

Adaptive Leadership: Leading through Change

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Center for Rural Health Development
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Preparedness and Response (PHPR) Center



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Session Overview and Objectives

- 1 Define adaptive challenges vs technical challenges
- 2 Identify 4 approaches for addressing adaptive challenges: 1) Get on the Balcony 2) Regulate Distress 3) Give the Work Back 4) Protect Voices from Below
- 3 Identify real world adaptive challenges in your own organization or work
- 4 Access specific tools and techniques helpful in applying adaptive leadership skills

Welcome and Introductions



Dino Beckett, DO



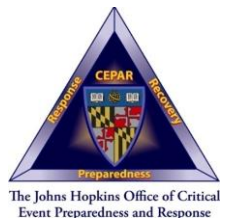
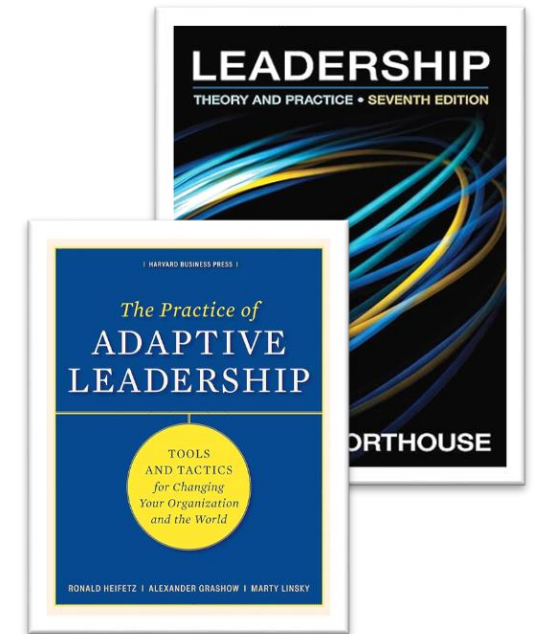
Angie Gray, RN



Anita Stewart, DO

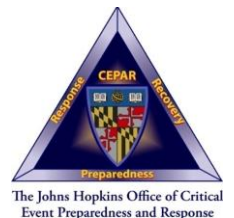
Resources

- **Heifetz RA, Grashow A, Linsky M. (2009). The practice of adaptive leadership:** Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Harvard Business Press
- McLaughlin, C., and Mark R. McMinn. "Developing and Evaluating an Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2013, pp. 107–118
- Leadership: Theory and Practice by Northouse, Peter Guy (2016)
- Nöthel S, Nübold A, Uitdewilligen S, Schepers J, Hülshager U. Development and validation of the adaptive leadership behavior scale (ALBS). *Front Psychol.* 2023 Sep 27;14:1149371. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1149371. PMID: 37829081; PMCID: PMC10565815.
- **Reg 3 PHR Center Website (Workforce Pillar):**
<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/preparedness-initiatives/region-3-center-for-public-health-preparedness-and-response/phpr-resources>



Defining Adaptive Leadership

- Mobilizing people to **tackle tough challenges** and thrive amid change
- Focus on **learning, values, and behavior shift**, not just expertise or authority
- Unlike traditional leadership, it focuses on a **collective, collaborative process** to solve problems without known solutions; It emphasizes **change, experimentation, and empowering others to lead and contribute**
- Pioneered by Ronald Heifetz and others, it involves a leader **stepping back, identifying the core adaptive challenge, and enabling the collective** to do the hard work of change



Distinguishing Technical vs Adaptive Challenges

TECHNICAL

A clearly defined problem with known solutions that can be solved by expertise and procedures

Ex. Electronic record downtime, data interoperability, treating disease, distributing supplies, setting up a shelter- these are mostly technical

ADAPTIVE

Is ill-defined, has competing values, and requires learning and behavioral change

Ex. Evolving attitudes of the public to recommendations, conflict in the workforce, morale, rebuilding trust in PH, and building cross-sector teams across agencies



Some problems are mixed and require both approaches to solutions, including dynamic shifts in priorities



Real-World Examples of Adaptive Challenges

Operational

- Financial and funding uncertainty issues and planning
- Burnout, morale issues, turnover in staff or health teams

Topic Area

- Affordable Housing, Vaccine Hesitancy, Maternal Mortality, Ca Prevention, Substance Use, Teen Pregnancy
- Advancing Community Resiliency; Disaster Preparedness



- Start thinking about examples from your experience and jurisdiction
- Do any of these resonate with you?
- As we go through the tools, consider how you might apply them to your challenges



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Tool 1: Get on the Balcony



1. Step back from the problem to see more:
 - (*Ex. Iceberg analysis*)
2. Problem diagnosis- what is the core problem in your organization or jurisdiction?
 - (*Ex. 5 Whys?*)
3. Step Out. Observe. Avoid proposing solutions before diagnosing the problem

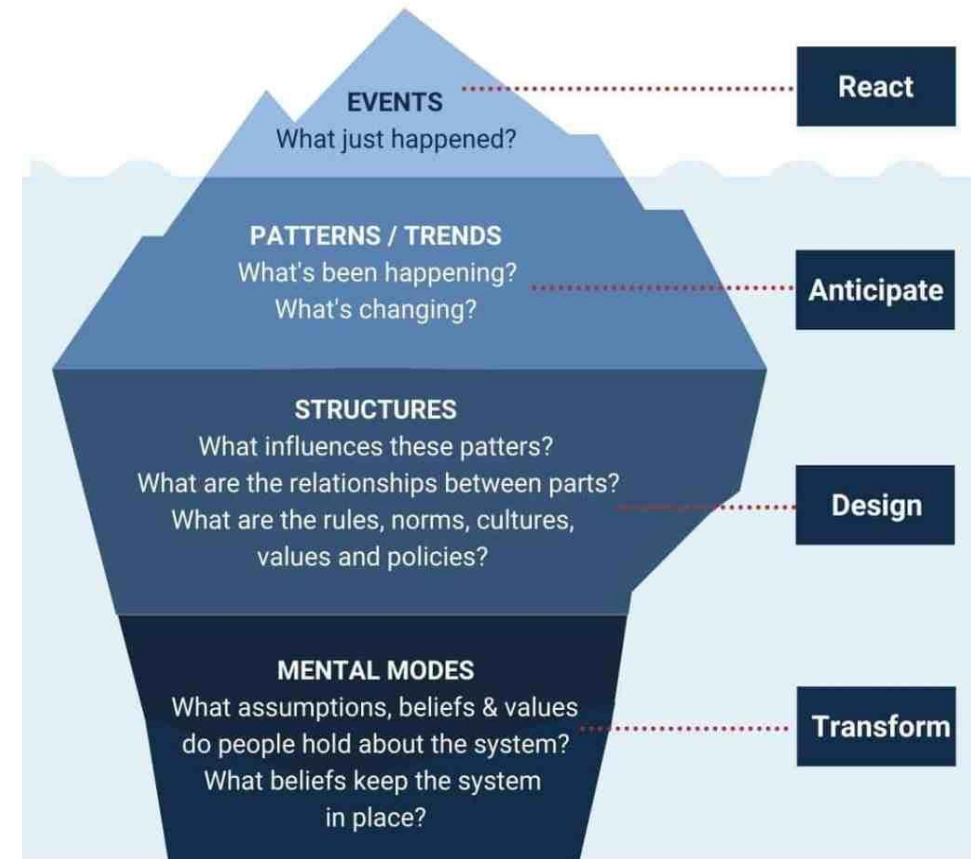


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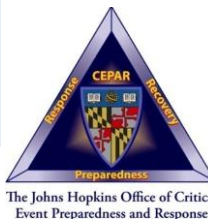
Ex: Diving Deeper to Understand

- What's happening on the surface?
- Can we see patterns or trends?
- What systemic issues or structures lead to this?
- Are there mental models / beliefs / organizational or societal values underlying what we see?

WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM?



Examples of analysis tools include *Iceberg Analysis*, *5 Whys activity*





Tool 2: Regulate Distress

1. Prepare your team to work productively while learning, encourage a thoughtful discussion, dissuade either hot or cold comments
2. Normalize discomfort, pace the work, and create psychological safety
3. Hold steady in the storm; Support maintenance of disciplined attention and regulation of emotions in the face of uncertainty
4. How does this present in the real world?



Provide ground rules, facilitation, and agendas to improve the environment; regulate and manage your own emotions; foster discussion; help staff share and process experiences; check-ins.





Tool 3: Give the Work Back

1. Avoid over functioning and ask teams to generate options
2. Clarify roles and invite shared responsibility; share the work with other stakeholders and influencers



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Tool 3: Give the Work Back

Key to this is.....

Coach and don't carry the team

- 💡 Empower autonomy in decision making
- 💡 Adaptive leaders encourage people at all levels to look deeper and wider, to innovate, and to suggest solutions or ideas
- 💡 This approach can lead to improved ownership of organizational issues, accountability, and innovation
- 💡 Examples may include facilitating a community meeting to dive deeper into a particular issue or to identify and propose solutions; Developing a task force, coalition or collective. Exploring new partnership opportunities.



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Map Partners and Interested Parties

- Who are the partners, collaborators, or community members involved and what do they value?
- Consider tools such as stakeholder mapping or power/interest grids
- Are there key alliances and neutral zones?



Examples of mapping or analysis tools include The Prevention Institute's *Collaboration Multiplier*





Tool 4: Protect Voices from Below

- Bring **marginalized perspectives** and **lesser voiced ideas** to the surface
- **Establish guardrails** so speaking is safe
- **Use dissent for learning** and not for derailment of your goal
- Examples: Use *anonymous input*, *round robins*, or *1-2-All* to widen participation



- Expand / build facilitation skills
- Consider stakeholder or network engagement
 - Who else cares about this issue
 - needs to be at the table
 - could add an oft unheard voice?



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Organizational Readiness for Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership thrives in organizations that allow for it



Create a culture that **values reflective practice** and **continued learning**



Encourage increased **self-efficacy** among teams



Develop **processes and structures** that embrace adaptive principles



Flexibly **mobilize resources** to allow adaptive leadership approaches

EXAMPLE

Incorporate adaptive leadership principles into **individual work plans**, leverage flatter **leadership structures** during crises. Create **spaces and processes that allow for innovation, information sharing, and relationship development.**



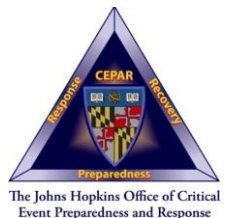
Qualities of an Adaptive Organization

- **Elephants** in the room are named
- Responsibility for the **organization's future** is shared
- **Independent judgment** is expected
- **Leadership capacity** is developed
- **Reflection and continuous learning** are institutionalized
- All are grounded in **collective purpose**



Anchor in Purpose

- Sustainability starts with **shared values**
- **Identify** shared values across your team and organization
- **Negotiate** where necessary
- Intentionally **reconnect** with values
 - Physical reminders
 - Rituals
- Avoid common traps
 - Going “blind and deaf”
 - Martyrdom
 - Self-righteousness



Building an Adaptive Culture

- **Model the Behavior**
 - Create comfort in naming sensitive topics
- **Protect troublemakers**
 - Approach the tangential with curiosity
- **Nurture shared responsibility**
 - Job shadowing, knowledge sharing,
- **Encourage independent judgment**
 - Make yourself dispensable
 - Build tolerance for ambiguity



Improving Communication



Adaptive leadership relies on **clear and flexible communication dynamics**

- Understanding communication skills, needs, roles, and responsibilities
- Understanding and communicating shared values / priorities



Includes communication **within an organization and across varied partners**

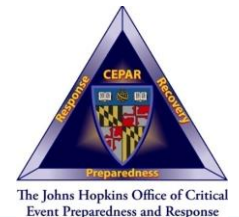
- Conflicting priorities should be understood, acknowledged, and maneuvered
- Build partnerships for improved workforce capacity/coordination



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Learnings From the Field – Panel followed by 1-2 All

- **What's one thing that's currently working for you / your organization** in leading through organizational and societal change?
 - What difference** is it making?
 - Why** does it work?
 - What are you/your org **learning**?



2 Week Take Home Activity: Diagnosing a Topic / Issue



Write down one leadership challenge



Is it technical, adaptive or both? Why?



What might a "balcony" observation reveal?



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2 Week Home Trial of Adaptive Leadership









- Diagnose the problem and measures. What would be the result if it works?
- Define the smallest change that is safe to try in your work environment
- Consider doing a balcony check-in and retrospective with your team to get the process started

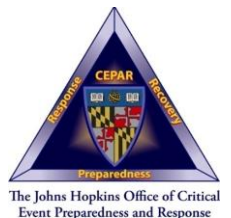


2 Week Take Home Activity:

Some practical scripts for choosing and/or addressing a challenge



-  "What are we pretending not to notice?"
-  "What's working really well that we could do more of?"
-  "What's happening in the bigger picture?" Why?"
-  "What 10% of this work can we own this week?"
-  "What might this change trigger?"
-  "Who could we partner with to address the issue?"

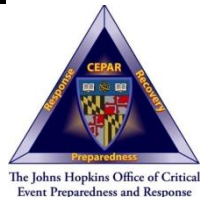


2 Week Take Home:

Tips / Starting Moves for Enacting Change



- Set norms for candor and curiosity
- Ground on shared values
- Park or delegate issues that appear technical; collectively focus on adaptive challenges
- Explore collaborations
- Consider tools such as the Iceberg Analysis or 5 Whys
- Use tools to expand voices and ideas: round-robins, 1-2-all, timed debates



2 Week Take Home: Measuring Impact



**Encourage simple
measurement**

**Track observed
behaviors**

**Identify changes in
processes and
structures**

**Make your desired
impact feasible**



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Remember....



The goal is to.....

**start somewhere, grow,
engage others, and learn**

Small steps:

- create momentum,
- build confidence, and
- allow for growth



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THANK YOU!!



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