



BOOK SUMMARY

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The Practice of Adaptive Leadership

Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION - PURPOSE AND POSSIBILITY

- These are uncommon times and we must find better ways to compete and collaborate in order to build a sustainable world in an era of extreme economic and environmental interdependence.
- This book is pragmatic and also about *possibility*: ways in which we might confront our adaptive challenges, created by the gaps between our aspirations and our challenging realities.
- This book aims to provide concrete approaches, grounded in core values, that enable the processes and practices of leadership needed to address these adaptive challenges.

CHAPTER 1: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

- The fundamental premise is that the practice of leadership involves the two key processes of diagnosis and action. The book is organized into an introduction and four parts, based on these essential practices: *diagnosis of the system; action within the system; diagnosis of self; and action within the self*.
- The book addresses both specific adaptive challenges and the challenge of building adaptive capacity in organizations and larger systems. The resources in this book are useful whether you are starting with a single adaptive challenge or trying to create a more adaptive culture.

CHAPTER 2: THE THEORY BEHIND THE PRACTICE

- “*Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive*” (p. 14).
- **The Illusion of the Broken System**
It is a fallacy to think that we need to change organizations because they are “dysfunctional.” In reality, human systems are the way they are because the people in the system want them to operate that way. Recognizing this will shift how you approach the problem. If you understand that an organization that appears to be broken is actually working for many of its members, then

you will choose different methods and approaches. In particular, rather than try to convince people that your view of the organization is right, you will learn to focus on how to mobilize and support them through a change that will appear risky and frightening.

- **Distinguishing Technical Problems from Adaptive Challenges**

- First, understand the difference between adaptive challenges and technical problems:
 - Technical problems can be very complex and important but the solutions are known and can be solved by deploying already available expertise, processes, and operating procedures, e.g. a medical problem solved by surgery.
 - Adaptive challenges require new learning and can only be tackled by changing people's assumptions, beliefs, habits, and allegiances. Expertise and existing knowledge may be helpful in solving adaptive problems, but the most critical work is to mobilize and guide people through a period of discovery which leads to a renewed capacity to flourish. Examples include culture change after a merger or social movements such as civil rights.
- Adaptive leadership is concerned with change that enables people, organizations and societies to flourish or thrive.
- Treating adaptive challenges as if they are technical problems is the most common cause of failure.
- Most problems are a mixture of technical and adaptive challenges. For example, in the corporate world, a merger will have elements which are technical, but the adaptive aspects are a greater threat because the newly merged businesses must confront the need to alter their cultural norms, hierarchies of power, and value systems.
- People and human systems resist loss, not change. Adaptive challenges are complex because the change will inevitably involve a sense of losing something. Leadership requires an ability to diagnose what losses will be experienced in any change initiative.
- Successful adaptive change does not ignore the past, but builds on it.
- Adaptive challenges are not only about change, but also about what needs to continue. For this reason, leaders must also identify the essential elements that must be sustained.
- The ability to adapt is enhanced by diversity and occurs as a result of experimentation.

- **Distinguishing Leadership from Authority**

- People often treat leadership as a job and confuse the concept with power and authority. Leadership is better thought of as an activity or a process.

- Authority, as opposed to leadership, is given to you by others who, in turn, expect you to provide your expertise, take certain actions, come up with solutions, or deliver a service. Any role has a defined scope of authority that specifies what is expected of you and what will satisfy those who have given you this authority.
- Adaptive leadership is not about meeting others' expectations; rather, it is about challenging the status quo, raising taboo topics, and naming the elephants in the room. Adaptive leadership is about finding a way to dissatisfy and disappoint people in order to mobilize the real work that needs to be done. As an adaptive leader, you will often scare people.
- As an authority figure, you are charged with ensuring the survival of the entity by providing direction, protection, and order. As an adaptive leader, you must be prepared to disrupt the equilibrium and ask people to step into new and unknown places that will feel risky, disturbing and disorienting.
- There is little adaptive leadership behavior in most organizations because adaptive leaders must risk saying what needs to be said as opposed to what people want to hear. Adaptive leadership is inherently risky.

- **Living in the Disequilibrium**

- Adaptive leaders need to be able to self-manage in the face of uncertainty, and help others deal with their own discomfort.
- People and organizations experience disequilibrium when you pose difficult questions and ask them to be responsible for issues beyond the scope of their own jobs. An adaptive leader is constantly managing the “temperature” to maintain a zone of productive disequilibrium. Teams and organizations are only able to confront difficult adaptive issues if they are kept within this productive zone.
- Be on the lookout for behaviors that enable people to turn down the temperature and avoid confronting the adaptive challenge.

- **Observe, Interpret, Intervene**

- Adaptive leadership requires these three skills:
 1. *Observation*: The goal is to become as objective as possible. The metaphor for this is moving off the dance floor and onto the balcony. From here you have distance and a new ability to observe yourself and others in action.
 2. *Interpretations*: Your brain is designed to make meaning – interpretations are unavoidable. As an adaptive leadership, you must take time to reflect on how you

interpret what you have observed before you act. Also, notice what you hear and sense that people are not explicitly saying.

3. *Interventions*: After observing and reflecting on your interpretation, the next logical question is what will you do about it? Any intervention is a response to your hypothesis about the problem. Consider your intervention an experiment, in service to creating a broader context that connects your interpretation of the problem to the adaptive challenge. If you take an experimental mindset there's no need to be defensive if the intervention is not successful. An experimental mindset opens you to learning. Be prepared to be absolutely right and open to being completely wrong at the same time.
- Adaptive leadership requires new skills and competencies, including spirit, guts, heart and head. It requires the courage to bring your whole self to the engagement. It requires that you connect to a compelling larger sense of purpose.

PART TWO: DIAGNOSE THE SYSTEM

CHAPTER 4: DIAGNOSE THE SYSTEM

Organizations are rife with people who jump to solutions and action without stepping back to clarify the nature of the problem. An adaptive leader's first step in confronting a challenge is to get on the balcony to gain an understanding of the organization's culture, structures, and ways of thinking.

- **The Elegance and Tenacity of the Status Quo**
 - The status quo can be seen as solutions that were put in place to solve yesterday's problems. These mindsets and behaviors can become quite tenacious, eventually comprising the organizational terms for success. The behaviors that conform to these norms are praised and rewarded; other behaviors are not valued. These become the self-reinforcing default behaviors for the system.
 - Each economic sector (not-for-profit, private, and public) has its own distinctive mindset and characteristics that limits its ability to adapt to new realities. For example, ingrained assumptions and beliefs about growth and profit drives behaviors in the private sector.
- **Discover Structural Implications**
 - Examples of structures include organization charts, norms around communications and reporting processes, bylaws, hiring practices, and compensation plans.

- Get on the balcony to observe your organization's structures and consider their impact. Consider how your structures support or hinder your organizational mission.

- **Surface Cultural Norm and Forces**

- *Folklore*: Examine which stories that are told repeatedly and look for what they tell you about how the organization functions and what its members consider important. Look beyond the words for clues about the unofficial rules of engagement – what are acceptable behaviors and what are not? Share examples of these stories with your team members and discuss what they reveal about your organization's values.
- *Rituals*: Look for repetitive practices, e.g. types of meetings and ways of recognizing achievement and reflect on what they tell you about your organization. Consider what new rituals might be put in place to instill new behaviors.
- *Group Norms*: Taken together, organizational norms provide valuable clues about the unwritten rules and the level of adaptability in an organization.
- *Meeting Protocols*: Consider what kinds of regular meetings are held, how agendas are determined and who's invited. This data will lead to a better understanding of how power and information are shared. Also consider how decisions are made (or not) in meetings, as well as the expected behaviors and roles for participants and senior leaders.

- **Recognize Default Interpretations and Behavior**

Default behaviors are familiar and comfortable ways of thinking and acting which rest on beliefs and assumptions that may have been useful for solving problems in the past. When confronted with a new challenge, adaptive organizations must look beyond their defaults, which often means trying new and potentially uncomfortable behaviors.

CHAPTER 5: DIAGNOSE THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

- Adaptive challenges require people to change. This involves three difficult tasks: figuring out which practices to discard, which practices to keep, and creating new ways of thinking and acting that build on the foundation of the past.
- Adaptive challenges are complex human challenges. Treating a human challenge like an analytical issue that can be solved by experts will most often fail. The ability to understand and diagnose complex human challenges is a key skill for adaptive leaders.

- **Determine the Technical and Adaptive Elements**

- Typically, an adaptive challenge will have one or both of these characteristics:
 1. A Cycle of Failure: One way to recognize an adaptive challenge is when the problem persists after repeated attempts at technical solutions. People are drawn toward technical solutions because they are easier to implement and they reduce uncertainty. However, if the challenge is adaptive, it will produce a cycle of failure. Getting on the balcony and looking at patterns in the system will reveal cycles of this nature.
 2. Dependence on Authority: Humans are biologically inclined to depend on those in roles of authority. This works when confronted with a technical problem that requires authoritative expertise, but not when authorities attempt to solve an adaptive challenge by assembling a group of experts. Instead, those in authority must learn how to mobilize people to solve their own problems.

- **A Basic Diagnostic Framework**

- Diagnostic work begins with inquiry – asking questions that get beneath the surface of the problem
- Some examples of these questions include:
 - What are the technical and adaptive elements of the challenge?
 - Is the challenge a function of changing organizational values and priorities? Or from changes in external conditions?
 - Is there a conflict at the level of values and mission? Or at the level of mission, strategy, objectives and tasks?
 - What contradictions do I see between strategy, mission, goals and the values and mission of the organization?
 - Who are the key stakeholders and what perspectives do they have?
 - What behaviors do I see that indicate how people are avoiding the hard work in order to maintain the status quo?
 - What's my perspective from where I sit in the organization? What beliefs and assumptions am I bringing to the challenge?
 - What tactics and strategies have I tried and what have I learned from these?
 - What new strategies am I afraid to try or am unwilling to consider?

- **Listen to the Song beneath the Words.** Look beyond what people say to their body language, energy and emotion. Pay attention to what's not being said.
- **Four Adaptive Challenge Archetypes:**
 - *Archetype 1: Gap between Espoused Values and Behavior:* Like individuals, organizations often have a gap between their espoused value and how they actually behave. Research shows that the human brain reacts more to what a person is doing than do what they are saying they mean to do. Hence, these patterns of behavior become the defacto organizational norms.
 - *Archetype 2: Competing Commitments:* When confronted with competing commitments, people in authority need to make decisions that lead to losses for some and gains for others. However, organizational leaders often avoid these painful choices, or they try to find a compromise serves no one. Adaptive leadership means asking who and what groups will lose - and specifically what will be the nature of their loss?
 - *Archetype 3: Speaking the Unspeakable:* In an organizational setting, there are always two types of conversations occurring simultaneously: what people say publically, and what they are actually saying in their heads. The most important content in any conversation is rarely ever publicly spoken.
 - *Archetype 4: Work Avoidance:* In every organization people develop innovative ways to avoid the discomfort of change. Two most common work avoidance strategies include: *diverting attention* away from the problem (e.g. by denying the existence of the problem, focusing on only the technical aspects, creating a surrogate conflict, refusing to consider certain options, using humor to turn down the temperature, forming new committees); and *displacing responsibility* (e.g. blaming/scapegoating others both inside and outside the organization, marginalize those who have raised the issue, or delegating the adaptive work to those who have no power to take action).

CHAPTER 6: DIAGNOSE THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

- People in organizations and politicians face similar challenges and pressures. However, in public bodies such as legislatures it's expected that people will put the real issues on the table. This level of openness is taboo in most other organizations.
- Adaptive leaders must learn to appreciate the importance of politics and learn to think politically. The key to this is appreciating that people in your organization are laboring to meet the expectations of their various stakeholders and constituencies. Mobilization is only effective once you understand the nature of these expectations, along with each stakeholder's ability to influence the situation, unique set of wants and needs, and desired outcomes.

- One important activity is to map your stakeholders, looking at these elements:
 - Uncover Values Driving Behavior: Look at what they care about and identify their strongest values. By appreciating this, you may be able to find other ways for these stakeholders to fulfill those values.
 - Acknowledged Loyalties: Take a broader focus: any stakeholder has allegiances to certain constituencies whom they do not want to disappoint. Look to those outside the room who have influence on the immediate stakeholders in the room with you.
 - Name the Losses at Risk: Fear of losing something meaningful is the source of resistance to change. When you ask people to change, they will often see your initiative as a threat to something they care about. It's not easy to identify losses; begin by assuming that potential losses are real and look for what each person or stakeholder group values, e.g. hierarchical role, power, money, control, identity, security, resources, independence, etc.
 - Realize Hidden Alliances: Recognizing unseen alliances between people and groups can determine the success of your change initiative. Identify the various stakeholder groups (an organization chart is a good starting point) and look for subgroups that may have common interests that cross formal structures and hierarchies; e.g. ethnicity, gender, shared values or concerns.

CHAPTER 7: QUALITIES OF AN ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATION

- The five characteristics of adaptive organizations:
 1. Elephants in the room are named. In highly adaptive organizations, no questions are withheld and no issues are considered too sensitive to discuss.
 2. Responsibility for the organization's future is shared. Adaptive organizations manifest a sense of shared responsibility for the whole in many ways: they engage frequently in cross-functional problem-solving, people feel free to discuss issues outside their purview at meetings, and compensation and reward system reflect shared accountability for the performance of the whole company.
 3. Independent judgment is valued and expected. Managers at the highest level discuss issues outside their functional accountabilities. Free and open dialogue occurs and people may change their opinions and positions after engaging in vigorous give and take.
 4. Leadership capacity is developed. Adaptive organizations have courageous leaders with a long-term perspective and a commitment to the future of the organization. They have strong talent pipelines and concrete succession plans. Leaders are primarily developed by engaging

in and reflecting on real on-the-job challenges, supplemented by other training and development processes

- *Reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.* Even the most experienced experts lack the knowledge and skill to solve most of today's intractable problems. An adaptive organization is open to learning – one of the most critical capabilities in today's world. Some clues that point to a learning mindset: front-line perspectives are considered in strategic decision making; mistakes are not punished; retreats and opportunities to reflect are routine and include a cross-section of the organization; breakdowns are treated as opportunities to learn; collaboration is encouraged across all boundaries; strategic plans are respected, but not treated as sacred and unchangeable texts.

PART THREE: MOBILIZE THE SYSTEM

- Practicing adaptive leadership requires interventions that mobilize people in your system to address worthy challenges. These interventions have certain characteristics: they avoid quick fixes in favor of long-term solutions; they make people uncomfortable, but also use the discomfort to gain headway; they create and utilize new networks of relationships; and they strengthen the organization's overall adaptive capacity.
- Often the most helpful thing you can do is slow the organization down from acting too soon and reflect before acting. Some useful ways to do this: ask more questions, gently withhold your support for a decision until the appropriate time, build extra time into meeting agendas to discuss the adaptive challenge, expand the circle of stakeholders; and separate distracting arguments from the real issues underlying the adaptive issue.

CHAPTER 8: MAKE INTERPRETATIONS

- **Unproductive Interpretations**
 - Often people cannot see the reality of the challenge because of their default interpretations, particularly those that allow them to evade responsibility, for example, "It's senior management's fault." Adaptive leaders must teach people the difference between technical and adaptive issues, helping them move away from technical interpretations and towards interpretations that reveal the systemic and discordant aspects of adaptive issues.
 - To counter the tendency to interpret the issues as technical (for example, as a deficit in the leadership team or incompetent execution), bring new information and perspectives from others outside your own group's experience to help them see the dynamic from the balcony.

- **Reframe the Group’s Default Interpretations.** Listen for the default interpretations you hear in your group, name them and/or ask questions that stimulate new interpretations, for example, What are the underlying assumptions about this problem? Are there any other perspectives we should consider when discussing this problem?
- **Generate Multiple Interpretations**
 - Expand the possible array of interpretations by using “what-if” questions. Have people work in pairs or small groups to generate multiple interpretations.
 - Holding several different interpretations at the same time is a skill, and you may experience resistance. Take an inclusive approach by sharing responsibility for generating and examining alternative interpretations by working in subgroups, trios or pairs, each working on a different perspective or interpretation. Take an experimental approach by asking people to design low risk experiments that test the various interpretations.
- **Audition Your Ideas.** Watch for your own interpretations. It helps to think of yourself as someone who is auditioning your interpretation rather than advocating for it.
- **Generate a Diversity of Interpretations.**
 - Adaptive leaders understand that their role is to facilitate the interplay of multiple stakeholders, each of whom will have their own strongly-held opinions. By encouraging people to reveal and discuss their different points of view, you learn more about the nature of the challenge, which will help you to generate experiments and interventions that work.
 - Alignment works well with technical problems, and is certainly faster and more efficient than creativity. However, solving adaptive problems require a great deal of creativity. This is fostered by continuing to expand and be open to a diversity of interpretations.

CHAPTER 9: DESIGN EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

- **Step 1: Get on the Balcony:** Step back and examine what’s going on around you. Continue to use your diagnostic skills, even if you decide to take action.
- **Step 2: Determine the Ripeness of the Issue in the System:** An issue has “ripened” or matured when stakeholders across the organization are in agreement about the urgency to take action. Determining the readiness to act is an essential step in planning an intervention.
- **Step 3: Ask, Who Am I in This Picture?** Examine yourself: How are you viewed by others in the organization? What role or roles do you play? What expectations do they have of you? If

others are comfortable with your predictable way of responding, you may need to surprise them with new behaviors to get their attention and to make progress on the adaptive issue.

- **Step 4: Think Hard About Your Framing:** As an adaptive leader, you must start with what they think, not what you think. You must communicate – or frame - your intervention in a way that enables all groups to understand why this is important and how they can help. Your framing should balance the head and the heart, incorporating both data and emotion. Your language must connect with the group’s purpose and values.
- **Step 5: Hold Steady:** Once you begin, the intervention will have a life of its own. Hold steady. Give people time to discuss and absorb new ideas and information. Don’t be too attached to your ideas - let people work with them. Keep listening and stay present.
- **Step 6: Analyze the Factions That Begin to Emerge:** Notice who stays engaged and who doesn’t, who starts to build on the idea and who resists it altogether. Map the factions.
- **Step 7: Keep the Work at the Center of People’s Attention:** It is human to avoid the discomfort of adaptive challenges. Expect people to find ways to evade the real challenge and remember this has mostly to do with fear of loss. Seek to understand the impact of the change on each stakeholder group and consider how you can assist them with this problem. Enlist allies to share the weight of the work with you.

CHAPTER 10: ACT POLITICALLY

- Chapter 6 discussed the necessity to learn how to *think* politically in order to understand the relationships, interests and concerns of people in an organization.
- This chapter focuses on *acting* politically, which means using your awareness of stakeholders’ interests, networks of influence and power, and the your own position in the organization to create alliances with people who will support your change initiative.
- **Six guidelines for “acting politically”:**
 1. *Expand Your Informal Authority:* Record some early wins, strengthen your relationships across the organization, try small experiments to sell a piece of your idea.
 2. *Find Allies:* Identify your allies and line them up before you go “live.” These include people who know and trust you, who see you as representing something needed for the organization, and/or who believe they will gain in the long-run from partnering with you.

3. *Stay Connected to the Opposition:* Identify the opposition and stay close to them. Include them in meetings, take time to listen to them, ask for their input, and continuously gauge the impact of the change on them. Be compassionate, but don't fall into the trap of trying to convince the resisters.
4. *Manage Authority Figures:* Prepare high level executives and authority figures for the discomfort you are going to produce. Observe them for signals suggesting how much heat they – and the organization – can withstand.
5. *Take Responsibility for Casualties:* Be clear that you are accountable for the outcomes of your actions and decisions. This will encourage accountability and communicate that you will treat others compassionately.
6. *Protect And Engage the Voices of Dissent:* Skeptics play a valuable role, like canaries in the coal mine, during the change process. Adaptive leaders must listen to and protect the naysayers.

CHAPTER 11: ORCHESTRATE CONFLICT

- When facing conflict, organizations usually avoid the issue, engage in unproductive fighting, or look to others such as authorities for answers. Orchestrating conflict is a skill. Like a composer, the adaptive leader creatively weaves together the harmonious and dissonant voices, moving forward toward resolution.
- Conflict is an essential resource in getting to the real, durable solutions. It requires great courage and an ability to learn and adapt.
- **Seven steps for orchestrating conflict:**
 1. *Prepare:* Learn the key aspects of the conflict and where each party stands, what they care about, and what they fear they might lose. Build informal authority and trust by talking to them in advance.
 2. *Establish ground rules:* Suggest ground rules that make it safe to discuss the conflict, such as confidentiality.
 3. *Get each view on the table:* Ask each party to share their perspectives on the adaptive challenge. Explore commitments they have to others who are not in the room. What are their potential gains and losses? What's negotiable and what's not?
 4. *Orchestrate the conflict:* Restate in plain and direct language the competing views and claims you are hearing. Expect the tension to increase. Watch out for avoidance behaviors such as

trying to change the subject or dismiss the problem. Keep reminding people of the purpose of the conversation, acknowledging the difficulty of the moment.

5. *Encourage accepting and managing losses*: Allow each party to discuss the specific losses they would be asking the other to accept. If necessary, given them time to reflect on these losses, whether takes hours or weeks. Discuss how they will manage their constituents.
6. *Generate and commit to experiments*: Create potential individual and collective experiments for dealing with the adaptive challenge. Facilitate an agreement to move ahead with several of these experiments as well as a process to evaluate the results and glean the lessons and insights.
7. *Institute leadership consulting*: To amplify success, teach group members a peer coaching process to enable them to consult with each other on the leadership challenge they have just created for each other.

- **Create a Holding Environment**

- A holding environment is a structure that provides cohesion and enables people to collectively and collaboratively focus on their important task. Holding environments are critical for adaptive work which requires safe structures for people to surface and discuss different perspectives, values, and ideas with regard to the challenge. Every group from a family to a large organization is a holding environment, although some will be stronger and more productive than others.
 - Some elements that strengthen cohesion include: shared purposes, values, work history and language; processes and structures; authority figures; meeting ground rules; and even a comfortable meeting room.
 - An off-site retreat is a good example of an effective holding environment. Off-site meetings are most successful if they are well thought out in advance and incorporate effective meeting processes and methods.
- Consider how wide you need to cast your net when selecting participants to work through conflict. Fewer stakeholders are recommended if a timely solution is urgent. On the other hand, you should seek a wider group if the adaptive work requires deep engagement on the conflict. A bias toward inclusion builds long-term adaptive capability.
 - To orchestrate conflict effectively, be prepared to turn up the heat, staying aware of when you need to lower or raise the temperature to further the adaptive work.
 - To raise the temperature: name the dynamics you see in the group (e.g. Is the problem being externalized? Is someone being blamed?); ask the difficult questions; surface conflicts.

- To lower the temperature: break the problem into parts and create a project plan; address the most obviously technical aspects of the conflict; use work avoidance mechanisms such as humor or storytelling; take a break.
- Give the work back: In the face of an adaptive challenge, people will attempt to push the work back on the authority figures in hopes that senior leader will make a decision that “resolves” the conflict. By giving the work back, an adaptive leader is contradicting organizational expectations that leaders will solve problems and maintain equilibrium for others. Adaptive leaders must push people outside of their comfort zone.

CHAPTER 12: BUILD AN ADAPTIVE CULTURE

- This chapter explores in greater detail the five distinguishing characteristics of an adaptive culture that were introduced in Chapter 7.
- **Make Naming Elephants the Norm:**
 - *Model the Behavior:* People take their signals from authority figures. As the authority, if you don’t model the act of naming the sensitive issues, it’s unlikely that anyone else will.
 - *Protect Troublemakers:* Naysayers and skeptics are often the only ones asking the necessary questions. Your task is to protect them and encourage their willingness to speak. Get curious when they say something that creates discomfort; ask them to say more about their idea.
- **Nurture Shared Responsibility for the Organization:** People feel a sense of shared responsibility for the overall organization when: people offer to provide resources to help others; rewards are based at least partially on the performance of the entire organization; new ideas and insights are shared across boundaries; people take time to understand what others are doing in other areas of the organization.
- **Encourage Independent Judgment:** Some authority figures encourage dependency as it makes them feel important. The job of the adaptive leader is to become dispensable by constantly giving the work back to others. Adaptive leadership generates broader leadership throughout the organization.
- **Develop Leadership Capacity:** Building a leadership pipeline is essential to the long-term adaptability of the organization.

- **Institutionalize Reflection and Continuous Learning:**
 - Ask difficult reflective questions, such as: What are the gaps between where we are and where we want to be? How will we know that we are successful? What challenge might be just be on the horizon?
 - Honor risk-taking and experimentation. Send the right signals: give experiments the time and resources they need; recognize smart risks in performance reviews, and take risks yourself.
 - Foster a taste for action: take continuous small steps and learn from them.
 - Run parallel experiments to test multiple strategies at the same time.

PART FOUR: SEE YOURSELF AS A SYSTEM

- You – an individual – are also a system. Within your system you also have multiple and conflicting loyalties and allegiances that will emerge when you are trying to lead an organization through an adaptive challenge. You must know your own default settings to ensure you have the liberty to respond in creative and valuable ways. These settings include your loyalties, your personal triggers, and your inventory of methods for leading adaptive change.

CHAPTER 13: SEE YOURSELF AS A SYSTEM

- Take a disciplined approach to knowing your own system. Understanding yourself provides clarity and stimulates courage and creativity.
- The notion that we each have one identity or “self” is inaccurate. In fact, you are comprised of multiple “selves” and identities along with myriad of (sometimes contradictory) assumptions, beliefs, and ways of thinking and acting. When you explore and understand your own complexities, you are better equipped to lead change.
- The most successful adaptive leaders are in a state of constant self-reflection, applying their diagnostic skills to themselves. They are constantly monitoring and seeking to understand what’s happening inside and how their own behaviors and ways of being are impacting the system overall.

CHAPTER 14: IDENTIFY YOUR LOYALTIES

- The first step in knowing your own system is to understand your loyalties and allegiances, and how they impact your behavior and ways of being. These three types of loyalties are particularly important:
 - *Friends, family & community* who are important to you outside of work.
 - *Professional colleagues* with whom you work.
 - *People from your past* who have influenced your worldview, such as ancestors, teachers, or groups who represent your national or ethnic origins.
- **Prioritize Your Loyalties:** List the people in these three categories. It may also be useful to create a visual display, mapping each category and noting how each individual or group has impacted your life and ways of thinking. Note also which voices constrain you and which are inspiring and liberating.
- **Name Your Unspeakable Loyalties:**
 - Personal mastery requires a critical examination of your loyalties and how they may be contributing to the problem. In particular, you must take stock of loyalties that you don't talk about and may not be aware of. These "unspeakable loyalties" have power over you because they stem from some basic fear or need.
 - Your ability to recognizing and name how you are contributing to the problem models transparency and self-awareness for others. It also gives you a chance to alter the one aspect of the problem over which you have control – you.
 - A useful exercise for surfacing unspeakable loyalties is provided by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey in their HBR article, "The Real Reason People Won't Change." Kegan and Lahey refer to these as competing commitments.

CHAPTER 15: KNOW YOUR TUNING

- A second default setting in your system is your tuning, or how you are "wired" to perform. Your awareness of your tuning and how other people or external events are likely to "pull your strings" will determine your ability to respond creatively rather than reactively.
- If you are unaware of your tuning, you will tend to react in predictable ways, making it possible for others to manipulate you and potentially derail your initiative. For example, if you are

adverse to conflict, a colleague could deter you with a threatening or confrontational approach. Lack of awareness of your tuning can put you at a significant disadvantage.

- **Know Your Triggers:**

- We've all had experiences that have "hit a nerve" or "pushed our buttons" where you find yourself in a reactive mode, temporarily out of control, or overreacting to small things. If you examine these events, you'll find they have a pattern – a pattern that leads you to greater awareness of your triggers.
- Be aware that we all have triggers, so your triggers may also produce unwanted reactions in others, which can pull you off purpose. The first step in controlling your reaction to your triggers is to become well acquainted with them and get curious about how you respond when triggered.

- **Two Key Types of Triggers:**

- *Hungers* are basic human needs such as caring, control, and recognition. When unmet, hungers can make you vulnerable to being influenced and manipulated by people who appear to provide these needs.
- *Carrying other people's water* is a metaphor for how we often shoulder other people's expectations, fears, and needs. When you take on other people's hopes and burdens, you may exhaust yourself to the point of burn out. If you feel overwhelmed, ask what "water" you may be carrying that is not serving you or the larger purpose.

CHAPTER 16: BROADEN YOUR BANDWIDTH

- Effective adaptive leadership requires a range of methods and practices for creating sustainable change. What skills do you already have? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you need to add to your repertoire?
- **Discover Your Tolerances:** One critical skill required for adaptive leadership is the ability to work in an environment of uncertainty. You will need to increase your tolerance for ambiguity, conflict, turmoil, and confusion. Inevitably, this also means revealing your own incompetence and modeling how to learn from adversity. Broadening your bandwidth entails moving out of your comfort zone into a new space of disequilibrium and discomfort.

CHAPTER 17: UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLES

- Knowing your system also means knowing the various roles you play in your organization. Your behavior in those roles is largely determined by the context and values for each situation.
- **What Roles Do You Play?**
 - Examine your roles, both formal and informal, such as: specialist, manager, mediator, supporter, naysayer, friend, spouse, sibling, or parent. Take the perspective that you always have multiple roles and you are at liberty to choose how to behave in any assigned role.
 - Take on new roles. Multiple roles will increase your effectiveness because they will give you more perspectives, options, and contexts in any given situation.
- **Identify Your Scope of Authority**
 - Map your scope of authority, including both formal and informal elements. This diagnostic process will reveal what others expect of you, what resources are available to assist you, and what latitude you have to take action. It will also help you to see people in authority as part of a larger system as opposed to barriers or threats. When you appreciate the complexity of the broader system you are more able to depersonalize people's actions and develop the compassion needed to work effectively with a broad range of stakeholders.
 - Seek to expand your informal authority. The wider your range of informal authority, the more power you have to achieve your objectives. You can expand your informal authority in many ways, including: being dependable and trustworthy; having repeated successes; developing mutually advantageous relationships; and demonstrating support for others.

CHAPTER 18: ARTICULATE YOUR PURPOSES

- Why would anyone take on the difficult challenge of being an adaptive leader? Ultimately, people choose this role because they wish to accomplish something that matters deeply to them.
- Knowing your higher purpose is a critical element in understanding yourself as a system. Understanding your purpose puts everything in a broader context which will sustain you through the difficult path ahead. Distinguishing your purpose gives meaning and focus beyond ambition.
- **Prioritize Your Purposes:**
 - How do you know what your purpose is at any point in time? And how do you go about prioritizing your purposes? One approach is to watch what you do, rather than listen to what

you say. For example, you may notice that you are willing to take more risks on behalf of one purpose than another.

- Remember your purpose: write it down in one sentence, say it out loud to yourself and/or create a symbol that reminds you of the purpose such as a picture, phrase, statue, or poem.
- Sometimes your purpose will not be clear – you will only have a vague sense of a purpose that’s emerging. This can be even more valuable than a well-defined direction as it may lead you to be curious and ask important questions like “what are we trying to accomplish now?”
- **This Story You Tell Yourself:** Our reality is defined by the stories we tell ourselves. By taking this perspective, an adaptive leader can appreciate the importance of aligning her stories with the new reality she wishes to create. Be clear about your stories, but also be willing to test their implicit assumptions against reality. By doing this, you create stories that are honest and powerful, not ones that rationalize the status quo or actions that are out of sync with your values.

PART FIVE: DEPLOY YOURSELF

- Confronting an adaptive challenge is different than tackling a technical problem because you must operate outside your comfort zone of expertise. Adaptive leadership puts you at risk. This section discusses how you need to adapt to be successful in this role. Most of this concerns the emotional elements of leading adaptive change which are more a matter of will than skill.

CHAPTER 19: STAY CONNECTED TO YOUR PURPOSES

Keep your purposes alive by using these five practices:

1. **Reflect on the Ethics of Leadership and Purpose:**
 - This book asks you to think about taking on new ways of behaving and thinking in service of a purpose that is profoundly important to you. Conversely, you must also consider what you are unwilling to do on behalf of this cause. You might be ambivalent about what actions might be necessary to achieve the higher purpose you have identified. Where and how will you draw the line?
 - First, calculate the potential injury your intervention may cause others. Second, evaluate the potential damage to your reputation and personal values. Finally, stay vigilant and self-aware. Test your motives and actions; ask questions about your interpretations, the data you are using to evaluate outcomes, the stories you tell yourself that may justify your behaviors and decisions.

1. **Keep Purposes Alive:** Use symbolic reminders (books, pictures, quotes, etc.) and rituals such as team “check-ins” that institutionalize time for reflection to sustain your connection with purpose.
2. **Negotiate your purposes:** Share your purposes with others and allow them to discuss and challenge them. Experiment with different translations of your purposes to ensure you are communicating in a language that others understand. Make your ideas concrete – share details on how this might look and how it could be operationalized. Also be willing to discover and understand the purposes of others. Decide what’s negotiable for you and what’s not, and find the areas of compromise that are acceptable to you.
3. **Integrate Your Ambitions and Aspirations:** Know that you don’t have to choose between aspiration and ambition: you can energetically serve both.
4. **Avoid Common Traps:** Traps include the martyr syndrome, not seeing or hearing what needs to be seen and heard, and being overly righteous about your purposes.

CHAPTER 20: ENGAGE COURAGOUSLY

These constraints hold you back from being a courageously adaptive leader:

- **Being stuck in the past:** Use this process to get “past the past”:
 - *Step 1:* Be aware of gaps between what you say and what you do.
 - *Step 2:* Stay in the present. Watch out for justifications based on past experiences.
 - *Step 3:* Identify the loyalties you need to change with friends, family, community, professional colleagues, and people from the past.
 - *Step 4:* Conduct the conversations you need to have with current people in your life, identified in step 3.
 - *Step 5:* Find ways to shift the loyalties that aren’t working for you with people from your past. This may be accomplished by writing a letter to a deceased parent, mentor or ancestor or by designing a ritual that will help you drop the part of the loyalty that is limiting your ability to be effective.
 - *Step 6:* Remember the important purposes and values you are preserving. You are not abandoning your loyalties, only those aspects that are preventing you from making progress.
- **Being afraid of your incompetence:** Adaptive leadership means learning as you go – your only alternative is to embrace your incompetence. Find classes and programs that provide safe

learning opportunities. Listen to the stories you tell yourself and learn to recognize the embedded assumptions masquerading as truths. Empower yourself by reframing these assumptions and creating new interpretations about yourself and others.

- **Being uncertain about making the right decisions:** You will need to accept the fact that adaptive leadership means making tough decisions now and for the rest of your life.
- **Being afraid of loss:** Develop new and broader criteria for success – beyond the duality of “this is working” or “this is not working.” Be curious and adopt an experimental mindset. Try small experiments and learn from them.
- **Being unwilling to work through the hard parts of the journey:** You will need to be resilient and have the stomach for the long haul. Measure your marathon in 50 yard dashes – have both long and short term goals and metrics. Be both relentless and patient.

CHAPTER 21: INSPIRE PEOPLE

- People will be inspired when you listen from the heart and speak with your own authentic voice. Anyone can learn to inspire others with practice.
- **Be with Your Audience:**
 - As an authority, you have probably been socialized to talk more than listen. However “being” with another requires an ability to listen deeply for what you hear that is not actually being said. Listen beneath the words to find out what really matters to people; ask questions to probe beneath the surface of the conversation. Listen with curiosity and be willing to suspend judgment.
 - Allow people to be silent. Silence is a reflective space that has content and emotion. When people are not speaking they are also able to consider and absorb what’s being said. You can also hold people’s attention with silence.
- **Speak from the Heart:**
 - Find a way to tell people what you care about. Be willing to experience emotion, especially if you wish to move others. Prepare yourself by practicing what you want to say. Also practice you will use your body, for example by physically anchoring yourself in place. Be prepared to operate on the edge of your own emotional comfort zone.
 - Pay attention to your patterns of speaking, for example, tone, volume, intonation, and tempo.

- Speak slowly and make sure each word counts. Remember that people generally need time to absorb what you say. Be aware of the meanings that different words convey and use your words wisely.

CHAPTER 22: RUN EXPERIMENTS

- Adaptive leadership is an experimental art. At best, you are making educated guesses. Take an experimental mindset in everything you do. For example, when you present an idea, step back and observe how people react. Design both short and longer-term experiments that include hypotheses, data collection methodologies, timeframes, and metrics.
- It may not always serve your purpose to tell others that you are running an experiment. Be clear about how much you want to share about your experimental perspective.
- **Take More Risks:** Assuming an experimental mindset means taking more risk. Find the courage to increase uncertainty on behalf of issues that are important to you.
- **Exceed Your Authority:** You may never be clear about the boundaries of your authority. Be willing to go beyond your perceived scope of authority, both formally and informally.
- **Turn up the Heat:** As an adaptive leader, be prepared to be accused of being a troublemaker, especially when your intuition tells you to turn up the temperature on the issue.
- **Name Your Piece of the Mess:** Always be willing to consider how you are contributing to the issue and share that with others. This will send a potent message that you are more committed to the outcomes than to covering up your mistakes.
- **Display Your Own Incompetence:** One powerful arena for experimentation is when and how you will display your own incompetence. If you are willing to do this upfront, you will create an environment for learning that will accelerate the change process.

CHAPTER 21: THRIVE

- Adaptive leadership can be exhausting. Your wellbeing is critical to success so taking care of yourself is not an optional luxury.
- **Grow Your Personal Support Network:**

- Find confidants who will remind you of your purposes and who will shoulder the emotional burdens with you as you go through this process.
 - Find ways to satisfy your hungers outside of work. Lean on your family, friends, and support systems to help you develop resilience and to provide the emotional support you may need.
 - Participate in other non-work communities such as sports team, civic organizations, and on-line communities to provide relief from the intensity of your work experience.
- **Create a Personal Holding Environment:**
 - You will need physical stamina to lead through the journey. A healthy body is essential for maintaining stamina but also because your body detects the undercurrents in the human system of which you are a part.
 - A personal holding environment is a sanctuary you create for yourself that allow you to find time and space renewal and reflection. These can be either physical or mental places where you can stop and listen to yourself. This can include meditation, a long walk, or a religious service.
- **Renew Yourself:** The goal is not just to survive, but to thrive. To thrive you need to be strong and resilient.
 - Balance your personal portfolio by investing your need for personal meaning in more than one place in life.
 - Don't let your dreams consume you; find satisfaction in daily life.
 - Be both realistic and optimistic even though some people would like you choose one or the other. Continue to remember your commitment to a better organization, community and world; be disciplined in reflecting on the outcome of your efforts; forgive yourself for your mistakes and enjoy the process of learning in action. Finally, stay in touch with your deep desire to contribute to the lives of other people.