

# 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, 2016***



## 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.

## PROGRAM FORMAT

### **Design and Customisation Phase**

Each Leadership program we design is different, because your brief, your leadership needs and the participants are different. So we'll always invest time talking with key stakeholders in the program to get under the skin of what's really needed.

We'll want to know what systems and processes you have in place (talent processes, HRIS systems, performance management systems, 360 feedback, profiling tools, competency/leadership excellence frameworks) and understand the challenges and opportunities your organisation is facing and what the plans and goals are for the next 1-3 years. We'll want to know what's worked or working (and why) and what hasn't or isn't working (and why).

All this provides the context to configure the program; the broad approach used, what content we include, which of our facilitators we recommend to work with you.

### **Participant Preparation Phase**

Depending on how we configure the program we will certainly make sure that participants are fully engaged in the why, what and how of the program from the start. They may well be involved in some benchmarking around their own thinking and skills and engagement. This provides some start data against which progress and results can be measured

### **Workshop Phase**

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.

## PROGRAM FORMAT

### **A Business (action learning) Project**

The individuals or the group as a whole select projects in the business that require adaptive leadership. These are projects where there is a genuine need in the organisation to change and improve. Previous projects have included:

- improving the pitch process to improve the success strike rate
- Embedding diversity and inclusion across the organisation
- Changing the way ideas are brought to market
- Creating a consistent approach to client relationship strategy
- Changing the way volunteering activities are implemented and socialised

All these required leadership beyond their normal role and authority levels. Participants learned how to influence positive change, mobilise others, handle setbacks and manage different agendas. These projects become learning environments for the participants and importantly created tangible results for the organisations concerned.

### **Collaborative Technology Platform**

Technology is an important part of all our leadership programs. It helps participants stay connected with each other, provides daily prompts and reflection, it measures engagement and behaviour change. Our platform is easy to use, fully mobile enabled and provides access to a full toolkit and resource library.

### **Mentoring and Individual coaching**

We recommend that 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

"The honesty of the conversations and the way we were held accountable, and critiqued made this the best program I have done during my career".

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

"This program challenged me to ask myself tough questions and face some hard truths. More than anything I have done previously."

"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".

"This program provided a true test of my leadership. So much more than a workshop. It's created a lasting change and produced results for the business."

# WENTWORTH

**Enjoy** your working life

If you like the sound of this approach program, please contact us at [info@wentworthpeople.com](mailto:info@wentworthpeople.com) or call 1800 807288

