Adaptive Leadership Toolkit

Introduction

Framed by our Pathways initiative and supported by an array of resources, APHSA envisions a health and human services field that is successfully driving a range of outcomes and impacts for the people and communities we serve—supported by innovative and collaborative practice and service strategies that often require a great deal of creativity and flexibility to achieve. This in turns requires a leadership approach that balances setting clear direction and expectations supported by efficient methods of operating, with empowering others to solve problems and generate solutions across the lines of traditional authority and within an ever-evolving environment.

In the June 2012 issue of Policy & Practice, the article “The Art of the Possible” details the importance of adaptive leadership to lead change effectively in this current era of public human services.

Adaptive leadership is ideally suited to drive creative approaches in such a complex environment. Adaptive leaders are well-positioned to create cultural norms, tangible plans, and expectations in which continuous improvement and transformative change will occur. Adaptive leaders set up and use systematic mechanisms for monitoring progress, impacts, and lessons learned, creating a “learning organization” to drive outcomes.

The following tools are intended to complement the above-referenced article and provide additional information and resources to support the identification and development of adaptive leadership skills. It is not prescriptive, but instead is intended to identify the adaptive leadership fundamentals, provide a snapshot of strengths and areas for growth around those fundamentals, and offer examples of strategies and considerations to develop one’s adaptive leadership approach.

The toolkit takes into account the multiple levels of a change process, including:

- One’s own leadership role
- Leadership within the organization (the team of leaders within the organization)
- Agency culture regarding change
- The approach to the organization’s work (service delivery, continuous improvement, and outcomes)
- Engagement of staff (line staff, case workers, etc.)
In addition to highlighting the fundamentals of an adaptive leadership approach, “The Art of the Possible” also provided a snapshot of three variations of adaptive leaders through examples – the Silo Smasher, the First Mover, and the Future Driver. This toolkit provides a framework for building on these variations and an approach to adaptive leadership based upon an individual leader’s strengths and growth areas.

**Reflective Thinking Questions**

Below are questions to encourage your thinking around adaptive leadership qualities that you and the other leaders with whom you work possess or may want to strengthen.

1. How well do you and your organization’s leaders know your organization, for example, in terms of similarities and differences between individuals and groups, staff attitudes (toward innovation, clients, partner organizations, management, each other), organizational climate, and organizational strengths and gaps?

2. To what extent do you and your organization’s leaders track societal trends (for example, in budgets, demographics, politics, economics, and technology) and organizational trends (for example, staff performance and stability, client outcomes) and reflect on their potential future impact on the organization? If you do not track trends, why not?

3. How well do you and your organization’s leaders collaborate with peers in other divisions within your agency and other public or private agencies that affect your organization’s operations and clients? To what extent do you (and/or your senior leaders) champion collective strategies toward improved outcomes for your clients and work to break down turf divisions and build common purpose?

4. To what extent do you and your organization’s leaders shake up the organization when needed? What are some examples when leadership changed long-standing processes or policies or made key staff changes to pave the way for new ways of working? What drove those changes? Were you “proactive” or “reactive” in those examples? Can you think of a time when leadership helped your organization develop new competencies and let go of old ones that no longer served the interest of the enterprise?

5. How able are you and your organization’s leaders to adjust mid-course when new information is revealed or when economic, technological, or social changes occur that require a different approach? What are some specific examples? What inhibits your organizational adjustments?

6. How effectively do you and your organization’s leaders ensure that mid- and longer-term changes get planned and implemented effectively? How does leadership:
a. Secure staff, client, and external stakeholder buy-in for change?

b. Empower staff at all levels, clients, and external stakeholders to co-create changes?

c. Set clear expectations for staff, clarify boundaries for staff and empower them within those boundaries, support staff in their implementation work, and hold staff accountable for follow-through?

7. To what extent does leadership ensure that plans get adjusted based on lessons learned during implementation? How effective is the communication of the mid- and longer term changes to staff, customers and stakeholders?

8. How sensitive are you and your organization’s leaders to the deep impacts on staff, clients, and external stakeholders of changes in the organization and environment? To what extent does leadership reflect on those impacts and make adjustments as needed to, for example, the pace and scope of change and the way they communicate about organizational changes? To what extent does leadership reflect on their own strengths and barriers, and work to leverage their strengths and overcome their barriers?
Strengthening an Adaptive Leadership Approach

The following elements are fundamentals for adaptive leadership and offer a framework to measure your strengths and identify areas that you might want to develop further:

- Knowledge of the organization
- Willingness to project into the future (assess trends and environmental factors)
- Breaking down barriers
- Being disruptive
- Being agile to get to the goal
- Ability to sense and respond
- Empowering the organization
- Knowledge of the organization
- Willingness to project into the future (assess trends and environmental factors)

A scenario is provided below with additional “factual” examples that follow, all aligned with each adaptive leadership fundamental element. To provide

Scenario - You are a new senior leader in a human service organization and have been asked to lead the implementation of recent state legislative reforms within the organization that will impact how families are served.

The nuances of your answers - why they may not be simple or straightforward.

In the last column, there is a self-assessment aligned with each fundamental element for you to identify your (or your leadership team’s) adaptive leadership strengths and potential areas for development. A space has been provided in the self-assessment for you to reflect on how your leadership style and that of those whom you supervise and coach.

To provide practical examples of each of the fundamental elements, potential strategies and considerations are included in the tool that follows. The potential strategies and considerations are not at all exhaustive, and are not all exhaustive. These examples are intended to reinforce adaptive leadership strategies and potential areas for development. A space has been added for you to reflect on the nuances of your answers. Why they may not be simple or straightforward.

You might want to develop further:

The following elements are fundamentals for adaptive leadership and offer a framework to measure your strengths and identify areas that
### Adaptive Leadership

#### Fundamental Element

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Assessment</th>
<th>Strategies and Considerations</th>
<th>Potential Adaptive Strategies</th>
<th>Additional “Fact”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of the Organization</strong></td>
<td>- Assess the “why” middle management is struggling to lead. Is the organization’s prior effort to implement a new practice framework a key consideration in developing your implementation approach for the recent legislative reforms?</td>
<td>- Implement a new practice framework with the organization’s clients.</td>
<td>- The practice framework is intended to work together against a common purpose, but that each stakeholder group has its own unique goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptive Leadership</strong></td>
<td>- Rate yourself (or your organization’s leaders) on the scale below for each of the related “facts.”</td>
<td>- Explore opportunities to involve and motivate middle management in the current reform effort and ask middle management to be actively involved in the change.</td>
<td>- Show middle management how they are involved in the organization and how their role of middle management is essential across the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Considerations</strong></td>
<td>- Gather information about the messaging and inclusiveness of middle management in the prior practice framework implementation to inform this current implementation strategy.</td>
<td>- Ask key internal (exemiply: the staff) and external stakeholders (example: clients) for feedback on the practice framework to inform this current implementation strategy.</td>
<td>- The practice framework has been integrated and included in the organization’s clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflections:</strong></td>
<td>- Consider the current reform effort and ask middle management to be actively involved in the current reform effort and ask middle management to be actively involved in the change.</td>
<td>- Is the organization’s prior effort to implement a new practice framework a key consideration in developing your implementation approach for the recent legislative reforms?</td>
<td>- The practice framework has been integrated and included in the organization’s clients.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Self-Assessment

Rate yourself (or your organization’s leaders) on the scale below for each of the related scenario “facts.”

**Rate Yourself**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflections:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
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<td>Somewhat Important</td>
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<td>Very Important</td>
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</table>

**Additional Scenario “Facts”**

Additional scenario “facts” on the scale below for each of the related scenario “facts.”

**Potential Adaptive Leadership Strategies and Considerations**

- **Willingness to project into the future (assess trends and environmental factors)**
  - Adaptive leaders get ahead of change before it happens.
  - They develop and gather support for a reform agenda based upon research for another sector/industry. While similar reforms have been considered in other states to date, no other state has moved similar reforms or achieved similar success.
  - An understanding of the reform effort’s buy-in for the reform effort and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose and the ability to articulate the reform effort’s purpose.

- **Understanding of the reform principle and the ability to articulate those principles could provide credibility in establishing relationships for a new leader.**

- **Connect the reform effort to the overall organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational vision in the short and longer term to promote a sense of synergy and organizational 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This view of all impacts is considered a longer-term strategy for organizational goals.

While the reform effort has been led by a small number of state legislators, who, while able to gather support for a reform agenda based upon research for another sector/industry, those principles could provide credibility in establishing relationships for a new leader and get buy-in for the reform effort. The reform effort has been led by a small number of state legislators who were able to gather support for a reform agenda based upon research for another sector/industry. While similar reforms have been considered in other states to date, no other state has moved similar reforms or achieved similar success.
### Self-Assessment

Rate yourself (or your organization's leaders) on the scale below for each of the related scenarios:

- **1** No
- **2** Possibly
- **3** Possibly
- **4** Yes
- **5** Yes

**Reflections:**

- Label any „facts“ that define a „win-win“ approach to outcomes and define any „facts“ that define interests and outcomes with the other organization.
- Identify identity shared interests and potential new remedies.
- Partner with the other organization to define interests and outcomes, design effective and streamlined cost-savings and streamlined implementation efforts.
- Further the reform implementation efforts.
- Try to forge a relationship between your organization and the other organization.
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- Further the reform implementation efforts.
- Try to forge a relationship between your organization and the other organization, identify identity shared interests and potential new remedies.
- Label any „facts“ that define a „win-win“ approach to outcomes and define any „facts“ that define interests and outcomes with the other organization.

**Breaking down barriers:***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Adaptive Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition - Adaptive Leadership:**

There has been a long-standing „work-around“ relationship, the legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients. The legislative reforms do not require another public agency to serve many of the same clients.
### Reflective Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Plan with your team to adjust implementation timeline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Test new infrastructure changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Plan with your team to test new infrastructure changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What would be your focus in addressing the infrastructure concerns?**

- Seek to adjust implementation timeline.
- Make your team comply with the timeline.
- Plan with your team to test new infrastructure changes.
- Test new infrastructure changes.
- Plan with your team to test new infrastructure changes.

**Reflections:**

- Realign your team's understanding of adaptive leadership and the opportunities it presents to your organization, its strategies, and its potential adaptive strategies and considerations.

**Additional Fact:**

- Being disruptive definition: Adaptive leaders privilege outcomes-focused goals and principles above all organizational norms and major changes. To achieve even if they require quick and principled adaptation of the organization’s focused goals.

**Potential Adaptable Leadership:**

- Facilitate self-assessment on the scale below for each of the related additional “fact.” Rate yourself (or your organization's leaders) on the scale below for each of the related additional “fact.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Leadership Fundamental Element</th>
<th>Additional “Fact”</th>
<th>Potential Adaptive Strategies and Considerations</th>
<th>Self-Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Being agile to get to the goal**     | In developing the implementation approach, you and your leadership team identify an opportunity to provide a new service that is not required by the legislative reforms. No harm would come to clients if this additional service is NOT provided. But if provided, clients would have an enhanced service experience and potentially be less likely to need future services from your organization. | • Being informed by varied perspectives (leadership, staff, clients), assess the cost and benefit for integrating this new service into the service array.  
• Discuss/debate with leadership team, staff, and other key stakeholders how the new service (and the broader required reforms) fits into the overall vision for the organization.  
• Plan to move forward to integrate the additional service with a clearly defined monitoring component and timeline to assess impact and make adjustments accordingly  
• Develop communication plans that articulate the purpose for the new service and expected outcomes  
• Set up benchmarks and a monitoring plan as part of implementation |  

**Should providing this new service be explored and pursued in implementing the reforms?**  
1  No  
2  
3  Possibly  
4  
5  Yes  

**Reflections:** |
### Adaptive Leadership

**Fundamental Element**

### Additional "Fact"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Adaptive Strategies and Considerations</th>
<th>Self-Assessment</th>
<th>Additional Scenarios, &quot;Facts&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Reflections:**

5. Yes

4. Possibly

3. No

2. From feedback that you are hearing from your leadership team, supervisors are concerned about the current reform effort is intended to impact and how it will connect to and change the current priorities and work of the organization.

- Ask the supervisors to meet to identify their concerns and propose solutions to support the reform implementation moving forward effectively.

- As the organization leader, meet regularly and frequently with supervisors as a group to update on, discuss, and ask them to inform the reform implementation. Ensure that your leadership team is providing the same messaging in communicating with supervisors and staff as a whole.

- Have the supervisors be responsible for and lead the design and implementation of strategies for staff communication about the reform effort.

**Questions:**

- Will supervisors lead the design and implementation of strategies for staff communication about the reform effort?

**Reflections:**

4. Possibly

3. Possibly

2. Yes

1. No
### Adaptive Leadership

#### Fundamental Element

#### Additional "Fact"

**Potential Adaptive Strategies and Considerations**

- **Self-Assessment**
  - Rate yourself (or your organization’s leaders) on the scale below for each of the related scenarios:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection:**

- With this group, do you believe a positive relationship is possible? Try to achieve a positive relationship with the group by doing the following:
  - Be transparent, vulnerable, and empathetic about the concerns expressed by the group.
  - Address the concerns you hear from your leadership.
  - Create a feedback loop for partners so you can hear their own partners’ concerns directly prior to groups making statements to the media or others.
  - Acknowledge the perceptions of the organization as valid and not just something you are listening to because you “have to.”
  - Designate one or more leaders for the feedback loop for partners so you can hear their own partners’ concerns directly prior to groups making statements to the media or others.

**Desired outcome:**

- Work through to reach a deeper understanding of other advocacy groups, realizing they may have their own barriers to work through to reach a deeper understanding of other advocacy groups.

**Definition - Adaptive Leadership:**

- A community advocacy group has been making statements through the media regarding your organization’s ability to effectively implement the reforms, basing those concerns on the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community.

- You have heard from your leadership team that this particular community advocacy group is very difficult to work with and that the organization has never been able to forge a positive relationship with this group.

- A community advocacy group has been making statements through the media regarding your organization’s ability to effectively implement the reforms, basing those concerns on the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community.

- You have heard from your leadership team that this particular community advocacy group is very difficult to work with and that the organization has never been able to forge a positive relationship with this group.

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- You have heard from your leadership team that this particular community advocacy group is very difficult to work with and that the organization has never been able to forge a positive relationship with this group.

**Responses:**

- **If you answered yes to the scenario(s) of the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community:**
  - Participate in a workshop.
  - Create an information dissemination plan by the community advocacy group.
  - Ask a representative(s) of the community advocacy group to inform the reform implementation planning by participating in a workgroup.
  - Partner with the community advocacy group to cultivate and improve the relationship with the broader community using the reform effort as key messaging around that relationship.

- **If you answered no to the scenario(s) of the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community:**
  - Acknowledge the perceptions of the advocacy groups as valid and not just something you are listening to because you “have to.”
  - Create a feedback loop for partners so you can hear their own partners’ concerns directly prior to groups making statements to the media or others.

**Reflections:**

- If you responded yes to any scenario(s) of the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community, list the steps you will be taking to improve the organization’s reputation in the community, starting immediately:

  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____

- If you responded no to any scenario(s) of the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community, list the steps you will be taking to improve the organization’s reputation in the community, starting immediately:

  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____

- Please provide any additional comments or feedback on the scenario(s) of the organization having new leadership (you) and a perception of the organization’s poor reputation in the community:

  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
  - ____
If your scoring is at or close to "5" on some or all of the self-assessment items, that suggests that you utilize a highly adaptive approach in how you mobilize around change, stay nimble and experiment through change, and team with your staff, external stakeholders, and other organizations.

8. How can you ensure that you and your leadership team are sending consistent messages?

7. How well do your deeds match the messages you're conveying?

6. How can you be a more effective purveyor of information and insights about your staff and stakeholders?

5. In terms of effective communication, who needs to know what, by when, and how?

Your leadership gaps?

4. Which resources are available (e.g., local universities, retired public or corporate executives, outside consultants) to help you close

3. Which gaps are most important to close quickly?

2. Why do you think you and/or your organization have those gaps?

1. What are your major personal and/or organizational strengths and gaps in the area of adaptive leadership?

Strategies to increase your adaptive leadership practices:

Next Steps and Considerations for Strengthening an Adaptive Leadership Approach

Organizational questions:

- How you mobilize around change, stay nimble and experiment through change, and team with your staff, external stakeholders, and other organizations is at or close to "5" on some or all of the self-assessment items, that suggests that you utilize a highly adaptive approach in

- If your scoring is at or close to "5" on some or all of the self-assessment items, that suggests that you utilize a highly adaptive approach in
**Resources/References**


