




Extra Credit Assignment

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

S

ad3714



Describe the major elements of adaptive leadership.

Cambridge Leadership Associates, which grew out of the work of Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, defines adaptive leadership as: **“A practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments.”**¹ Thriving is drawn from evolutionary biology, it preserves essential DNA, discards or rearranges redundant DNA, and create new DNA arrangements in order to flourish in challenging environments. Successful adaptive leadership needs to reimagine the survival of the organization with similar outlook.²

In traditional business structure, actions and direction come from top down. This format of chain of command works just fine in an unchanging world or with an omniscient CEO. However, this is not the case in real world. Let’s consider our current COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders or organizations across the board face unpredictability, imperfect information, multiple unknowns, and the need to identify responses quickly- all while recognizing the multi-dimensional (health-related, economic, social, political, cultural) nature of the crisis.

Responding to this crisis would require adaptive leadership, which would involve the following:

- **Anticipation** of likely future needs, trends and options
- **Articulation** of these needs to build collective understanding and support for action
- **Adaptation** so that there is continuous learning and the adjustment of responses as necessary
- **Accountability**, including maximum transparency in decision making processes and openness to challenges and feedback.³

Dr. Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky at Harvard University developed adaptive leadership as a way to work within the fast-changing landscape of today’s business world. The four elements of this framework consist of:

¹ <https://www.leadershipgeeks.com/what-is-adaptive-leadership/>

² <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/reader.action?docID=5181819>

³ <https://hbr.org/2020/09/5-principles-to-guide-adaptive-leadership>

1. **Emotional Intelligence.** Emotional Intelligence is basically a combination of being both highly self-aware *and* aware of others. Leaders with strong Emotional Intelligence are empathetic, calm, fair, and true team players.
2. **Organizational Justice.** Organizational Justice in adaptive leadership could be described as an open-door policy. It is about keeping open and honest lines of communication with all employees and taking a genuine interest in their questions, concerns, and even criticisms.
3. **Development.** Development as a characteristic of adaptive leadership occurs when a leader is willing to continually explore new methods to achieve the desired result. Rather than continually failing with an outdated practice, the adaptive leader seeks innovation and development to move a business forward.
4. **Character.** Adaptive leadership is about having a deep sense of character, being transparent and creative. Adaptive leaders may not always be right, but they earn the respect of those they work with and practice what they recommend.

Compare the major steps in the processes of adaptive leadership and human centered design.

Thriving in business would include increases in short- and long-term shareholder value, exceptional customer service, high workforce morale, and positive social and environmental impact.⁴ Successful adaptive changes should be built on past rather than jettison it. A challenge for adaptive leadership is to engage people in distinguishing what is essential to preserve from their organization's heritage and what is expandable. Successful adaptations would therefore have to be both conservative and progressive. Organizational adaptation occurs through experimentation, and an experimental mind-set is crucial in management. The mindset to adhere has to be: *Improvise, Adapt, Overcome*. Adaptation also relies heavily on diversity, to pool in distributed or collective intelligence. New changes/adaptation can displace old systems significantly. Learning can be painful and opposed. Leadership therefore requires diagnostic ability to recognize losses, predict defensive patterns of response and know how to counter. All of this takes time. Significant lasting change demands persistence. Hence, for management to follow this route, they need to go through incremental changes built over time.

In the light of COVID outbreak, the need for a fast-paced adaptive leadership is essential. The following five principles can be considered as steps in the direction of adaptive leadership, while utilizing the tools at their disposal:

1. **Ensure evidence-based learning and adaptation:** Assessment of actions persistently can highlight insights through which we can recognize successful patterns, so that it can be performed iteratively and adapted as guidance. Best action to ensure it, would be to collect, interpret and act on the evidence. Putting social learning and adaptation at the center if the response in this way has been found to be crucial element.
2. **Stress-test underlying theories, assumptions, and beliefs:** Assumptions and hypotheses guiding an adaptive response need to subject to robust and rigorous reflection and

⁴ <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/reader.action?docID=5181819>

examination, including through the simulation of different possible future scenarios. Drawing on military approaches to strategic learning, difference scenarios have been developed for automotive, fashion and luxury goods sectors.⁵ These scenarios account for critical uncertainties in the public health situation, the impact of government measures, the wider economic environment and business-specific demand forecasts and make use of real-time monitoring as the basis for decision-making.

3. **Streamline deliberate decision making:** When decision makers feel threatened, they are more likely to revert to risk-averse responses to ensure a degree of safety that results from narrowly defined targets. Decision makers at different levels therefore need to have clarity on the basis for their assumptions and hypotheses. They need to employ transparency regarding the decision making, so that trust can be maintained in the process.
4. **Strengthen transparency, inclusion, and accountability:** Covid response demanded people around the world to make major behavior changes, at significant cost to society, business and governments. Ongoing real-time assessment of the response is needed to maximize learning for all stakeholders- from professionals to affected populations. Adaptive leaders should be able to recognize that mistakes are likely to be made and actively use them as learning opportunities. By acknowledging the fallibility, leaders can create an environment of candor, psychological safety, and mutual trust.
5. **Mobilize collective action:** Effective responses need to be built on collaborations across different sectors, industries and professionals and between international, national and local levels – quite an ambitious task to undertake. Collective action can be in the form of coordination amongst businesses, partnerships among different interest groups, and a dialogue across a range of stakeholders. Adaptive leadership has a crucial role to play in helping to identify shared alignment of objectives and scope for collective action across the platform. Such interactions enrich debate, are inclusive, and improve ownership of decisions.

⁵ <https://www.bcg.com/en-gb/covid-19-recovery-scenarios-for-fashion-and-luxury-brands>