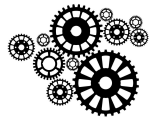


Adaptive Leadership:
Thriving While Facing Congregations'
Toughest Challenges

Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh
Rev. Dr. Terasa G. Cooley
Douglas Zelinski

What is your toughest leadership
challenge?

Technical Problems



- Clear problem and solution
 - Understandable within current paradigm
 - Addressable by the expertise of an authority
- Finally...
- Work on problem restores equilibrium and leads to group satisfaction

Dialogue – In Pairs

- Identify a technical problem – one that:
- Has one or more apparent solutions
 - Can be addressed in a reasonable timeframe
 - Is pretty clear about who needs to do what

5 minutes total

Role of Authority in Technical Problems

- Restores order
- Provides expertise & protection
- Sets direction, persuades the group
- Clear authority to act on behalf of group

When is a challenge not technical?

... when the same problem keeps coming back over and over again

Dialogue – In Pairs

Identify an Adaptive Challenge – one that:

- Keeps showing up no matter what is tried
- Seems serious but we are reluctant to bring up
- Feels confusing or drains your energy to think about

10 minutes total

The Allure of the “Quick Fix”

“If we believe that the change we are facing is a problem, we will treat it as a problem, and search for solutions.”

- Fix the people
- Fix the program
- Fix the policy

These technical solutions tend not to work, because we have limited or no control over most of the challenges we face.

Gil Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation*

Adaptive Challenges

- In the gap between aspiration and reality
- Demand responses outside our repertoire
- Require difficult learning
- Problem and solution lies in stakeholders
- Generate loss & conflict
- Value-laden
- Experimental

Technical or Adaptive?

Technical Problem	Adaptive Challenge
Clearly understood problem and solution	Both problem and solution require learning and experimentation
Authority figure restores order, provides direction, and protects group	Leader moves group through sustained period of disequilibrium at a pace the group can stand
Group expects authority figure to be the source of leadership... and she can be	Group expects "Leader" to be the source of leadership... must be shared
Work on problem restores equilibrium and leads to group satisfaction	Work on challenge generates disequilibrium, challenges values, and surfaces conflict
Authority figure must persuade group	Leader must learn with group
Defined timeframe	Unclear timeframe

Adaptive Leadership

- Mobilizes people to make progress on their toughest challenges
- Tackles challenges without easy solutions
- Enables the capacity to thrive rather than perish, regress, contract
- Wrestles with normative questions of value, purpose, and process

Adaptive Leadership

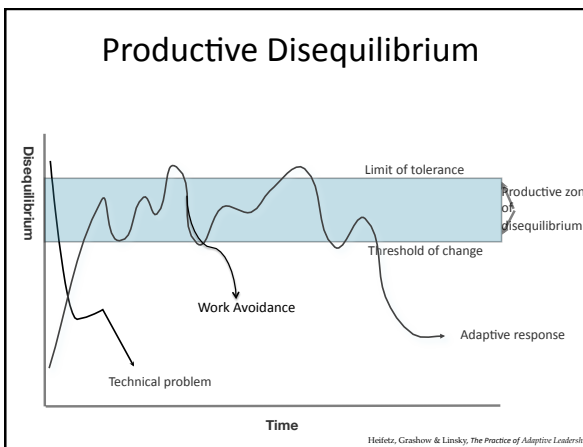
- Leader must learn with group
- Group expects leader to be the source of leadership, but leadership must be shared
- Moves group through sustained period of disequilibrium at a pace the group can stand

Authority vs. Leadership

Task	Technical	Adaptive
Direction	Provide problem definition & solution	Identify the adaptive challenge; frame key questions & issues
Protection	Protect from external threats	Disclose external threats
Order		
Orientation	Orient people to current roles	Disorient current roles; resist orienting to new roles too quickly
Conflict	Restore order	Expose conflict or let it emerge
Norms	Maintain norms	Challenge norms or let them be challenged

- ### 5 Big Ideas in Adaptive Leadership
1. Balcony Space
 2. Productive Disequilibrium
 3. Holding Environment
 4. Work Avoidance
 5. Five Practices of Adaptive Leadership

Balcony Space



Holding Environment

Work Avoidance

Divert Attention:

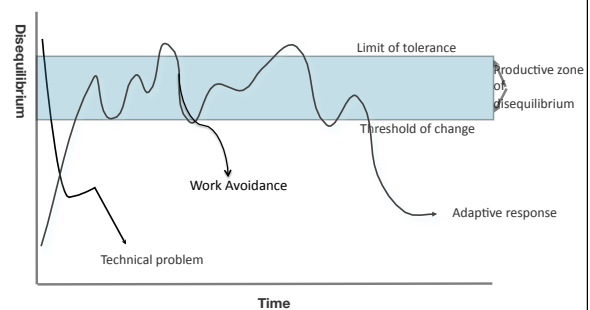
- Focus only on technical fixes
- Define the problem to fit your expertise
- Turn down the heat
- Deny that problems exist
- Create a proxy fight
- Reorganize
- Take options off the table to honor legacy traditions

Work Avoidance

Displace Responsibility:

- Blame the messenger
- Scapegoat
- Externalize the enemy
- Attack the authority
- Delegate the work to those without the skills or the power
- Complain about factions

Productive Disequilibrium



Paradigm Shift for Leaders

- From “doing” to “discerning”
- From “knowing” to “learning”
- Keep attention on the mission and the values
- Create holding environments to tolerate and learn from conflict
- Create balcony space
- Model openness to conversation and process

Five Practices to Evolve Your Church into an Adaptive Organization

1. Share Leadership for the Congregation
2. Identify the Elephant
3. Create Holding Environment
4. Develop Leadership Capacity
5. Institutionalize Reflection and Continuous Learning

1. Share Leadership for the Congregation

- “Who’s in Charge?”
An adaptive question, not technical
- Authority vs. leadership
- Abdicating vs. empowering
- Thinking politically

2. Identify the Elephant

- Encourage people to speak the unspeakable
- Model the behavior.

3. Create Holding Environments

- Reminders of Purpose
- Covenantal Behavior
- Dialogue not debate
- Listening circles
- Processes of discernment rather than steps of decision-making

4. Develop Leadership Capacity

- Bless incompetence
- Engage in small (low-risk, high- learning) experiments
- Make yourself dispensable.

5. Institutionalize Reflection and Continuous Learning

- Ask difficult questions:
 - How will we know when we are successful?
 - What is the gap between where we are and where we want to be?
 - Strengths/Weaknesses/Threats/Opportunities.
- Devote resources to ensure continual learning by ministers, staff, and lay leaders.

Questions

Resources

- Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh
– jmillspaugh@uuma.org
- Cambridge Leadership Associates
– cambridge-leadership.com
- *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Ronald Heifetz, Martin Linsky & Alexander Grashow, Harvard Business Press, 2009
- *Leading Change in the Congregation*, Gil Rendle, Alban Books, 1997.

Thank You !

