Adaptive Leadership in the Face of Crisis

Navigating COVID-19

UBC SAUDER
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Adaptive Leadership Framework

What is Adaptive Leadership?

- Leadership framework built from the work of Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky at Harvard.

- 35+ years of academic research in the art & practice of leadership development.

- A practical toolkit that helps organizations:
  - ➢ adapt to challenging circumstances
  - ➢ implement systemic change
  - ➢ build adaptive capacity in people

In Action: A Sample

- Chase
- Enbridge
- Harvard University
- Lyft
- Microsoft
- Novartis
- Obama Foundation
- Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia
- TELUS
- UNESCO
- University of British Columbia

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1. Technical vs. Adaptive

Technical Problems

- clear – easy to spot/identify

- problems are familiar; may range from simple to complex

- expertise already exists

- solving is a tactical exercise

Fulfilling role of Authority

Adaptive Challenges

- elusive – difficult to spot/identify

- haven't been solved within current context or w/ current stakeholders

- no ready-made answers exist

- requires stakeholders/organization to make systematic changes

Exercising Leadership

"The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat adaptive challenges like technical problems."

- Ronald Heifetz

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2. Productive Zone of Disequilibrium
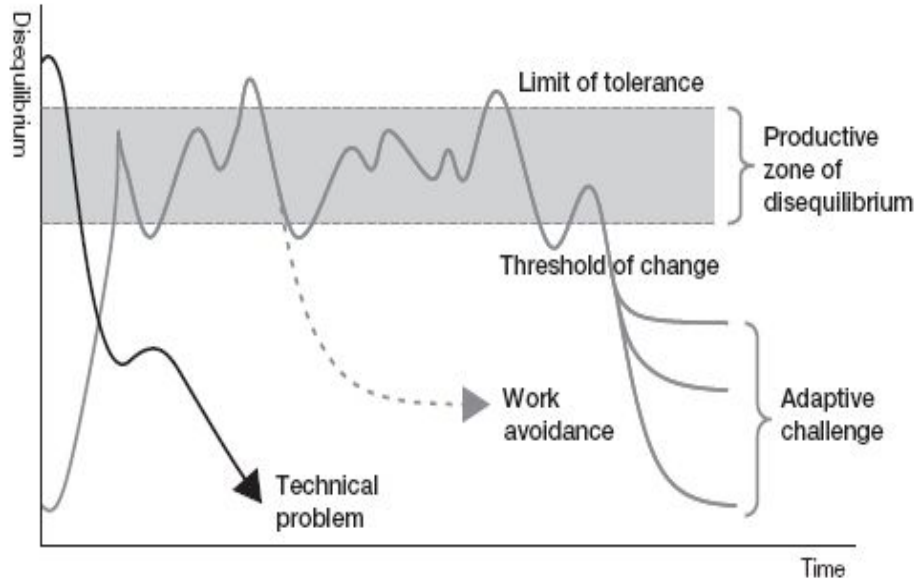
Strategies to Remain in the Zone

1. Get on the balcony
2. Seek allies
3. Give the work back
4. Mitigate/honour losses
5. Instill inspiration and hope

Source: Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and World (Harvard Business Press, 2009), p. 30.

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3.   Self vs. Role

Ways to Anchor Ourselves During Adaptive Work

- Places: find sanctuaries

- People: reach out to confidants

- Practices: uphold rituals

Greater significance during COVID-19

- Working from home

- Physical isolation

- Juggling various roles

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