how do you protect the voices who disagree with the majority?

Orchestrating Conflict

GROUND RULES

During negotiations what ground rules can you institute that will help the group resolve emerging conflict?

Orchestrating Conflict

MUSTS

Ask yourself first what are your absolute musts at this point... the decisions you are not willing to give up. Write a list of those "musts" in the space below. Review your list. Are you sure none of this is open to negotiation? Why?



Acting Politically

AUTHORITY

How can you prepare those in position of authority for potential road blocks and points of resistance? How can you encourage these people to imagine "worse case scenarios" as the discussions and negotiations begin?



Acting Politically

CASUALTIES

How can you help those who experience loss? What can you do for the inevitable casualties of the process? How can you demonstrate empathy and support?



Orchestrating Conflict

STYLE

What is your preferred conflict resolution style? Do you tend to collaborate? Compete? Compromise? Give in? Whatever your preferred style is, it could "creep in" in your plans and decisions. Decide what style you want to adopt in this particular case. Why is this the most useful style?

