

# **Leadership:**

# **The Adaptive Framework**

**Ronald Heifetz**

**Where are We:  
In the Development of “Leadership”  
as an Area of Study?**

# Re-defining Old Terms for Analytical Purposes

Example -- Physics Definitions:

**Force = Mass x 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 x 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

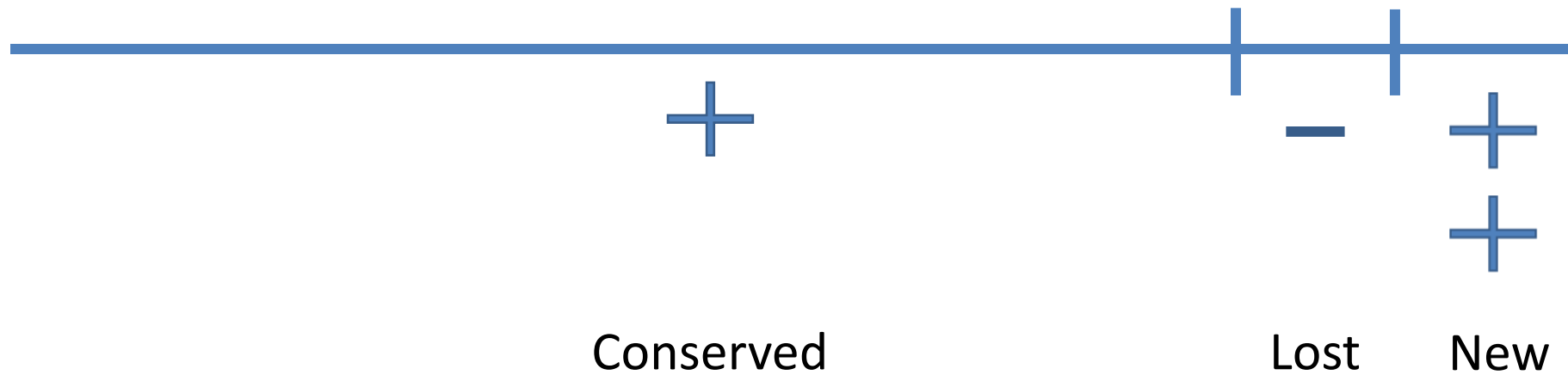
KIND OF WORK	PROBLEM DEFINITION	SOLUTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION	PRIMARY LOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORK
TECHNICAL	CLEAR	CLEAR	AUTHORITY
TECHNICAL & ADAPTIVE	CLEAR	REQUIRES LEARNING	AUTHORITY & STAKEHOLDER
ADAPTIVE	REQUIRES LEARNING	REQUIRES LEARNING	STAKEHOLDER > AUTHORITY

# Essential Questions of Adaptive Change

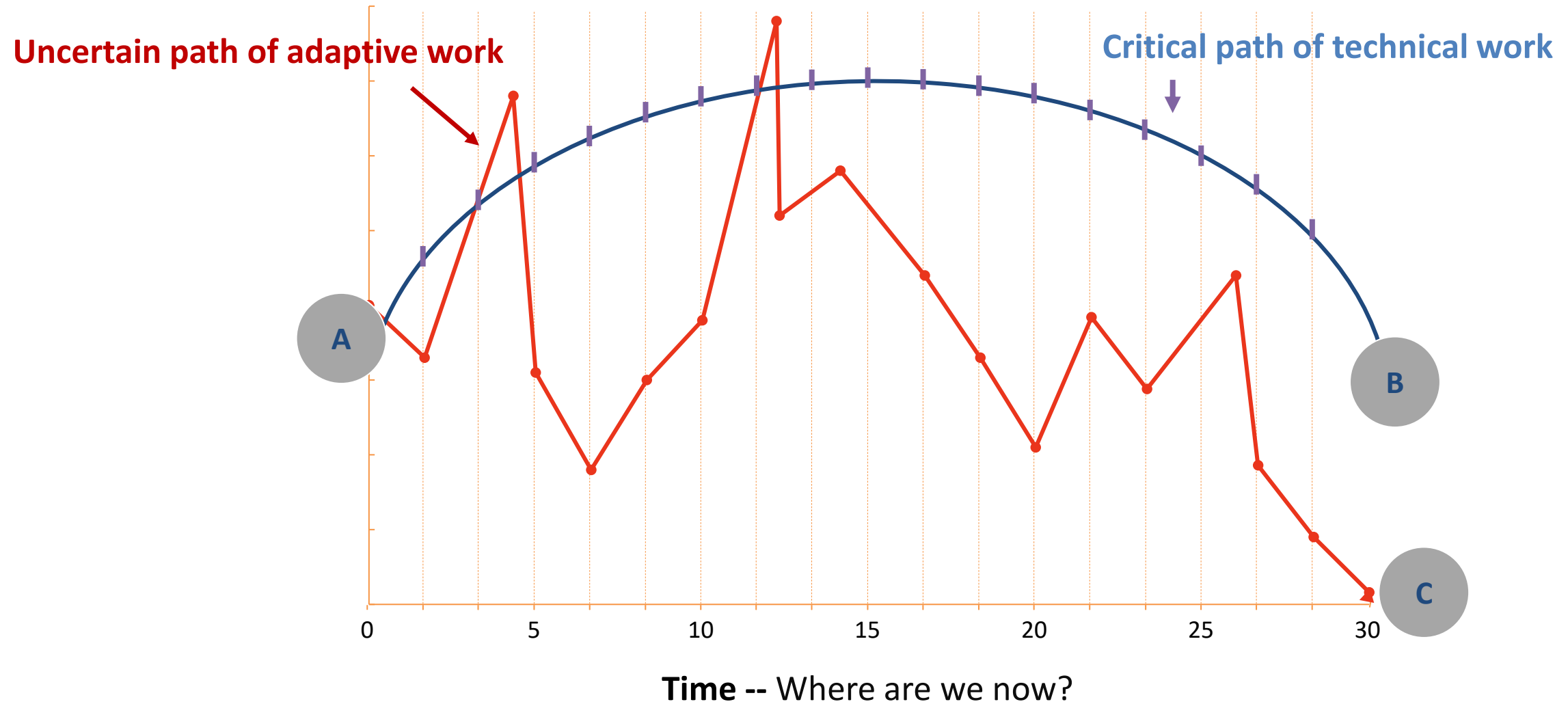
1. **What cultural DNA do we keep?**
2. **What cultural DNA do we discard?**
3. **What innovative DNA will enable us to thrive in the new and challenging environment?**

# Sustainable Transformative Change is Adaptive

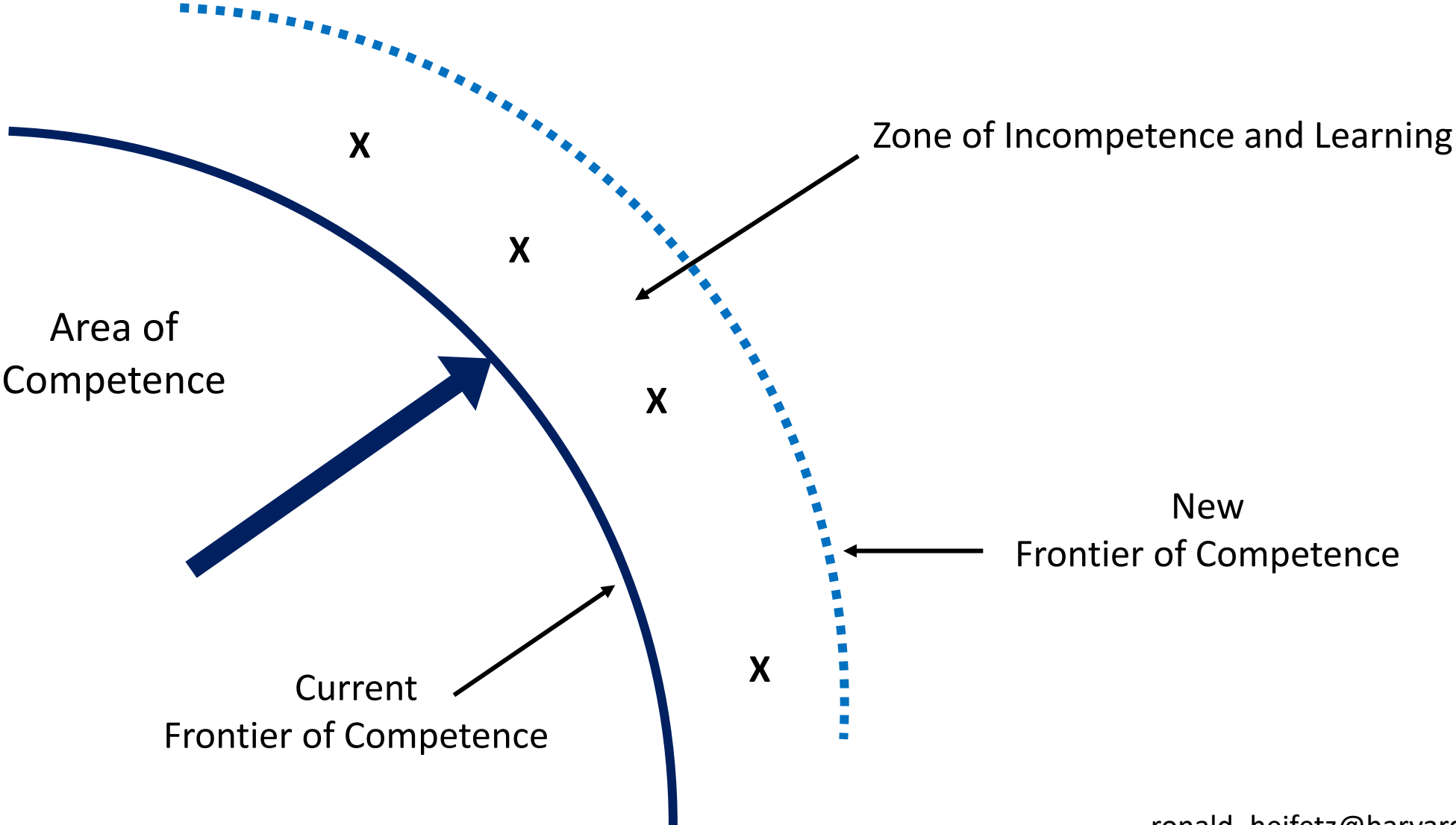
## Cultural DNA



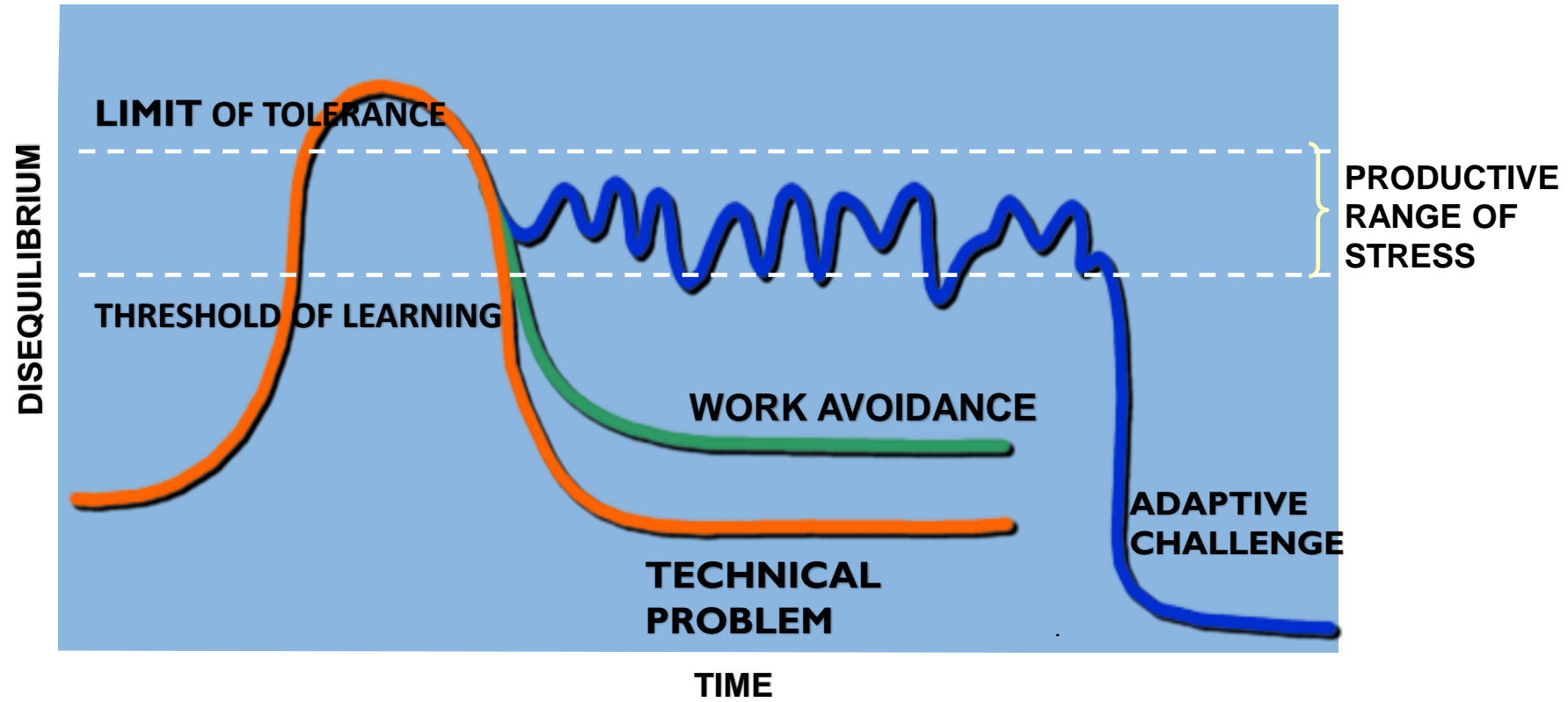
# Technical vs. Adaptive Processes



# Frontier of Competence



# Technical and Adaptive Work



# 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.**
9. **Adaptive work generates disequilibrium, and losses generate resistance.**
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

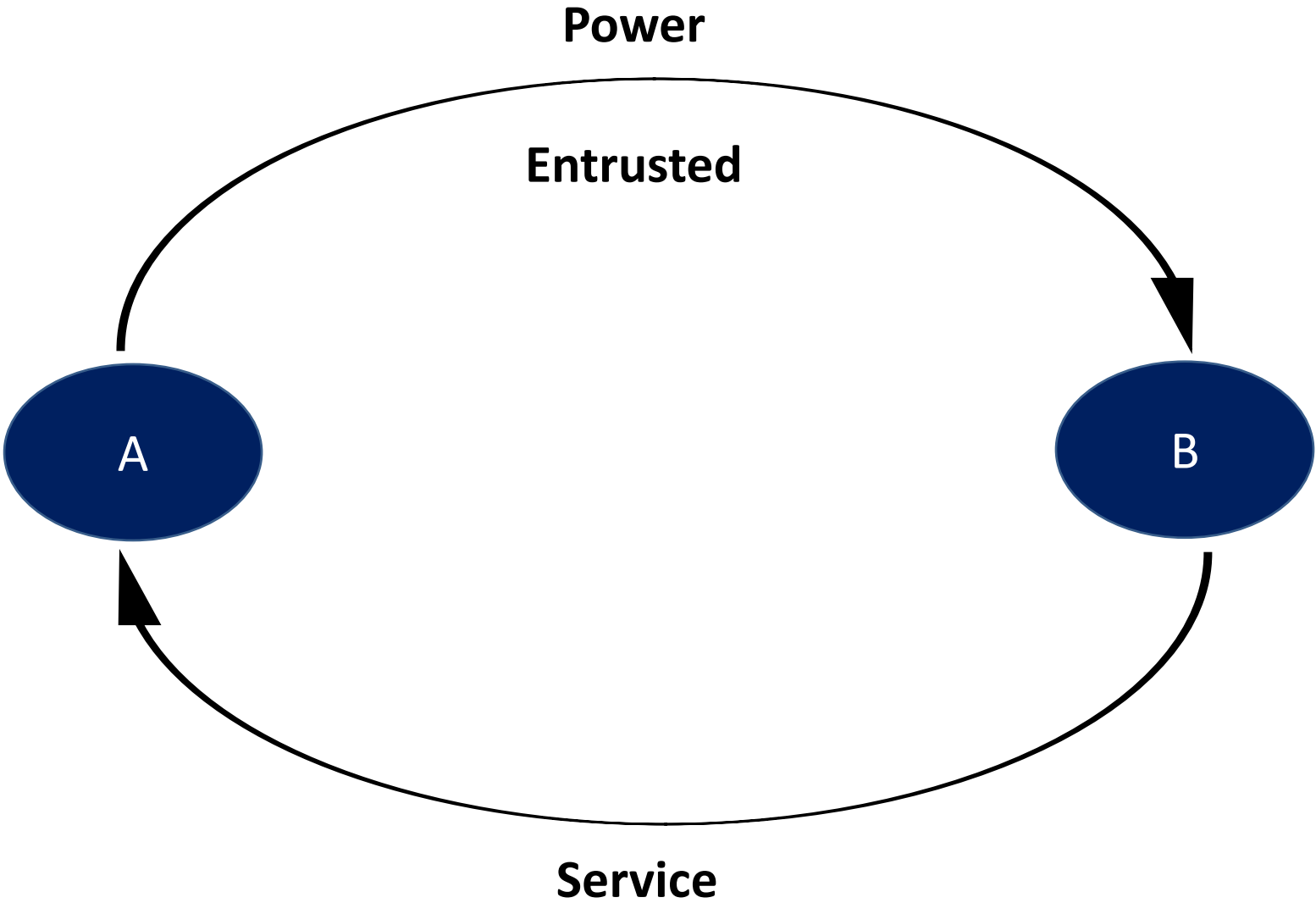
1. **Partial or Fake Remedies**
  - **Define the problem to fit our competence**
  - **Define the problem to make it somebody else's**
  - **Misuse structural adjustments**
  - **Misuse consultants, committees, task forces**
2. **Deflect attention to side issues, irrelevant issues**
3. **Deny**
4. **Lie**

# **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



# 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**

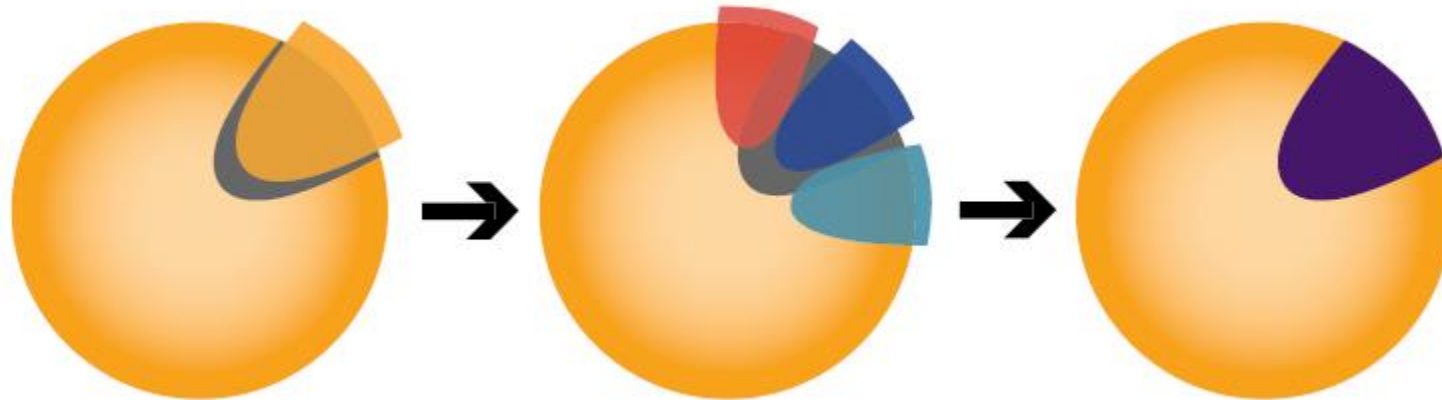
# Management and Leadership

	Technical	Adaptive
With Authority	Management	Leadership with Authority
Beyond Authority	Managing Up and Across	Leadership Up, Across, and from Outside

# 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

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

# 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



# View I

**Power**

**Authority**

Formal Authority

Informal Authority

-Neustadt's Powers  
-Nye's Hard Power

-Neustadt's Power  
-Nye's Soft Power

**Management and Leadership**

**Coercion**

**Influence**

## View 2

# Work

## Authority

Formal and Informal Authority

- Neustadt's Powers and Influence
- Nye's Hard and Soft Power

## Management

## Leadership

## Technical

## Adaptive

# **A Strategy of Leadership: Mobilizing Adaptive Change**

# A Strategic Framework with Four Quadrants

	System	Self/Role
Diagnosis	1	2
Action	4	3

# 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**

	System	Self/Role
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Action	4	3

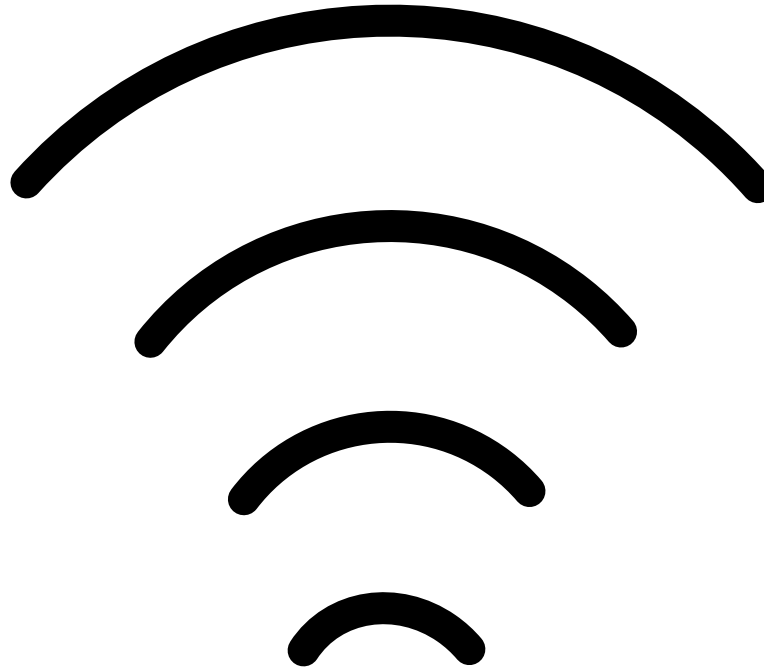
**Quadrant 1:**  
**Analyzing the Systemic Challenge**

# 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

General



Specific

1. Structure – Macro to Micro
2. Direction – Purpose to Tasks
3. Time – Long to Short



## 2. Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges

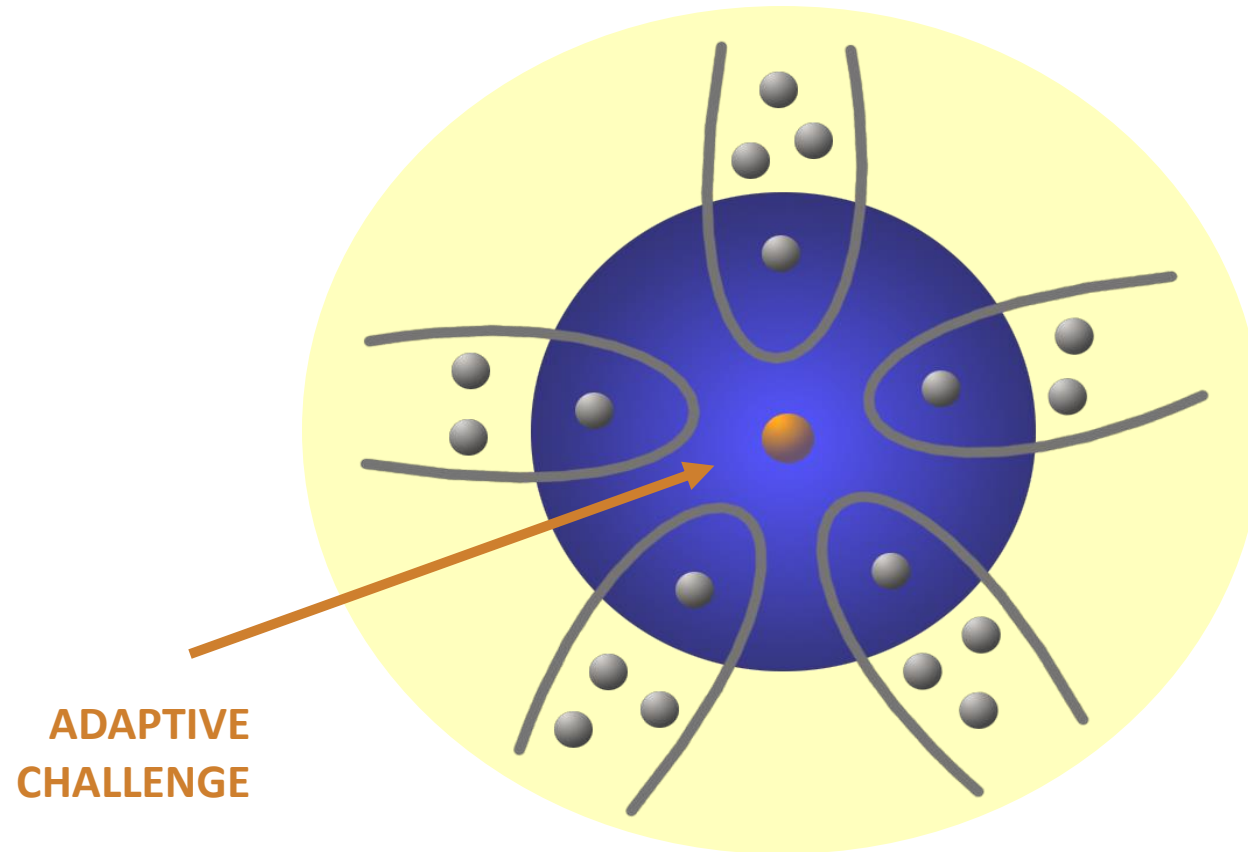
**Key Question:**      *Who Needs to Learn What to Make Progress?*

- 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



	System	Self/Role
Diagnosis	1	2
Action	4	3

**Quadrant 2:**  
**Place Yourself in the System**

# 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**



## **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

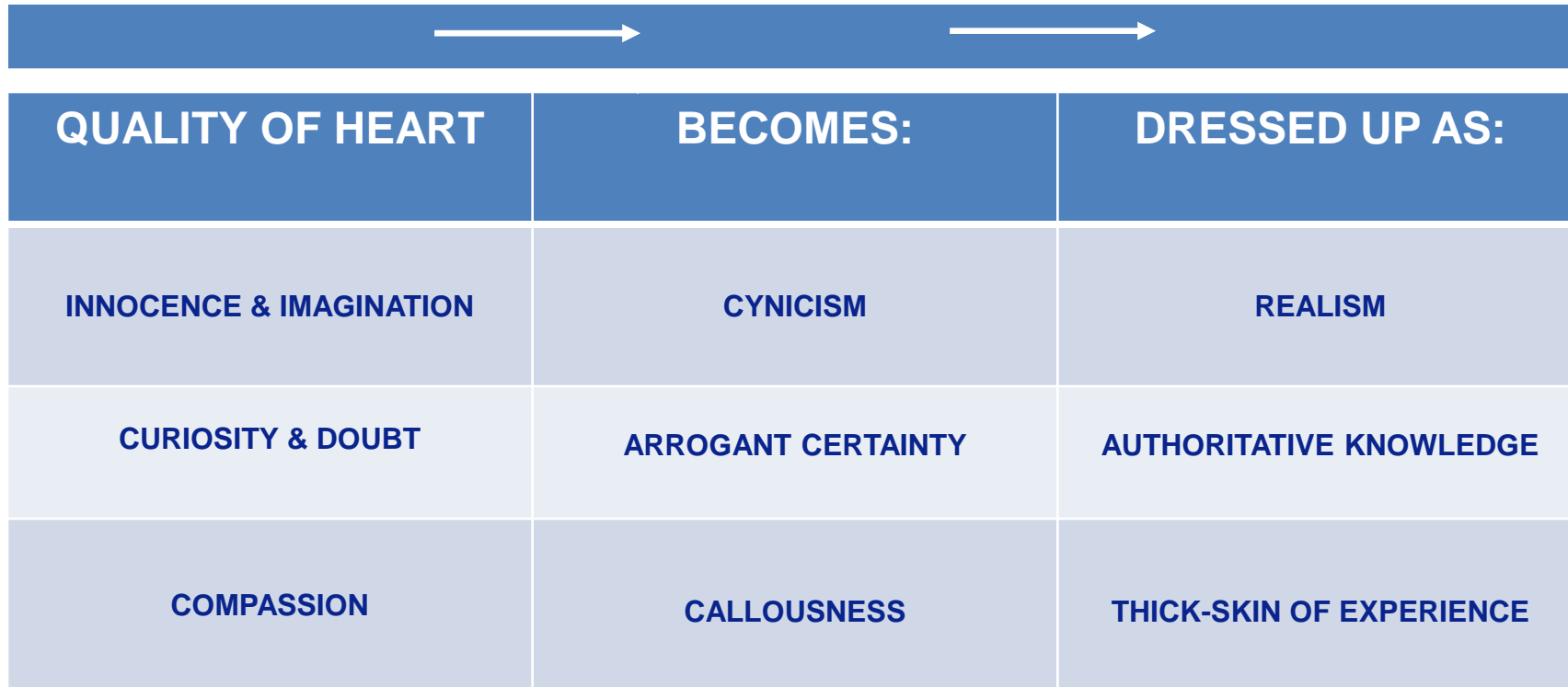
## **6. Stay Mindful of the Context**

- **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



QUALITY OF HEART	BECOMES:	DRESSED UP AS:
INNOCENCE & IMAGINATION	CYNICISM	REALISM
CURIOSITY & DOUBT	ARROGANT CERTAINTY	AUTHORITATIVE KNOWLEDGE
COMPASSION	CALLOUSNESS	THICK-SKIN OF EXPERIENCE

	System	Self/Role
Diagnosis	1	2
Action	4	3

## Quadrant 3: Managing Yourself

# 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**

	System	Self/Role
Diagnosis	1	2
Action	4	3

## Quadrant 4: Taking Action



# 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 Leadership

# **1. Infuse the Work with Meaning –**

## **The Narrative**

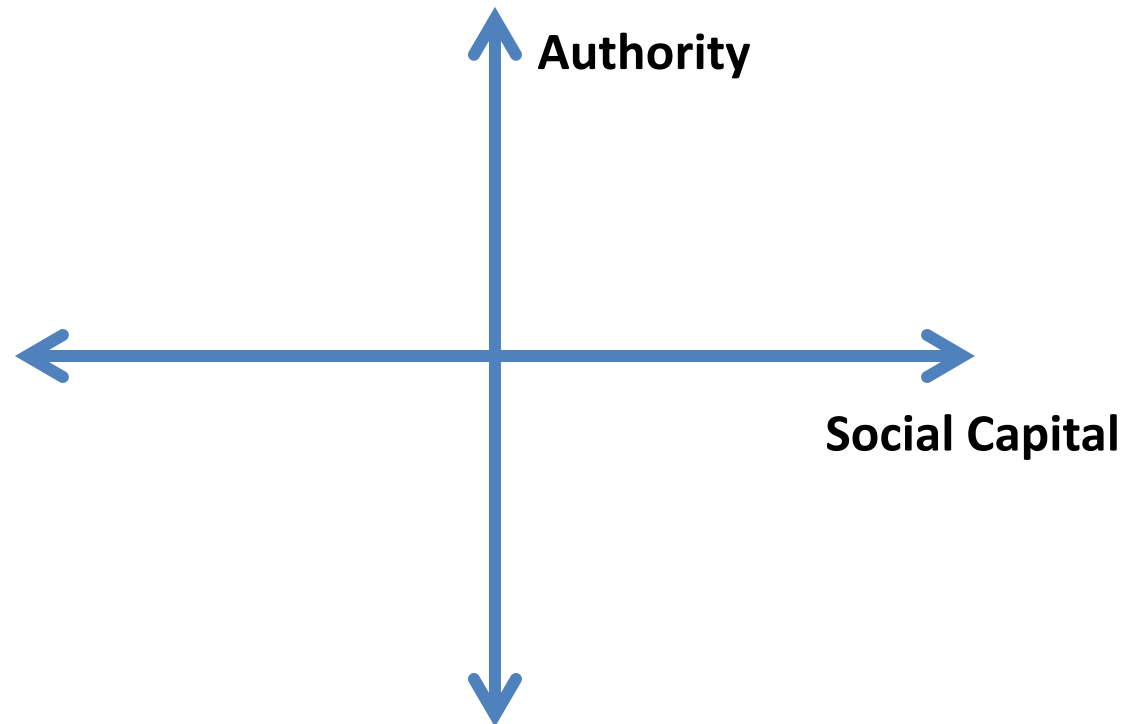
- **Help people comprehend the changing context of their lives and work**
- **Locate and orient each party to the changing context**
- **Articulate orienting values**
- **Manage unrealistic expectations for quick and easy solutions**
- **Honor the essential: Build from and conserve the past**
- **Name 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**

# The Holding Environment

## Vertical and Horizontal Bonds of Trust

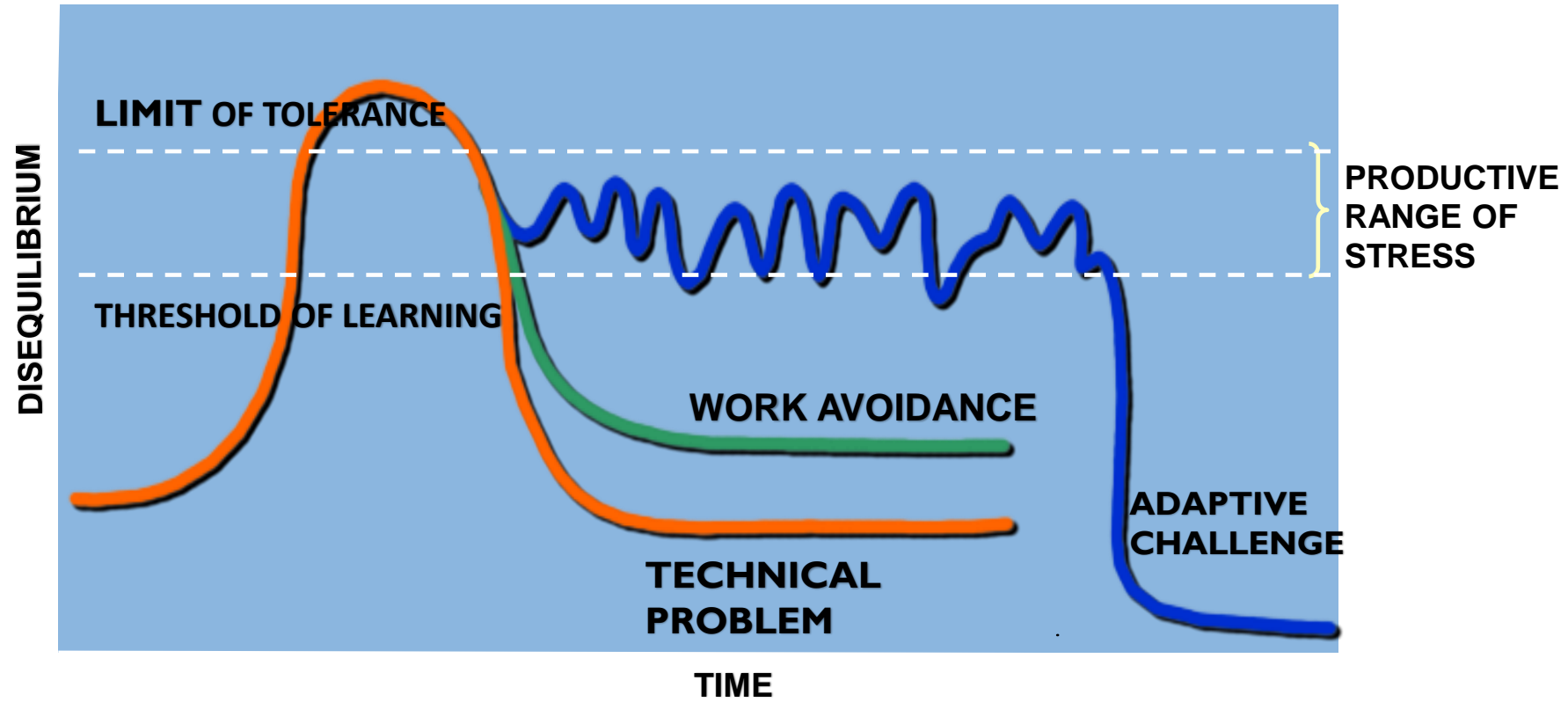


## 3. Give the Work Back to People

- 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

**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.**

# 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

**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

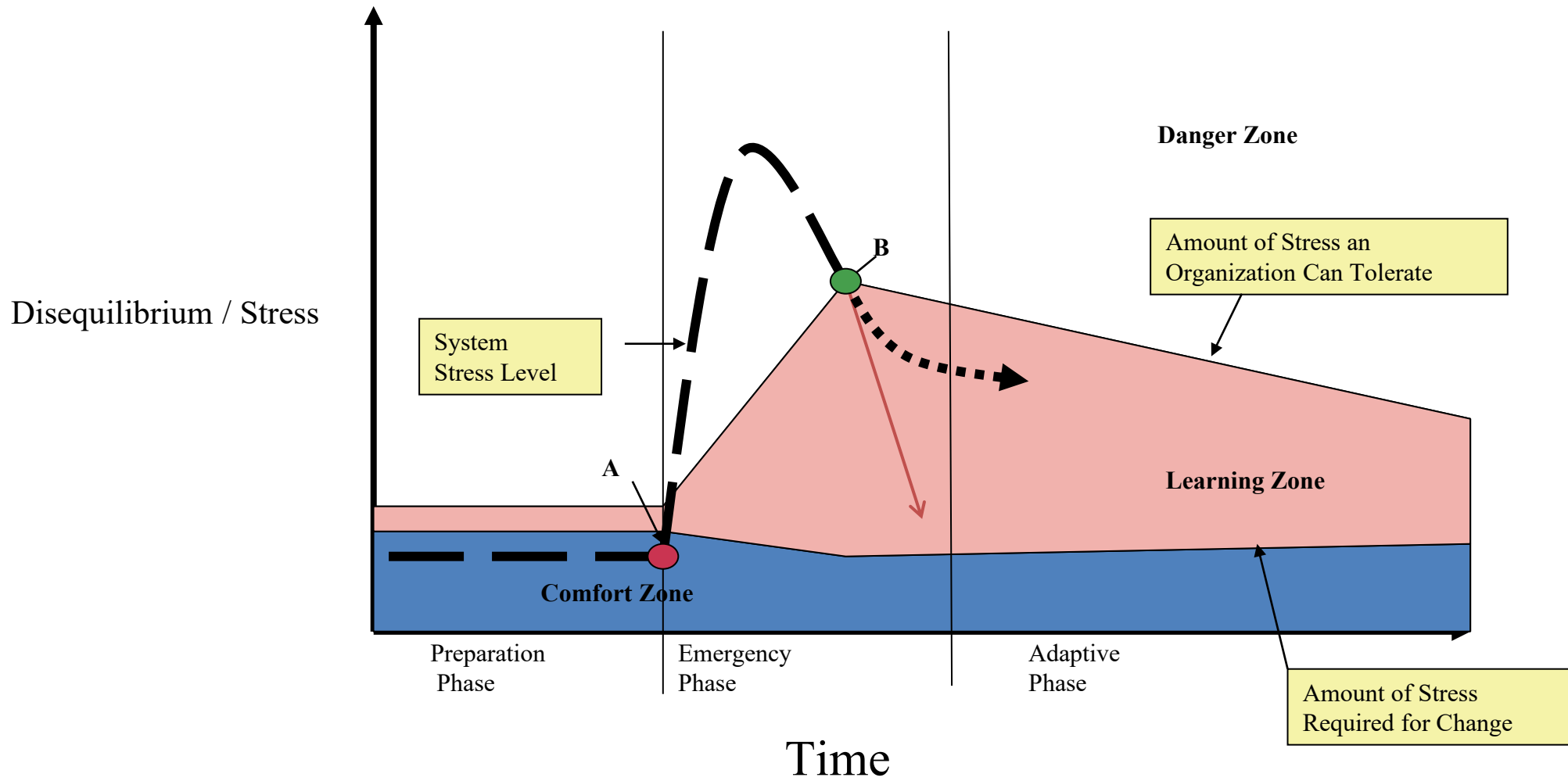
## **Goal:**

**Stabilize the situation**

## **Purpose:**

**Survive and buy time for adaptive work**

# Crisis Life-Cycle Model



# 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**