Change or Die...
Understanding Adaptive Leadership

Tod Bolsinger, Ph.D.
Based on the work of Ronald Heifetz
“If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?”

Lesslie Newbigin
Leadership...

- ...is an action.
- ...is collaborative.
- ...can be learned.
- ...requires transformation.
Questions from Last Night
When given a choice...
When given a choice...

90% die.
What doesn’t produce change...

- Fear
- Facts
- Force
What brings change...

- Relate (new communities)
- Repeat (new practices)
- Reframe (new ways of thinking)
  - “Shifting”
What is one problem that you can’t seem to get traction on?

One problem that no matter how much you work on it, it just seems to keep coming back?
What is the “nature” of our biggest challenges?

“Systemic problems with no clear answers.”
What brings change...

- Relate (new communities)
- Repeat (new practices)
- Reframe (new ways of thinking)
  - “Shifting”

Radical (Not “tweaking!”)
Technical vs. Adaptive

- “Application of current knowledge, skills and tools to resolve a situation.”

- “Cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge, skills and tools, requiring people to make a shift in values, expectations, attitudes or habits of behavior.”

- “Systemic problems with no clear answers.”
Transformational (adaptive) leadership is all about process. Too many pastors are beginning to use the language of adaptive, but don’t change their approach to leadership.
The Moon Takes More than Vision

- Bay of Pigs
- Russians
- Congress
- NASA

The Dream Takes a Team
The Adaptive Process

“The process is the product.”

Harvard University: “Our only strategic plan is thinking strategically about every decision.”
Adaptive Perception

Look from the balcony,
Listen on the floor.

“NFL’s All 22”
Adaptive Perception

- Looking for systemic patterns
- Listening for the “music” behind the words.

- *What is the “music” that is keeping us “dancing”?*
Adaptive Leadership

- Question default mental models
- Clarify, through conflict competing values
- Regulate “heat”
- Reframe for a new way of seeing
- Make a “blue zone” decision
- Enact Relationally
The Adaptive Process

- Question Default Mental Models.

“At the moment of crisis...we default to our training.”
Assume that the first idea is the wrong idea.
Give up being the great "answer-giver"
and become a good "question-asker".
Adaptive Process in Action

Convene conversations
...especially with those who see things differently.

“Leadership is convening.”

Peter Block
The Adaptive Process

- Clarify, *through conflict*, the *competing* values.
  - Excellence vs. Engagement
  - Justice vs. Righteousness
  - Stakeholders vs. Unreached
  - “Come to the Table” vs. “Go into the World”
  - Peace vs. Unity vs. Purity
"Adaptive Leadership for the pastor involves creating an environment in which the congregation can wrestle with the competing values and implications associated with a problem."

Jim Osterhaus
Conflict, Heat and Adaptive Change

- Regulate the heat.
- Too “cool” nothing cooks.
- Too “hot” everything scorches.
The Adaptive Process

- **Reframe** for a new way of seeing.
  
  *(This is the shift....)*

- Lewis and Clark: NOT water route, but exploration.
The Adaptive Process

- Make a "Blue Zone" Decision

![Book Cover](image-url)
Red Zone / Blue Zone

Survival
Acceptance
Control
Competence

Principles
Values
Mission
Blue Zone Thinking

- What furthers the mission?
- What principles are at stake here?
- What values are we expressing?
- “Side” with “principles”, not people.
Notice what tends to “make you go red” and strive to be the “less anxious presence in the room.”

If you can be less anxious and stay connected, you can keep good transformation occurring.
Enact "Relationally"

- Find allies and confidants.
- Support those who are changing.
- Keep the opposition close.
- Accept responsibility for your piece of the mess.
- Acknowledge loss.
- Model behavior.
- Accept casualties.
An Example of Adaptive Work

“Adapt or Die”
The First Task...
Which did Billy do?

- Question default mental models
- Clarify, through conflict competing values
- Regulate “heat”
- Reframe for a new way of seeing
- Make a “blue zone” decision
- Enact Relationally
Practicing for Adaptive Capacity

- Practice with ‘easy’ issues.
- Observe, Interpret, Intervene.

_Playful interventions._
“Try a lot of stuff and keep what works.”
100,000 garages

Observe like a soccer game.

Make multiple interpretations.
(The first one is usually wrong!)
“If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?”

Lesslie Newbigin
Questions?