

Adaptive Leadership



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Adaptive Leadership

What is Adaptive leadership?

Adaptive Leadership is a process to develop the ability of leaders in your organisation to mobilise people to tackle challenges that cannot be fixed through a “technical solution”. A technical solution being a “do this – get that result” initiative.

Adaptive Leadership was developed by Ron Heifitz and Marty Linsky at the Harvard Kennedy School in the USA. It acknowledges that senior authority figures cannot always “fix” problems. It needs everyone in the organisation facing that problem to help out. It was applied to society, just as much as organisations, that government alone could not fix society’s problems.

Why do we use this framework when developing leaders?

Because we believe that conventional leadership development approaches just do not solve many organisational challenges. Because we live and operate in a VUCA world and that needs a more agile and adaptive set of thinking from leaders. Because there is often too much learning from the “neck up” (academic and theoretical) and not enough learning from the “neck down” (intuitive, practical).

Because leaders, particularly in Asia, need to balance the strength of their traditional authority based approach, with thinking that acknowledges that they need to unleash ideas and ownership throughout the organisation and that senior authority figures do not have all the answers.

“62% of top-performing companies say the most important factor to improve their organization’s agility is the right leadership team.”

***Accenture, Leadership Imperatives
for an Agile Business
Statistics, 2015***



Does Your Business Need ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP?

So how would you assess whether adaptive leadership may be right for your organisation? Here are some qualifying questions:

- Have you tried to create cultural change but found it hard to make it stick?
- Have traditional leadership programs not translated into genuinely different behaviours
- Is there a gap between what people “know” and what people “do”.
- Is there too much reliance on senior people to “fix” everything?
- Have problems, despite new systems and processes, reappeared?
- Do the problems you are facing have no obvious solution?
- Do you need to get people at all levels mobilised and energised about challenges?
- Is your organisation undergoing or facing a lot of change?
- Are you wanting to get managers to think beyond just their immediate role and responsibility?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, then adaptive leadership may be for you.

Traditional command-and-control leadership approaches do not produce the agile and collaborative behaviour that teams need for today’s business environment. Leadership in the 21st century can no longer be about a “heroic” leader at the top who “knows all the answers” and instructs subordinates to execute.

Leaders need to enable their teams’ own creativity and adaptability in order to increase their probability of success.



The Adaptive Leadership Program



The program itself is a learning environment. Everything is designed to allow participants to learn rather than be “taught”. This is because leadership is notoriously hard to teach. Having any ‘expert’ talk through leadership theories, leadership competencies and attributes and engage a group in dialogue may provide some great intellectual frameworks, but it in no way replicates real life and business as usual. Leadership in real life is much more messy and harder to execute.

The Adaptive Leadership approach asks more of the participants because it uses the group and the program as a representation of an organisational system and looks at how people deploy themselves in the group to lead, influence and initiate action.

During the program people are asked to take responsibility for their own learning and even the direction of the program. They are allowed to challenge the facilitators and other participants. Sometimes they succeed. Sometimes they fail and that provides crucial learning opportunities.

People disagree. Factions develop wanting different things, just like in every organisation. So instead of the ‘safe space’ that most leadership programs offer, Adaptive Leadership offers a space for people to genuinely look at themselves and their colleagues as leaders and see how they shape up.

The Adaptive Leadership Program

Adaptive leaders promote the following business outcomes:

- ✓ Ability to mobilise people in the business to work on wider business challenges, instead of everyone relying on the top team
- ✓ Increased and shared ownership, drive, and initiative between the senior leadership team and other levels of leaders in the business
- ✓ Ability to sustain the focus on bigger business challenges and avoid a drop off on initiatives after the first burst of activity
- ✓ People at all levels behaving like leaders
- ✓ Enhanced leader-team communication and collaborative problem-solving
- ✓ Agile teams that work towards shared purpose
- ✓ An inclusive, engaging, work culture that encourages ideas, solutions, and wisdom.



So What Is Actually “In” The Program?

The previous pages indicate a broad approach. Sitting inside that approach is some best practice thinking, concepts and frameworks around leadership and management. Your leadership team will go away with a range of tools and models that will help them make better decisions, influence others, engage their teams, lead change and manage for results.

The specific agenda will be developed after the initial scoping of the program and after we have met all the key stakeholders, however the following will give you a good idea of what we know works.

- **Set up for the workshops.** Explain the concept of learning in the room. How participants use observation (what they see going on with themselves and the group; interpretation (thinking about different ideas about why things might be happening) and intervention (making a move to challenge the facilitators or others in the room, to change what’s happening, to lead and influence others)
- **Adaptive leadership framework.** Looking at the difference between technical challenges (can be fixed by a known solution or by an expert/authority figure) and adaptive challenges (where the solution is unclear and it requires the people with the challenge to change) and whether the challenges faced by the participants are technical or adaptive and how that will impact on their behaviour and success.
- **Understanding the difference between leadership and authority.** Authority often stems from the role or position and therefore limits the influence to others where that authority is in play. Leadership however requires influence beyond the role and position. This sessions looks in depth at how these two concepts are used within your organisation.
- **EQ and Emotional Intelligence** – this runs through the whole program, looking at self awareness, self control (when to makes moves and speak out), relationship and communication in an organisation system.



So What Is Actually “In” The Program?

- **Understanding the nature of organisational change.** An important section of the program where we look at the response that people have to change, why change is rarely win/win (there are often people who lose out), why change is usually a long process and why leaders need to keep the “heat” turned up (heat being a metaphor for focus on the change that is needed). Then we look at the leadership behaviours needed to manage the people and process elements of change
- **Decision making frameworks.** It is important that this program provides some tools to help your team lead and navigate complexity. This session looks at cause analysis to diagnose the real issue, different approaches to reaching a decision, using Cartesian logic to unblock decisions.
- **5 types of organisation culture and what it takes to create each one.** We look at five types of culture (1) high performance, (2) people first, (3) innovation, (4) client centric and (5) a “one team” culture. Deciding which is right for you and how to create that culture.
- **Staff engagement** – The latest research on engagement at work, drivers of motivation and how to increase engagement in a sustainable way.
- **Understanding the importance of values** - our own, others and the organisations. This exercise elicits each person’s values and maps them into their current role. We then explore how to influence and persuade using values as the anchor strategy.
- **Thinking politically.** – Being political is usually seen as a negative. The view here is that it is simply one’s ability to read the system you are working in. We look at how to read the system, understand how different initiatives are viewed, when an issue is “ripe”, the idea of “having the numbers” and different groups to manage.
- **Lencioni’s 5 dysfunctions model.** This model provides a great base to build trust, allow healthy conflict, commit to goals, hold people accountable and focus on results.



Program FORMAT

Preparation work

The Wentworth team engage with key stakeholders, conduct participant interviews to understand each individual and map the program to the collective needs.

- Analyse existing data or conduct fresh research on individual and organisation. 360 feedback and workplace surveys provide a benchmark against which the success of the program can and should be measured.
- Optional profiling using either MBTI, HBDI or Reiss.
- Program communication from CEO or senior stakeholders – a program like this must have senior sponsorship and requires their input and involvement.

Workshop Element (usually 2 x 2 days offsite)

It is important that the group of participants are brought together at least twice during the course of the program. It is the style and the way these workshops are facilitated that makes the difference. More experiential; more challenging of personal behaviour; more agile.

A change project initiative and commitment (ongoing over at least 6 months)

The individuals or the group as a whole select projects in the business that require adaptive leadership. These are projects where they need to lead beyond their formal authority to influence positive change and get people working on issues that matter.

These projects become learning environments for the participants.

Mentoring and Individual coaching (minimum 4 sessions each person)

Each participant gets access to a mentor or coach to help them work through the program. We recommend a minimum of 4 sessions per participant.



This works! Comments from previous participants

“Really liked the way it was run by two people, who each brought a different approach”.

“I’ve learned to be more authentic as a leader, show vulnerability, you don’t have to have the answers to everything”.

“Best training course I have done during my career”.

“I have learned the value of being persistently adaptive. And that's a good thing”.



“Deeper relationships with people I thought I already knew pretty well! A real sense of team ethos”.

“I felt re-invigorated by the program - and that has had a lasting effect on motivation, which I am passing on to my direct reports and their teams”.

“Congrats to the business for doing this. Its the best work based initiative that I've been involved in to date”.

“It pushed boundaries and made me really think”.

“Generated a lot of honesty and built deeper camaraderie”.

Case STUDY – Adaptive Leadership

The issue

A mid-sized police agency was facing an issue related to the time it took to complete investigations. Efforts had been made to reduce the turn-around time, but it was still unsuccessful over the long term. This resulted in a bad reputation with the public and eroded confidence with the employees.



case study

The intervention

Several work avoidance patterns were evident within the team. A change in values and beliefs was needed to fundamentally change the team's inefficient behaviour and culture. A long-term change was achieved through the implementation of 'Adaptive Leadership' strategies in individual and small-group meetings over several months. The impact was to restructure thinking around work, values, beliefs and principles. Focus on productive and unproductive behaviours opened up opportunities to 'raise the heat' to drive the change process by causing discomfort in areas where accountability fell through. The team aligned and worked toward an agreed cultural change, which involved working on multiple cases until they were completed instead of one at a time.

The result

There was a significant reduction in the amount of time needed to complete investigations. Several other key outcomes emerged - reduced workload per person, improved working relationships across organisational hierarchy improved, healthy culture of mutual respect across all levels.

Adapted from:

www.policechiefmagazine.org



Case STUDY – Adaptive Leadership

The issue: What does leadership mean at the point of care, particularly in reference to the relationship between health care practitioners and patients and their family caregivers? Caregivers described the fatigue associated with caring for family members with dementia. One woman who was caring for her mother with dementia also worked full-time.



case study

Her mother awakened multiple times during the night, often with the need to void, requiring the caregiver's assistance. This interrupted her sleep, caused her to be listless at work, and created a level of fatigue that put the caregiver and the care recipient's health and safety at risk.

The intervention: To understand the adaptive work that family caregivers might do, a pertinent question arises: Does teaching a family member stress management techniques reduce fatigue associated with care recipient incontinence? While the health care provider is not intervening directly with the problem of incontinence (technical work), they are teaching the caregiver ways to deal with a consequence of the incontinence – caregiver fatigue (adaptive work). The adaptive intervention is kick-started by using a mix of formal and informal respite services to augment care for patient and reduce fatigue for caregiver.

The result: Supporting this adaptation to a situation provides the caregiver a valuable tool in addressing this and possibly other challenges that may arise while caring for a family member with dementia. In adaptive work, health care providers and caregivers, together with patients, re-evaluate their existing beliefs, and learn and adopt new priorities and habits related to health and both technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges are “situations where both the problem and the potential solution can be clearly defined” by an expert; thus they are best addressed by technical work done by that expert, such as a clinician. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, occur in situations in which a patient must adapt to a health issue, for example by engaging in self-managing a chronic illness. In this case, the patient must do the work – the adapting, learning, and behaviour change.

Adapted from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3883363>

WENTWORTH

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