



## Adaptive Leadership

The practice of adaptive leadership requires leaders to take people out of their comfort zones in order to change. Adaptive leaders help others create the ability to thrive in changing environments.

Behaviors that can help leaders meet adaptive challenges:

1. **Get on the balcony:** Leadership requires stepping back to view patterns, relationships, context, and implications, for themselves and for others. In this sense, leadership becomes both active and reflective. When dancing (active), it's not possible to see the patterns made by others on the floor. To discern the larger pattern, you have to move from the dance floor to the balcony (reflective) where you can observe interactions and designs. Leaders must not only look out at the dance floor but also look inward to see how they contribute to the issue and what role they play in various groups.
2. **Think politically:** Successful leaders work hard to build relationships, create allies, keep close to the opposition, and find ways to generate commitment from the uncommitted.
3. **Be open to all voices:** Leaders must practice inclusivity and solicit the unexpected voices of leadership, including diverse voices or voices that differ from the prevalent view. The adaptive leader provides opportunities for all players to participate and give input. They also manage any attempts by others in the group to invalidate these new voices.
4. **Regulate distress:** Adaptive change requires new learning, attitudes, or behaviors and can cause pain and discomfort. Change requires a certain level of distress, and leadership means finding the right balance.
5. **Orchestrate conflict:** When open to all voices, the potential for disagreement increases, and that can escalate into conflict. Successful leaders use conflict as a constructive force from which creative and productive approaches can emerge.



6. **Give the work back to the people:** Adaptive leaders recognize that no one person, no matter how talented, has all the answers. Success happens when everyone involved carries responsibilities for both the problem and the solution.
7. **Hold steady:** Confronting major change generates a conflict. Managing the conflict, dealing with the politics involved, and assuring accountability require an ability to hold steady in the heat of action. The Adaptive Leader keeps others focused on the task at hand.

Source adapted from:

Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Press..