The innovation is online.
The transformation is in person.
The Practice of Adaptive Leadership

Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World

Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Marty Linsky

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Adaptive vs. Technical Challenge

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## Adaptive vs. Technical Challenge

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Adaptive vs. Technical Challenge
The Hero Myth of Leadership
Leadership Level and Associated Tasks

Authority-Based Leadership

Adapted from Drath and Heifetz
Leadership Level and Associated Tasks

- **Authority-Based Leadership**
- **Relationship-Based Leadership**

Adapted from Drath and Heifetz
Leadership Level and Associated Tasks

Adaptive Leadership

Relationship-Based Leadership

Authority-Based Leadership

Adapted from Drath and Heifetz
Adaptive Leadership Challenges

• “challenges for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways…”

Leadership Without Easy Answers, Ronald Heifetz, p. 2
“Making progress on these problems demands not just someone who provides answers on high, but changes in our attitudes, behavior, and values. To meet challenges such as these, we need a different idea of leadership and a new social contract that promote our adaptive capacities, rather than inappropriate expectations of authority.”

Leadership Without Easy Answers, p. 2
Comfortable Authoritarian “Equilibrium”
Comfortable Authoritarian
“Equilibrium”

Power & Trust

Protection
Direction
Order
Adaptive Challenges are Messy
The leadership challenges are complex: there is no one “right” answer
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Real risk must be balanced against reward.
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The leader does not impose a solution: the final solution emerges from the dialogue of all the parties.
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All parties learn from one another—and learn more about the situation in the process
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The leader does not impose a solution: the final solution emerges from the dialogue of all the parties

All parties learn from one another—and learn more about the situation in the process

Everyone must adapt their perspective in order for a solution to emerge
A challenge is Adaptive when...

The Same problem appears over and over again.

© Gerard Van der Leun
A challenge is Adaptive when...

There is resistance and you don’t understand why.

© Nicolas Buffler

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A challenge is Adaptive when...

People behave as if the world is going to end.

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A challenge is Adaptive when...

You feel incompetent.

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Adaptive Learning

Too hot!

Limit of tolerance

Threshold of learning

Adaptive challenge

Productive distress

Source: Heifetz & Linsky: Leadership on the Line, 2002
Adaptive Learning

Source: Heifetz & Linsky: Leadership on the Line, 2002
“Leadership is about disappointing people at a pace they can tolerate.”

-Alexander Grashow
“Leadership is the art of hiding your panic from others.”

-Rabbi Edwin Friedman
“Our mission is not to make people happy. That’s Disney World’s mission.”

-Connie Goodbread
A HEALTHY IMMUNE SYSTEM

PROPAGANDA, LIES, HATE, FEAR, BRUTALITY, CRUELTY, CYNICISM
The Fallacy of the “Quick Fix”
5 Big Ideas in Adaptive Leadership

1. Powerful Questions
2. Getting on the Balcony
3. Work Avoidance
4. Create Holding Environments
5. Productive Disequilibrium
Powerful Questions

- generate curiosity
- stimulate conversation
- are thought-provoking
- surface underlying assumptions
- invite creativity and possibility
- generate energy
- channel attention
- explores deep meaning
- evokes more questions
Sample Questions

• How do we want people in our community to feel when they encounter the fruits of our congregation’s work?
• What might our adult faith development program look like if we took seriously our covenant to “encourage spiritual growth.”
• If someone offered us three million dollars for our building, how might we reimagine our ministry?
“Getting on the Balcony”
Observations, Interpretations, Judgments

There! That ought to dispel the myth that we’re an elderly congregation that doesn’t know how to reach out to young people.

First Town Church
Whippersnappers are welcomed
<table>
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<tr>
<td>Member average age = 57</td>
<td>Older members with more experience are elected - &quot;known&quot;</td>
<td>Older members don't want change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member average age = 65</td>
<td>Older members have more time</td>
<td>Younger people don't care about the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average tenure on board = 9 years</td>
<td>Newer/Younger people aren't interested</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of board members = 9</td>
<td>Newer/Younger people aren't encouraged to become leaders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average length of board meetings = 3 hrs</td>
<td>Newer/Younger people feel their ideas/initiatives are repressed</td>
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<td>Church membership declining 3%/year</td>
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Work Avoidance

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Define the challenge as a technical problem.
Work Avoidance

Change the “problem” to fit your expertise
Work Avoidance

Make the problem too big to solve.
Collect more data.
Work Avoidance

Reorganize.
Blame those in leadership.
Work Avoidance

Create a proxy fight.

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“Create Holding Environments”

Photo by DH (Flickr)
“Create Holding Environments”

Stay Connected

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Stay Non-Anxious

Passive

Aggressive

Anxious

Recalcitrant

Visionary

Motivated

Energetic

Imaginative

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“Productive Disequilibrium”

Regulate the Heat!
“Productive Disequilibrium”

“Orchestrating Conflict”
“Productive Disequilibrium”

“Covenant”

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Mission / Moral Owner
Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner
Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner

Goal
Thoughtful Framing

• Develop the powerful question
We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish.

Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner
Connect, Grow, Serve

Mission / Moral Owner

Goal

We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish

Setting / Situation
Charismatic minister in 1970s
Decline in members and pledges
Aging membership/Leadership
Cliquishness /Conflict /Low Energy

Mission / Moral Owner

Connect, Grow, Serve
Stakeholders

- Stakeholder
  - Can be an Ancestor!

- Relationship to issue?
- Noblest values?
- Loyalties
- Preferred Outcome?
- Potential Losses
We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish.

**Mission / Moral Owner**

**Goal**

**Setting / Situation**
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**Stakeholders & Their Interests**
- People who yearn for the glory days
- RE Families who feel isolated
- Existing leaders who are tired but don’t trust newer members
- Future possible UUs

**Connect, Grow, Serve**
Mission / Moral Owner
Mission / Moral Owner

Goal

Setting / Situation

Stakeholders & Their Interests

Formal & Informal Authority
Expanding your Informal Authority

Scope of Authority

Increase in your informal authority

Adaptive Challenge
We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish.
Mission / Moral Owner

Goal

Work Avoidance

Setting / Situation

Stakeholders & Their Interests

Formal & Informal Authority

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE CONTEXT MAP
Goal

We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish

Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner

Setting / Situation
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Resistance to updating Mission/vision
Resistance to new Stewardship ideas
Social Justice committee with pet projects
Resistance to minister working with membership

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Work Avoidance
Formal & Informal Authority
“Shadow board” vetoes decisions
Minister close to retirement
Cohort of newer members “in alignment”
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**Connect, Grow, Serve**

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COMPETING COMMITMENTS
- We don’t want to insult past leaders
- We don’t like to talk about money
- “Real members” serve on committees
- Pastoral Care is Minister’s #1 priority

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Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner

Uncertainties
Is church going out of style? Will we lose members if we change?

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Metaphors framing problem
Let’s make our church garden an organic one!

Adaptive Challenge Context Map
Designing Interventions
Powerful Question
Architecture of Powerful Questions

Why
How
What
Who, When, Where
Which, Yes/No Questions

Context

Assumptions

Construction

Scope

Paradigm

Blame

Conflict
Powerful Question
How can we invite and help people to grow their souls and serve one another while building the beloved community?
Balcony Space

Powerful Question
Powerful Question

How can we invite and help people to grow their souls and serve one another while building the beloved community?
Whose work is it?
Different Levels of Commitment and Belonging in Our Congregations.

1. **Staff**: paid staff and leaders with “high commitment” who hold themselves accountable to the congregation’s mission.

2. **Committed**: leaders and volunteers who care enough about the mission or the institution to help keep the church functioning by filling needed roles.

3. **Belong**: members or pledging friends who attend worship and some programs and volunteer at various levels. May need some attention around mission and discerning their own gifts/passions.

4. **Interested**: occasional attendees to church programs who are still in discernment.

5. **Oblivious**: people in your community, or who may stumble across your website or attend a program held in your building.
Powerful Question
How can we invite and help people to grow their souls and serve one another while building the beloved community?

Whose work is it?

Core Leadership Group
Newer members
Partners

Members
Whose work is it?

Partners

Balcony Space

Powerful Question
**Powerful Question**
How can we invite and help people to grow their souls and serve one another while building the beloved community?

**Whose work is it?**
- Core Leadership Group
- Newer members
- Partners
- Members
- Partners
- Other churches, leaders, newer members, Past Presidents
Whose work is it?

Low-Risk/Hi Impact Interventions

Powerful Question

Balcony Space

Partners
Powerful Question
How can we invite and help people to grow their souls and serve one another while building the beloved community?

Low-Risk/Hi Impact Interventions
Move to Theme-based Sermons
Then Move to Theme-based “Simple Church” with small groups
Leadership Development to Starfish model / ask members to recovenant

Metaphors framing the work
From Organic gardening to Permaculture

Whose work is it?
Core Leadership Group
Newer members
Partners
Members
Partners
Other churches, leaders, newer members, Past Presidents

Group
Spiritual Discernment
Encourage Team Learning
Balcony Space
Whose work is it?

Low-Risk/Hi Impact Interventions

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Balcony Space

Holding Environments

Try it for 6 months after each step, then re-evaluate
Show how it’s a part of history Hold lots of information meetings and forums

Group
Spiritual Discernment
Whose work is it?

- Powerful Question

- Metaphors framing the work

- Low-Risk/Hi Impact Interventions

- Holding Environments

- Partners
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