Leadership:

The Adaptive Framework

Ronald Heifetz
Where are We:

In the Development of “Leadership”

as an Area of Study?

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Re-defining Old Terms for Analytical Purposes

Example -- Physics Definitions:

**Force = Mass \times Acceleration**  (Newtons)
- An interaction that changes the motion of an object: from still to moving or one speed to another – both are accelerations.

**Work = Force \times Distance**  (Joules)
- An interaction that changes the motion of an object over a distance. That is: You are doing work when you accelerate an object over a distance. Work: How far did you accelerate an object?

**Power = Work / Time**  (Watts)
- An interaction that will change the motion of an object for a distance over time. Power: How far and fast did you accelerate an object?
How Should We Define Leadership?

Leadership is often defined by its Inputs or Instruments:
  • Personal Characteristics
  • Tools of authoritative power and influence

Leadership is better viewed as a practice, defined by:
  • The work to be done
The Work of Leadership
Three Major Sources of Confusion about Leadership

1. Leadership = *personal characteristics*
2. Leadership = *positions of authority and tools of influence*
3. Leadership = *value-free*
Distinguish

Technical and Adaptive Work
Common Source of Leadership Failure

- We treat adaptive challenges as technical problems
- We do this for both political and personal reasons
## Technical and Adaptive Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIND OF WORK</th>
<th>PROBLEM DEFINITION</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS &amp; IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th>PRIMARY LOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TECHNICAL</td>
<td>CLEAR</td>
<td>CLEAR</td>
<td>AUTHORITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHNICAL &amp; ADAPTIVE</td>
<td>CLEAR</td>
<td>REQUIRES LEARNING</td>
<td>AUTHORITY &amp; STAKEHOLDER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADAPTIVE</td>
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<td>STAKEHOLDER &gt; AUTHORITY</td>
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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Essential Questions of Adaptive Change

1. What cultural DNA do we keep?

2. What cultural DNA do we discard?

3. What innovative DNA will enable us to thrive in the new and challenging environment?
Sustainable Transformative Change is Adaptive

Cultural DNA

Conserved  Lost  New
Technical vs. Adaptive Processes

Time -- Where are we now?

Uncertain path of adaptive work

Critical path of technical work

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Frontier of Competence

Zone of Incompetence and Learning

Area of Competence

Current Frontier of Competence

New Frontier of Competence

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Technical and Adaptive Work

#### Diagram:

- **DISEQUILIBRIUM**
- **LIMIT OF TOLERANCE**
- **THRESHOLD OF LEARNING**
- **WORK AVOIDANCE**
- **TECHNICAL PROBLEM**
- **ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE**
- **PRODUCTIVE RANGE OF STRESS**

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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Key Properties of Adaptive Work

1. Adaptive challenges demands responses outside the current way of operating.

2. Transformative change is conservative as well as innovative.

3. Innovation is an experimental process.

4. Adaptive organizations sense their environment.

5. General success requires local adaptations to local environments.
Key Properties of Adaptive Work

6. The people with the problem are part of the problem, and they are the solution.

7. Adaptive solutions often lie within the society or organization.

8. Solutions involve real and potential losses – material, competency, and identity.


10. Adaptive work takes more time than technical work.
Avoiding Adaptive Work

• To avoid real and potential losses
• By diverting responsibility or attention
Displace Responsibility

1. Look for a Big Man to fix the problem
2. Externalize the enemy
3. Attack authority
4. Divide the top team
5. Kill the messenger
6. Scapegoat
Divert Attention

1. Partial or Fake Remedies
   • Define the problem to fit our competence
   • Define the problem to make it somebody else’s
   • Misuse structural adjustments
   • Misuse consultants, committees, task forces

2. Deflect attention to side issues, irrelevant issues

3. Deny

4. Lie
The Tools of Authority, Power, and Influence
Why Distinguish Leadership from Authority?

1. Explain why many people in positions of authority fail to lead
   - Analyze the powers and constraints of authority on leadership

2. Learn from those who lead without or beyond their authority
   - Encourage people to lead from any position

3. Analyze authority systems and renew authority relationships
Authority Relationships

Power

Entrusted

Service

A

B

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Properties of Authority

• A service contract
  • Party A entrusts power to Party B for services
  • Formal or informal

• Key components of the contract
  • Power
  • Trust
  • Service
Key Services of Authority

• Direction

• Protection

• Order
  • Orientation to roles
  • Control of conflict
  • Norm maintenance
Trust

• Predictability
  • Values
  • Competence
The Paradox of Trust

People will trust you when you fulfill their expectations for service

*So what happens when you:*

- Deliver information that conflicts with those expectations?

- Tell people what they may need to hear, not what they want and expect to hear?

*Renegotiating expectations to reset trust becomes critical to leadership*
Defining Leadership

The practice of mobilizing people to accomplish adaptive change

- Leadership is a practice
- with and without authority
- that builds new capacity in people and organizations
- to meet adaptive challenges
- and thrive in a changing and challenging world
Distinguish
Management and Leadership
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>Adaptive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With Authority</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Leadership with Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Authority</td>
<td>Managing Up and Across</td>
<td>Leadership Up, Across, and from Outside</td>
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Management and Leadership

Management is the set of practices that mobilizes the efficient coordination of complex technical problem-solving.

Leadership mobilizes adaptive change: honoring the essential, discarding the expendable, and innovating to build new capacity.
### Operating from Authority Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Mode of Operating</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing</td>
<td>Leading</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Define problems and solutions</td>
<td>Identify adaptive challenges ... frame the key issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Shield the organization from external threat</td>
<td>Let the organization feel external threats within a productive range of distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order:</td>
<td>Restore order</td>
<td>Regulate disequilibrium -- within a productive range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Orientation</td>
<td>Clarify roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>Disorient current roles and resist pressure to orient people to new roles too quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managing Conflict</td>
<td>Reduce conflict</td>
<td>Surface and use conflict productively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shaping Norms</td>
<td>Maintain current norms</td>
<td>Challenge unproductive norms or let them be challenged</td>
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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
The Practice of Leadership

Near-Term
• Mobilizing people to accomplish adaptive change

Long-Term
• Building a culture of adaptability for an ongoing stream of adaptive challenges
Work

Authority
- Formal and Informal Authority
  - Neustadt’s Powers and Influence
  - Nye’s Hard and Soft Power

Management
Technical
Adaptive

Leadership

View 2

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
A Strategy of Leadership:
Mobilizing Adaptive Change
### A Strategic Framework with Four Quadrants

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Self/Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>4</td>
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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Seven Strategic Tasks

Diagnosis
1. Get on the Balcony
2. Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges

Action
1. Infuse the Work with Meaning
2. Build Trust
3. Give the Work Back to People
4. Regulate Stress
5. Generate More Leadership
Quadrant 1: Analyzing the Systemic Challenge

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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
1. Get on the Balcony

• Take an interpretive stance

• Zoom in and out iteratively:
  • Structure — from macro to micro levels of the system
  • Direction — from orienting values to tasks
  • Time scale — from the larger arc of change to short time frames

• Think politically

• Take time for reflection

• Use partners
Levels of Abstraction

1. Structure – Macro to Micro
2. Direction – Purpose to Tasks
3. Time – Long to Short
2. Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges

Key Question: Who Needs to Learn What to Make Progress?

• Identify the ecosystem of the challenge

• Identify the key stakeholders and their perspectives

• Unbundle the Technical from the Adaptive challenges

• Distinguish ripe from unripe issues
2. Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges

- Listen across and outside the organization
- Interpret authority figures in light of their constituents
- Listen to the values underpinning arguments – the “song beneath the words”
- Use conflict as a clue
- Use your team dynamics as cases-in-point for clues
The Politics of Leadership

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE
Quadrant 2:
Place Yourself in the System

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Place Yourself in the System

1. Placement
2. Mindsets of leadership
3. Distinguish Role from Self
4. What Diagnostic and Action Mistakes am I likely to Make?
5. Renegotiate Loyalties that Cause these Mistakes
6. Stay Mindful of the Context
7. Maintain Heart
1. Placement

You’ve been entrusted with power for services.

In analyzing your placement in the authorizing environment,

1. What are you authorized to do, i.e., what is your job?
2. Who gives you these authorizations?
3. What are the expectations of each of these sources of authorization?
4. Do they conflict? If so, how?
5. What are the cultural norms -- the unwritten rules of behavior -- for maintaining the trust that come with your authority?
6. What are the limits of your authority: What does your authority enable you to do? What does it not enable you to do?
2. Key Mindsets of Leadership

- Conserve – essential values and capacity
- Model – consistent orienting values
- Scan – 360 degrees for new challenges
- Experiment – pervasively
- Improvise – responsively
- Take losses – thoughtfully
3. Distinguish Role from Self

- A Systems View of Yourself
- Multiple Role Identities
- Kegan’s Stages 3-5 of Adult Development
- Levels of Loyalty:
  - Professional
  - Social
  - Ancestral

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
4. Identify Likely Mistakes

1. In the diagnostic search process
2. In thinking strategically
3. In taking action
5. Re-Negotiate Activated Loyalties

- to free you from making these mistakes
6. Stay Mindful of the Context

• Leadership is an improvisational practice

• Iteration: Assessment-Action-Assessment

• Where are we now?

• And now, where are we?
7. Maintain Heart

- Service
- The Form Doesn’t Matter
- The Myth of Measurement
Sacred Heart

<table>
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<tr>
<th>QUALITY OF HEART</th>
<th>BECOMES:</th>
<th>DRESSED UP AS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>INNOCENCE &amp; IMAGINATION</td>
<td>CYNICISM</td>
<td>REALISM</td>
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<td>CURIOSITY &amp; DOUBT</td>
<td>ARROGANT CERTAINTY</td>
<td>AUTHORITATIVE KNOWLEDGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMPASSION</td>
<td>CALLOUSNESS</td>
<td>THICK-SKIN OF EXPERIENCE</td>
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ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
## Quadrant 3: Managing Yourself

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Daily Practices to Lead and Stay Alive

1. Get on the balcony
2. Seek confidants
3. Distinguish role from self
4. Listen
5. Manage your hungers
6. Anchor yourself
7. Purposes beyond measure
Quadrant 4: Taking Action

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4. Regulate Stress
5. Generate Leadership
1. Infuse the Work with Meaning –

The Narrative

• Help people comprehend the changing context of their lives and work
• Locate and orient each party to the changing context
• Articulate orienting values
• Manage unrealistic expectations for quick and easy solutions
• Honor the essential: Build from and conserve the past
• Name the losses and sustain people through transitional difficulties
• Call forth people’s resourcefulness
2. Build Trust

- Strengthen Vertical and Horizontal Bonds of Trust
- Provide presence and poise amidst uncertainty and risk
- Model the changed behavior
- Own your piece of the mess
- Acknowledge losses
- Receive anger with grace
- Manage personal boundaries with integrity
- Learn publicly

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
The Holding Environment

Vertical and Horizontal Bonds of Trust

Authority

Social Capital

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
3. Give the Work Back to People

• Place responsibility for adaptive work where it is needed
  • Frame the key challenges for each sub-group
    • Who Needs to Learn What to Make Progress?
• Counteract work avoidance patterns that displace attention and responsibility
• Encourage widespread experimentation
• Model new norms to move from dependency to distributed initiative
  • Cascade leadership practice to local level
  • Support rather than control

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Leadership Generates Capacity, not Dependency
4. Regulate Stress
4. Regulate Stress

**Raise the Temperature**

1. Draw attention to the tough questions
2. Give people more responsibility than they are comfortable with
3. Bring conflicts to the surface
4. Protect provocative people and oddball ideas
4. Regulate Stress

Lower the Temperature

1. Speak to people’s anger, fear, and disorientation.

2. Take action. Structure the problem-solving process—break the problem into parts, and create time frames, decision rules, and clear role assignments.

3. Slow down the process. Pace and sequence the issues and who you bring to the table.

4. Be visible and present—shoulder responsibility and provide confidence; take heat and hold steady.

5. Orient people—maintain a collective sense of purpose
   - reconnect people to their shared values
   - locate them in an arc of change over time

6. Low-hanging fruit—make short-term gains by prioritizing the technical aspects of the problem situation.

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
5. Leadership Generates Leadership

Leadership Development is a Line Manager’s Job

• Encourage experimentation
• Make time to explore people’s hunches
• Control your reflex to squelch variant voices
• Use each supervisory encounter as a training opportunity
• Coach creative and challenging people for effectiveness
• Model new norms to move from dependency to distributed initiative
  • Cascade leadership practice to local level
  • Support rather than control

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu
Leadership

Generates

Leadership
Two Special Time Frames:
Crisis and Culture Change
Crisis

Properties:
1. High Stakes
2. High Uncertainty
3. Urgency – Time Compression

Two Phases:
1. Acute Phase
2. Adaptive Phase
Acute Phase

Goal:
Stabilize the situation

Purpose:
Survive and buy time for adaptive work
Crisis Life-Cycle Model

- Comfort Zone
- Learning Zone
- Preparation Phase
- Emergency Phase
- Adaptive Phase
- System Stress Level
- Disequilibrium / Stress
- Time

Danger Zone

Amount of Stress an Organization Can Tolerate

Amount of Stress Required for Change
Authority in the Acute/Emergency Phase

Key Services

1. Decisive action – Drive the organizational response
   - Direction, Protection, and Order
   - Informing the public that this is an adaptive context demanding the need to Improvise
   - Improvise – decisive action today followed by a modified decisive action tomorrow

2. Manage the Disequilibrium
   - Action
   - Presence
   - Heart – speaking to the losses
   - Confidence – faith in people’s resilience

2. Frame the key issues for the Adaptive phase
Adaptive Phase

Goal:

Use the urgency generated by the crisis to mobilize collective energy for tackling the adaptive challenges revealed by the crisis.
Adaptive Organizations
Adaptive Organizations

1. Sense early and respond quickly to the environment
2. Build a strong holding environment of vertical and horizontal bonds of trust
3. Build an ethos of shared responsibility
4. Reward and learn fast from ongoing experimentation
5. Put the tough issues on the table
6. Encourage people to lead with and beyond their authority
7. Develop people daily
Leadership Research and Education
A Work-Oriented Approach to Leadership Research and Education

1. Begin with cases of organizational, social or political challenges -- success and failure

2. Analyze the practices of leadership that met or failed to meet these challenges

3. Analyze and develop the knowledge, skills, values and character needed for those leadership practices
Teaching Leadership

- Challenges of Transferability and Readiness
- Using Experience
  - Case-in-Point method
  - Participant Cases / Small and Large Group Work
  - Structured Exercises
- Longitudinal Structures
- Online Adaptations

ronald_heifetz@harvard.edu