THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

Questions

1. What is an aspect of your job that you love and you wouldn't want to see change?

2. What is a challenge in your organization that you are avoiding because of its complexity or toughness? Or what is a challenge in your organization that you have tried to fix, but it just keeps coming back as a problem?

Agenda

Overview of key concepts
- Authority vs. Leadership
- Technical vs. Adaptive
- Building adaptive capacity

Methods
- Share knowledge and stories
- Individual and group reflection and discussion
- Time for questions and unexpected directions
- Responsive to the needs of the group and individuals

Adaptive leadership

"…the activity of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and do the adaptive work necessary to make progress and thrive."

- Heifetz and Linksy

Adaptive leadership framework

Kennedy School
Ronald Heifetz
Marty Linsky
Dean Williams

Overview (or proselytizing)

Individual exercise

- Think of a time when a boss, or someone who ran an organization you were a part of, disappointed you. What expectations did that person not meet? What frustrated you about his/her actions (or inaction)?

Individual exercise

- Now the tougher one: think of your own role as the person in charge of your office, how do you think you might be frustrating your own people? What do you think they expect from you that you're not delivering?

AUTHORITY V. LEADERSHIP

Authority

- Authority is a solution to the problem of social living.

- Authority is power entrusted for service.

- Appropriate authority provides direction, protection and order.

- Authority can be given and taken away.

Authority

- **Direction**
- **Protection**
- **Order**
  - **Orientation to roles**
  - **Control of conflict**
  - **Norm Maintenance**

The Authority

Types of Authority

Formal
- Comes with various powers of the office and is granted because the office holder promises to meet a set of explicit expectations (job descriptions, legislated mandates, etc.)

Informal
- Rests on trust and comes with and comes with the power to "influence attitude or behavior beyond compliance"
- Trust: predictability on values and skills
- Relationship

A caveat:
Authority does not just empower those who have it, it also constrains them.

Think, pair, share

Authority

- **Direction**
- **Protection**
- **Order**
  - **Orientation to roles**
  - **Control of conflict**
  - **Norm Maintenance**

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS
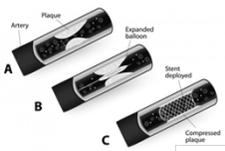## VS. ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Technical problems

- Clearly defined
- A person with expertise or authority knows how to solve them
- Can be solved with current knowledge and systems
- Authority and/or designated expert is primary locus of responsibility

Solution is known and the work is about optimizing execution and efficiency

Technical solutions

- Angioplasty
- Purchasing/installing a database system upgrade

Technical problems are mostly problems of authority properly exercised—they are problems of expertise and efficiency.

Adaptive Challenges

• Issues are hard to identify or not clearly understood

• No expert or authority can be called on to fix it

• Requires learning, relearning, and/or unlearning

• The people with the problem are part of the problem and can also create the solution

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Calls for people involved in or effected by the problem

to come together

sort through competing commitments and priorities

take risks and experiment

consider possible losses to the old way of being or doing

Territory of adaptive leadership

• Loyalties
• Traditions
• Beliefs
• Fears
• Cultures
• Relationships
• Competencies
• Self-perception
• Capacities

Going beyond the technical…

Adaptive challenges

- Lifestyle changes to improve health
- Implementation of new database system

Mom's driving

In Pairs

Discuss:

- Brainstorm at least 2 **technical** aspects of the problem
- Brainstorm at least 2 **adaptive** aspects of the problem

Prepare to share with your table

Technical vs. adaptive

- "Technical problems are well defined: Their solutions are known and those with adequate expertise and organizational capacity can solve them."

- "Adaptive problems…are not so well defined, the answers are not known in advance, and many different stakeholders are involved, each with their own perspectives. …The stakeholders themselves must create and put the solution into effect since the problem is rooted in their attitudes, priorities, or behavior. And until the stakeholders change their outlook, a solution cannot emerge."

Classic mistake

Treating every problem like a technical problem

Technical vs. Adaptive

	What's the work?	Who does the work?
Technical	Apply current know-how	Authorities
Adaptive	Learn new ways	The people with the problem

Adapted from "Leadership", presentation by Manuel Contreras, available at https://www.slideshare.net/MEContreras/leadership-presentation-887462

THE CHALLENGE

"People cannot see at the beginning of the adaptive process that the new situation will be any better than the current condition.

What they *do* see clearly is the *potential for loss*."

• Heifetz and Linsky, 2002

Think, pair, share

• What loss do you fear?

What we fear losing

- Identity
- Competence
- Independence
- Values
- Security
- Job
- Status
- Resources
- Authority
- Comfort
- Reputation
- Time
- Money
- Power
- Control

FROM AUTHORITY TO LEADERSHIP

Remember: authority provides:

- **Direction**
- **Protection**
- **Order**
  - **Orientation to roles**
  - **Control of conflict**
  - **Norm Maintenance**

So what happens when authorities…

- Deliver information or behave in ways that conflict with those expectations?

- Tell people what they might need to hear, but not what they want to hear from those in authority?

Adapted from: Ronald Heifetz, "Leadership: The Adaptive Framework," Presentation at the American College of Education, 2016

Adaptive leadership is:

• "…the activity of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and do the adaptive work necessary to make progress and thrive."

Building adaptive capacity

1. Get on the Balcony
2. Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges
3. Keep Attention Disciplined
4. Give the Work Back to People
5. Build Trust
6. Regulate Distress—Help People Manage Their Losses
7. Generate More Leadership—Protect Voices from Below
8. Infuse the Work with Meaning

• Adapted from: Ronald Heifetz, "Leadership: The Adaptive Framework," Presentation at the American College of Education, 2016

Get on the balcony

Diagnose the adaptive challenges

1. Revisit the seemingly intractable problem you discussed this morning

2. Offer up a summary to the table

3. Choose an issue that has resonance with the group

4. Consider the following:
   1. What are the possible technical problems involved?
   2. What loyalties, traditions, tribalisms, beliefs, etc. might be driving the problem or resistance to the solution?
   3. What losses might people fear?

The work moving forward

- **Keep Attention Disciplined**
- **Give the Work Back to People**
- **Build Trust**
- **Regulate Distress—Help People Manage Their Losses**
- **Generate More Leadership—Protect Voices from Below**
- **Infuse the Work with Meaning**

"Leadership generates capacity, not dependency."

Possible next steps

EXTRAS

Technical Challenges	Adaptive Challenges
1. Easy to identify	1. Difficult to identify and easy to deny
2. Often lend themselves to tried and tested solutions	2. Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, & approaches to work
3. Often can be solved by an authority or expert	3. People with the problem are the problem and must do the work of solving the problem
4. Require change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries	4. Require change in numerous places; usually across organizational boundaries
5. People are generally receptive to technical solutions	5. People often resist even acknowledging adaptive challenges.
6. Solutions can often be implemented quickly—even by edict	6. "Solutions" require experiments and new discoveries; they can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict
7. Requires hands, feet and mouths	7. Requires hearts, eyes, and ears

Adapted from Groupsmith, and Heifetz, et al. (2009)