Adaptive Leadership for Tricky Challenges

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The innovation is online.
The transformation is in person.
# Adaptive vs. Technical Challenge

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Technical
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
Adaptive Leadership Challenges...

“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”

Protection
Direction
Order
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
The leadership challenges are complex: there is no one “right” answer.

Real risk must be balanced against reward.

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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Real risk must be balanced against reward.

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.

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A challenge is Adaptive when...

There is resistance and you don’t understand why.

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A challenge is Adaptive when...

People behave as if the world is going to end.
A challenge is Adaptive when...

You feel incompetent.
Adaptive Learning

- Adaptive challenge
- Limit of tolerance
- Threshold of learning
- Too hot!
- Disequilibrium
- Work avoidance
- Technical problem


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Adaptive Learning

Adaptive challenge

Limit of tolerance

Threshold of learning

Productive distress

Limit of tolerance

Too hot!

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

- Too hot!
- Limit of tolerance
- Threshold of learning
- Adaptive challenge
- Productive distress

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, DEATH, LIES, HATE, HOMOPHOBIA, FEAR, BRUTALITY, CRUELTY
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
Architecture of Powerful Questions

Construction Assumptions

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

Context

Assumptions

Scope

Paradigm
Blame
Conflict

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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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<th>OBSERVATIONS</th>
<th>INTERPRETATIONS</th>
<th>JUDGMENTS</th>
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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>
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<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>
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| Average length of board meetings = 3 hrs | Newer/Younger people feel their ideas/initiatives are repressed | }
Work Avoidance
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.

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Work Avoidance

Collect more data.
Work Avoidance

Reorganize.
Work Avoidance

Blame those in leadership.
Work Avoidance

Create a proxy fight.
“Create Holding Environments”
“Create Holding Environments”

Stay Connected

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Stay Non-Anxious

Integrity of the Leader

- Passive
- Aggressive
- Anxious
- Recalcitrant
- Motivated
- Visionary
- Energetic
- Imaginative
"Productive Disequilibrium"

Regulate the Heat!

Disequilibrium vs. Time

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“Productive Disequilibrium”

“Orchestrating Conflict”

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“Productive Disequilibrium”

“Covenant”

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Thoughtful Framing

• Develop the powerful question
We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish.
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
Charismatic minister in 1970s
Decline in members and pledges
Aging membership/Leadership
Cliquishness /Conflict /Low Energy
Mission / Moral Owner

Goal

Setting / Situation

Stakeholders & Their Interests

Adaptive Challenge Context Map
Stakeholders

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

**Goal**

**Connect, Grow, Serve**

**Mission / Moral Owner**

**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

**Adaptive Challenge Context Map**

- Formal & Informal Authority
  - "Shadow board" vetoes decisions
  - Minister close to retirement
  - Cohort of newer members "in alignment"
Connect, Grow, Serve
Mission / Moral Owner

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Work Avoidance
- Resistance to updating Mission/vision
- Resistance to new Stewardship ideas
- Social Justice committee with pet projects
- Resistance to minister working with membership
We want to grow and increase UUs to change the world so that all people can flourish.
Connect, Grow, Serve

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

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

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Work Av
Update to
Committee
Designing Interventions
Powerful Question
Architecture of Powerful Questions

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

Construction Assumptions

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

- Group Spiritual Discernment
- Encourage Team Learning
Whose work is it?

Powerful Question

Balcony
Space

Partners
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- Partners
  - Other churches, leaders, newer members, Past Presidents
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Metaphors framing the work
From Organic gardening to Permaculture

Whose work is it?
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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

Other churches, leaders, newer members, Past Presidents

Encourage Team Learning
Balcony Space
Group Spiritual Discernment
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**Core Leadership Group**

- Newer members
- Partners

**Members**

- Other churches, leaders, newer members, Past Presidents

**Partners**

- Encourage
- Team
- Learning

**Group**

- Spiritual
- Discernment

**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

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