Building Your Adaptive Leadership Skills

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*CRL Consulting is the Technical Assistance partner for the Network Planning Grantees.*
Your Real, Sticky Challenge

• Rural health network efforts always present sticky, complex challenges that limit progress
• May have been dealing with it for a while
• Tried solutions but still there
• Might even have had consultants to try to help
• Write down your sticky challenge in a sentence or two
• Think for a moment and list what is driving the challenge
• Think about what you have tried to solve it and why it was insufficient
Your Real, Sticky Challenge: How Will You Get Unstuck?

• Would you use a screwdriver to paint a portrait?
• What if you are using the wrong tool to solve your challenge?
• Maybe you need the screwdriver for some aspects of your work AND need another tool for other aspects
• Important to recognize the nature of your challenge and match the approaches to fit
• Recognize “Technical” and “Adaptive” challenges
• Apply the right leadership approach for the challenge
Leadership for **Adaptive Challenges**
Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges
Adapted from *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz, R; Grashow, A; Linsky, M

**Technical**
- May be complex and critically important but problem is clear
- Have known solutions
- Can be resolved by
- Applying current structures and procedures

**Adaptive**
- Problem definition not clear
- No set of known solutions, requires learning
- Requires shared strategies among stakeholders = collaboration
- Require changes in peoples’/partners’ beliefs, habits and loyalties
Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges

Adapted from The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Heifetz, R; Grashow, A; Linsky, M

**Technical**
- Led by authority
- It’s about following protocol
- Compliance
- Linear approach to throughput – manufacturing model
- Often, circumscribed benefit or mitigation
- Ex. building a hospital, brain surgery, space mission

**Adaptive**
- Led by collaborative influence
- It’s about scanning and sense-making to co-create shared deeper understanding of the issue, past and future
- Co-creation among stakeholders of new strategies begging change
- Unpredictable course
- More inclined towards pro-action and strategic value
- Ex. harmonious partnership, health equity
Leadership As Fit
Adapted from Human Systems Dynamics Institute

• Why do leaders succeed and fail?
• Not just leadership skill, dealing with complex human systems
• Spectrum of leadership approaches from more authoritative to more collaborative
• Effective leaders apply the right approach to the context = fit
  ✓ They co-evolve with the environment - structured and demanding when needed or more open to shared exploration when more appropriate
Adaptive Leadership Qualities

• Comfortable working with ambiguity
• Connected to purpose - Applies both “head” and “heart”
• Constantly scanning and sense-making as first nature
• Understands role/limitations of Authoritative vs Collaborative
• Experiments with smart risk-taking
• Learns and adapts

Leadership Approaches to Challenges

**Technical**
- Control (Authority)
- Predictability
- Accountability
- Reliability
- Stability
- Maintenance

**Adaptive**
- Emergence
- Surprise
- Innovation
- Creativity
- Patterns (sense-making of the complex systems)
- Creative Destruction
Example: Getting Unstuck with Adaptive Leadership

• Members of your Network Board are not engaged. Interest is waning. Fewer and fewer stakeholders attend the meetings. Only a couple of partners are participating in the updating of the strategic planning.

• What do you do?
Example: Getting Unstuck with Adaptive Leadership

**Technical (Transactional) Approaches**
- Send additional email reminders of meetings
- Reminded partners of responsibilities in their MOU
- Shame them
- Antagonize them
- Threaten expulsion

**Adaptive Approaches**
- Be genuinely curious about the underlying causes
- Explore honestly with partners why loss of interest and/or trust in the network
  - Has mission lost appeal?
  - Don’t see enough effective action?
  - Perceive power imbalance?
  - Low value proposition?
- Engage with partners to co-create the strategies that all would value and get you unstuck – esp. if you need to evolve!
- Implement strategies earnestly
- Have honest feedback and adjustment
- Reinforce the refreshed mission and culture
Exercise: Unstick your Sticky Challenge

• Get your Sticky Issue
• Reflect and bullet:
  • Be honest and note real **Drivers** and **Influences** of the sticky issue
  • Identify any **Technical (Transactional) approaches** to apply/re-apply
  • Be reflective and generate ideas of **Adaptive approaches** that may address those honest underlying causes
  • Be excited about how you are generating new ideas through REFLECTION and EMBRACING what you DIDN’T KNOW to finally get you and partners unstuck
  • Be ready to share with others in the session
  • Consider this ADAPTIVE, REFLECTIVE approach as an ongoing STRATEGY