You've Lost that Leader Feelin' | Adaptive Leadership

"The single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify – in politics, community life, business or the non-profit sector – is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems." – Heifetz & Linsky, Leadership on the Line

Not all changes are equal, which means how you approach them should vary depending on the nature of the change. Technical changes are usually clearly defined and have relatively clear solutions (although it may not be easy!), whereas adaptive changes may not have clear solutions and thus may require addressing emotional responses. Check out the differences between technical and adaptive challenges:

		Problem Definition	Solutions	Feelings	Work Processes	Leadership
Technical	While technical problems may be complex and important (like replacing a heart valve during surgery), they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. They're resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the org's current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things.	Clearly defined	Clear solutions; goal is to optimize execution	Rational, logical	Uses existing processes, practices, and behaviors; progress is linear	Authoritative: leaders can dictate the solution.
Adaptive	Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress will require going beyond authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding old ways, tolerating losses, and generating a new capacity to thrive.	Not clear; requires learning; may be a recurring problem	May not have all info needed; requires experimentation	Emotional; people may not want to deal with this change	Challenges existing processes, practices, and behaviors; progress is nonlinear	Stakeholders need to be engaged and brought along

Think about a change your team is going through. Is it an adaptive or technical change? Flip this page over for a tool to address this change.

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The pace of change in the workplace is not going to slow down any time soon, and companies today are requiring individuals to be even more adept at handling change. While some of these changes are technical and straightforward, there's an underlying emotional and human element to *all* change. This tool can help leaders comprehend and frame the changes we're all facing, focusing what's really changing, and how we can respond to it—both technical and adaptive.

Core	Emerging	Legacy
Big change feels like *everything* is changing, but usually only one small thing is changing. The core elements are pieces that helped us get to where we are today and will continue to be relevant as we evolve. They need to be protected and invested in as change occurs. What's core to the company that will not be changing (values, activities, beliefs)?	Evolution requires change and is critical to future relevance. Thankfully, change doesn't happen overnight! What are we discovering that needs to change? What are new capabilities and cultural attributes are we developing? What are we experimenting with now to make the changes?	With any change, there are pieces that are discarded as they don't help the work evolve and grow. These pieces may have helped get us to where we are but aren't needed for the future. We should honor these pieces but acknowledge they aren't as relevant moving forward. What are the elements of our company and culture that will be left behind? How do we mitigate the sense of loss?

What is a change your team is, or has been, experiencing? Fill out the boxes below.

Core	Emerging	Legacy
What's not changing for the team or individuals?	Are there new behaviors, values, or actions the team must adopt? What are the new expectations?	What legacy elements will be left behind? How does this change expectations? What is our change plan to transition away from these?

Questions to think about:
What is the loss that people are experiencing? _____
What are key talking points to address? What is the one message you want people to walk away with? _____
_____
Where should people go if they have questions about this change? _____