Practical Adaptive Leadership: Driving Empowerment through the Organization

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Agenda

- What is Adaptive Leadership
- Types of Challenges
- Learning / Learning to Learn and Unlearn
- Mindset and how Adaptive Leaders Work
- Adaptive Leadership Growth
- Critical Skills

What is Adaptive Leadership?

" "Adaptive Leadership is a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organisations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is being able, both individually and collectively, to take on the gradual but meaningful process of change. It is about diagnosing the essential from the expendable and bringing about a real challenge to the status quo."

~ Cambridge Leadership Associates

WHAT ADAPTIVE LEADERS REALLY DO

"They don't make plans; they don't solve problems; they don't even organise people. What leaders really do is prepare organisations for change and help them cope as they struggle through it."

John P. Kotter

Types of Challenges

TECHNICAL VS. ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Kind of Challenge	Problem Definition	Solution	Locus of Work
Technical (Complicated)	Clear	Clear	Authority (expert) will implement existing structures and roles
Technical & Adaptive	Clear	Requires Learning	Authority will have to consult with stakeholders
Adaptive (Complex)	Requires Learning	Requires Learning	Stakeholders (Shared Leadership)

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Unlike technical problems where the know how already exists. Adaptive challenges require learning to overcome the conflicts in values, or reduce the gap between the espoused values and reality. They require changes in values, attitudes and habits of behaviour.
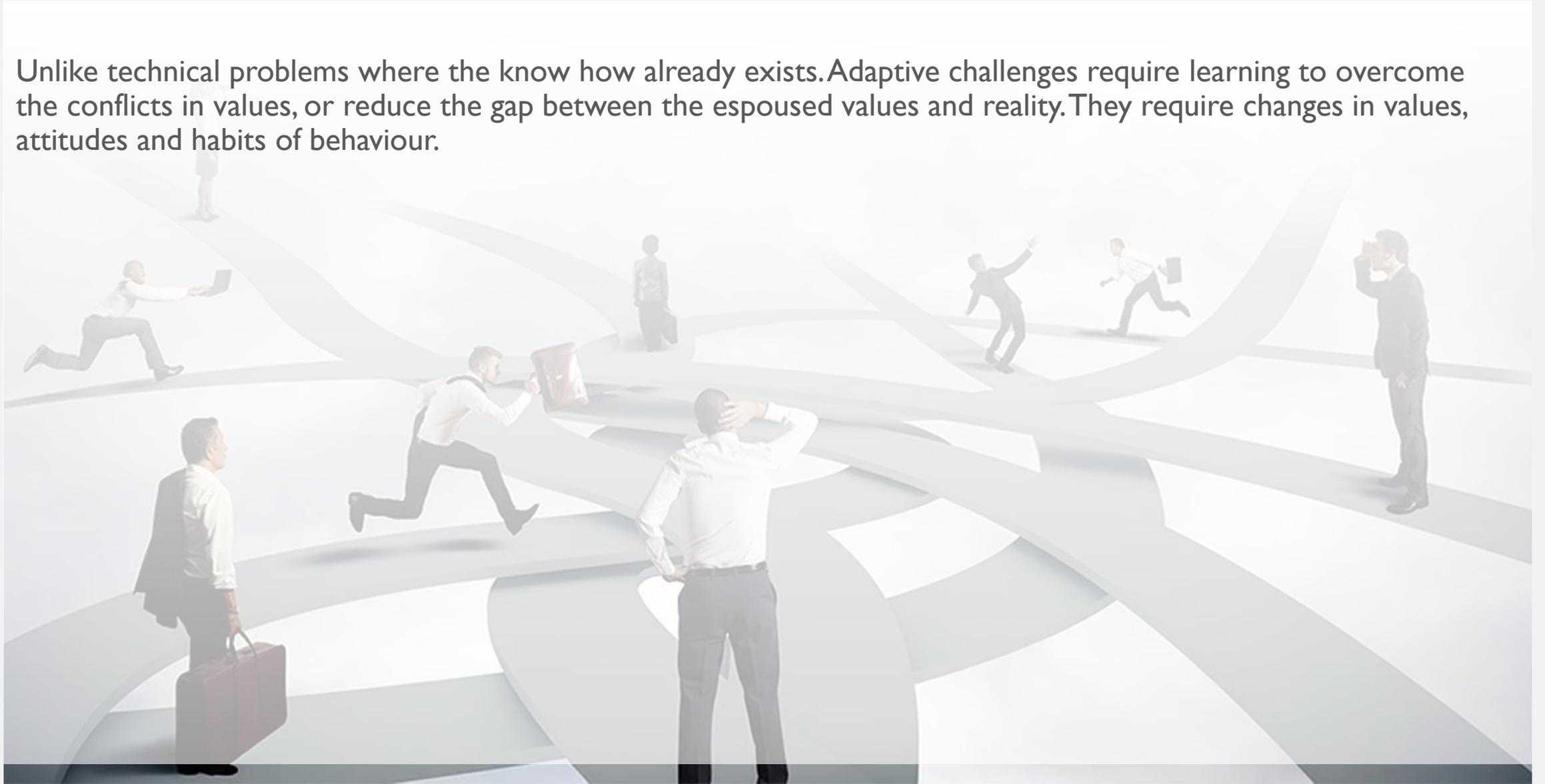
ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE FLAGS. TEST = 3 OR MORE

- **No known solution**—There is a gap between the current reality and aspiration that you don't have the skills or knowledge to close.

- **People would rather avoid the issue**—Balancing two ideas is not possible; therefore, working on the challenge creates tension and conflict.

- **Reason and logic alone won't get you there**—There are competing values at play or there is a gap between what people say and what they do. For example: "Is there an issue that you/your team/your organisation continually talks about but can't solve?".

- *Recurring problem—Challenge reappears after fix is applied. For example: "Have you tried to fix a problem the same way multiple times but it keeps coming back?".*

- *Emotional response—Working on this challenge makes people feel uncomfortable; they experience an emotional response such as a feeling in their gut or a knot in a muscle. For example: "When does an emotional reaction shut down an issue?".*

- **Failure to resolve competing priorities**—You are being asked to do more with less instead of making tough trade offs.

- **Moving forward feels risky**—Making progress on this challenge means putting your reputation, relationship, and job at risk.

- *Casualties—In order to move forward, some people may be left behind.*

- **People must work across boundaries**—No one person or group can fix the problem alone.

- **Progress is not linear**—No direct path to get to a better outcome; trial and error is necessary.

OUR PREDICT-AND-PLAN LEADERSHIP (FIGHTING AGAINST)

Assumes That:

The future is predictable

Events and outcomes are stable

We are capable of anticipating all relevant variables in any situation ahead of time

Cause and effect is

stable and linear

To create value….

As Leaders We:

Plan everything ahead of time

Make most of our decisions ahead of time

Break down large institutional initiatives into smaller pieces

Each of these pieces fall within separate organisation responsibility areas (functional and departmental silos)

We create org and management systems, processes, structures and controls that operationalise and enable these assumptions and activities and plans…

TECHNICAL VERSUS ADAPTIVE EXAMPLE

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

1. Easy to identify

2. Often lend themselves to quick and easy (cut-and-dried) solutions

3. Often can be solved by an authority or expert

4. Require change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries

5. People are generally receptive to technical solutions

6. Solutions can often be implemented quickly—even by edict

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

1. Difficult to identify (easy to deny)

2. Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, & approaches to work

3. People with the problem do the work of solving it

4. Require change in numerous places; usually cross organizational boundaries

5. People often resist even acknowledging adaptive challenges.

6. "Solutions" require experiments and new discoveries; they can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict

EXAMPLES

- Take medication to lower blood pressure

- Implement electronic ordering and dispensing of medications in hospitals to reduce errors and drug interactions

- Increase penalty for drunk driving

- Change lifestyle to eat healthy, get more exercise and lower stress

- Encourage nurses and pharmacists to question and even challenge illegible or dangerous prescriptions by physicians

- Raise public awareness of the dangers and effects of drunk driving, targeting teenagers in particular

# FIVE KEY IDEAS ABOUT COMPLEX SYSTEMS

- Complex systems are composed of independent, decentralised agents.

- *These independent agents, in the absence of centralised control, will self-organise.*

- Self-organisation will create complex behaviour and emergent results that are not evident from studying the agents themselves.

- *Rich information flows in an ecosystem balanced at the edge of chaos define the most effective pattern for generating emergent results.*

- Simple, generative rules guide the creation of complex behaviours.

A NOTE ON RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

- People love change when they know it is a good thing (the reality is people always hate change)

- People resist when change involves real or potential loss

- Resistance to loss is the most common adaptive failure

- Adaptive Leadership always puts you in the business of assessing, managing, distributing and providing contexts for losses that move people through these losses to a new place

- As in nature, a successful adaptation enables an organisation or community to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history into the future

All About Learning: Learning to Learn!!

REGULATING TENSION FOR ADAPTIVE LEARNING

Too hot!

Adaptive challenge

Limit of tolerance

Productive distress

Threshold of learning

Disequilibrium

Work avoidance

Technical problem

Time
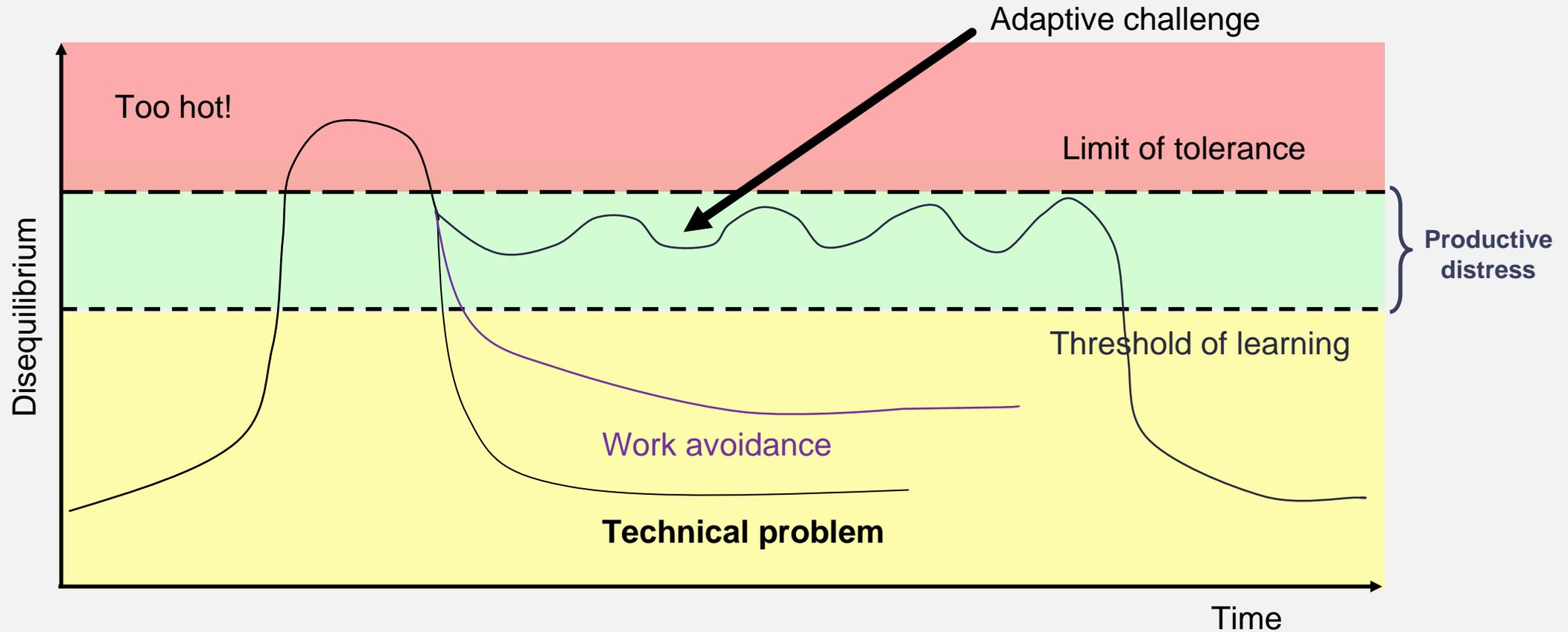
Source: Heifetz & Linsky: <u>Leadership on the Line</u>, 2002

TACTICS TO STAY IN THE ZONE

Increase heat in the System	Decrease heat in the system
Give more responsibility – give the problem to the system	Address technical aspects
Bring conflict to surface	Employ structure
Protect dissenting voices	Reclaim responsibility temporarily
Seek other perspectives	Slow down the process

LEARNING AMPLIFIERS

- Opportunities to practice new learnings
- Immersion experiences
- Experimentation
- Time for reflection
- Energy
- Time for cultivating imagination
- Opportunities for exploration
- Challenges
- Safety to fail

Point of maximum learning

Panic Zone

Learning Zone

Comfort Zone
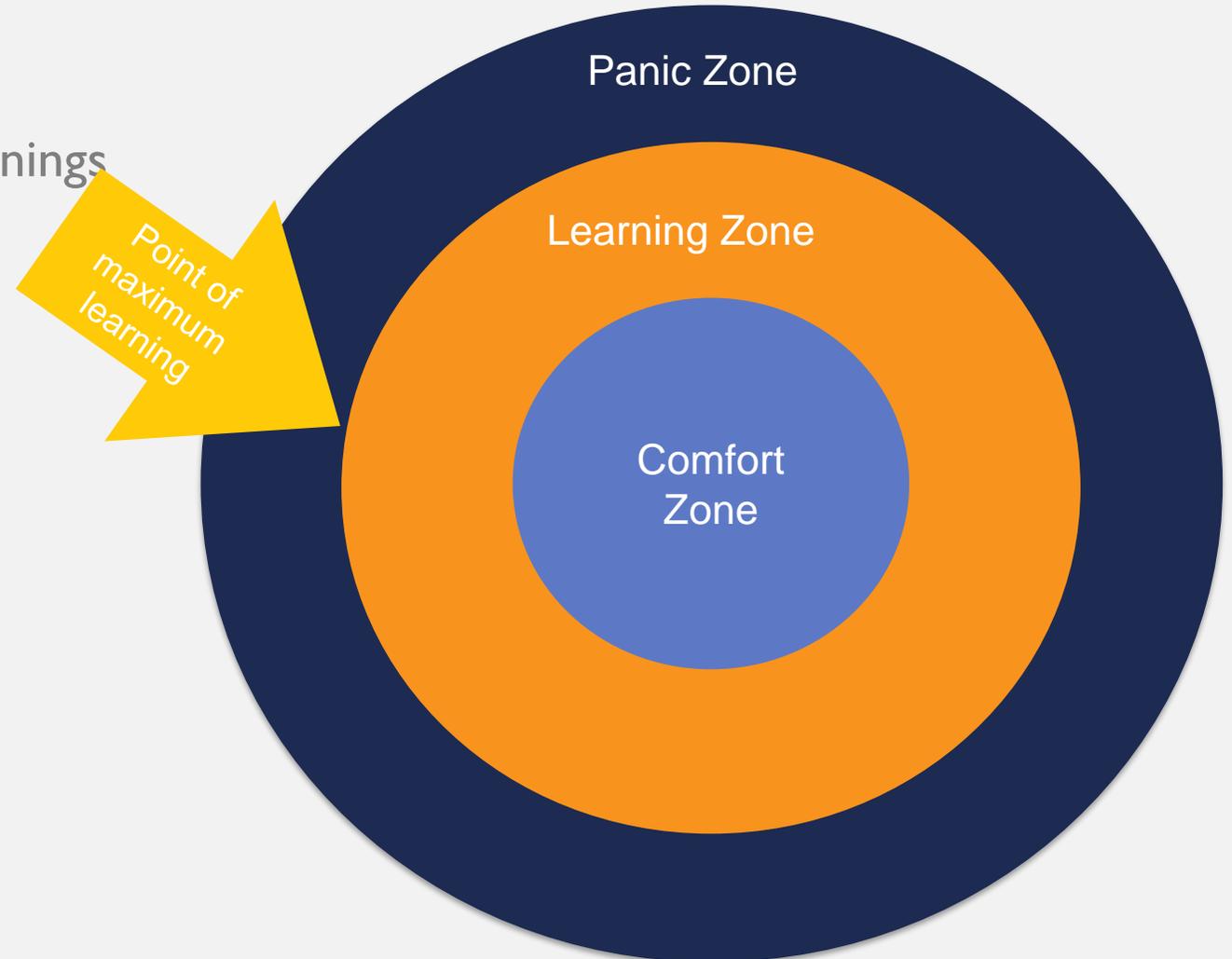
The Power of Unlearn

- A doctor is faced with a complete refresh of information in five years
- Where does that old information go?
- Think of a water bottle getting overfilled
- Ties to underlying beliefs (break those to begin unlearning process)
- Go into it like you don't know anything

What has made you successful in the past/currently is not necessarily what is going to make you successful in the future

Ref: **Barry O'Reilly and Stephen Dowling**

Questions and thoughts at this point?

- What's the one thing that might be impossible to change, but that will make the most significant difference in accelerating my Adaptive Leadership?
- What will I do differently?
- What do I do when I don't know what to do?

Mindset Shifts

Adaptive Leadership Action and Strategy Map

Get on the balcony
- Distinguish T vs. A
- Find out where people are at
- Song beneath the words
- Authority figure for clues

Think politically
- Find partners
- Keep opposition close
- Accept responsibility for your piece of the mess
- Acknowledge their loss
- Model the behaviour
- Accept casualties

Orchestrate the conflict
- Create a holding environment
- Control the temperature
- Pace the work
- Show them the future

Give the work back
- Take the work off your shoulders
- Place the work where it belongs
- Make interventions short and simple

Hold steady
- Take the heat
- Let the issue ripen
- Focus attention on the issue

Heifetz and Linsky, 2002

Essential Mindset Shifts

Adaptive Leaders should serve as a living example of how one can thrive with a **shift in mindset**. The leader should focus on:

Team improvement over specific individual results	**Business value-driven delivery** over meeting targets	**Guiding principles** over rules and procedures
Curiosity and trust over judging or manipulating	**Learning and empowerment** over "doing it for them"	**"Servant as leader" style** over management by "telling" style

Leader as a Coach Mindset Shifts

- Long term thinking- "Know all, tell" all to "know-all, tell-no

- Push authority to information

- Guiding principles over rules and procedures

- Invite candour and criticism 'What am I not seeing, what could do wrong"

- Act your way to new thinking

- Listening to understand over listening to respond

Know All

Tell All
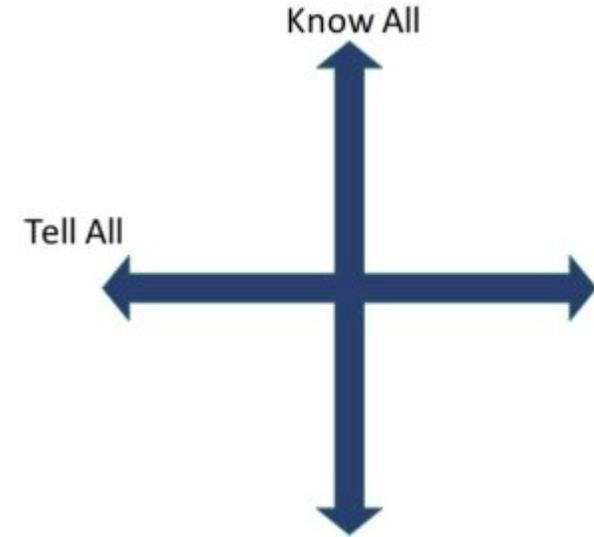
Manager as a Servant-Leader

" A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong… The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership

Alternative View – Leader as a Host

1. Initiator, providing the initial sparks of what might become a broader initiative

2. Inviter, inviting the relevant people to join our idea

3. Space Creator, thus creating an environment - both physical and emotional, where something is really happening

4. Gatekeeper, defining and protecting the space we have created, allowing people in and out as necessary

5. Connector, by putting in touch people who otherwise would not cooperate, thus enabling useful conversations

6. Co-participator, where we are also an important part of the system we helped creating, not just creators
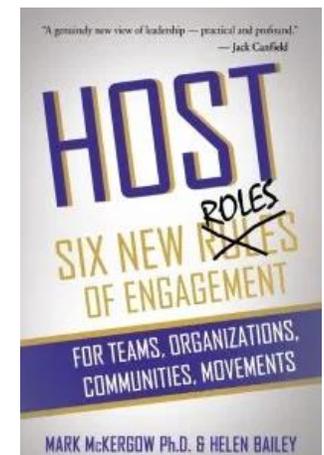
Adaptive Leadership Growth

The Upward Spiral of Adaptive Leadership

Focus all work on delighting customers

Work in self-organising teams

Work in short cycles

Add customer value each cycle

Radical transparency

Continuous self-improvement

Forging deep relationships

Mutually reinforcing principles
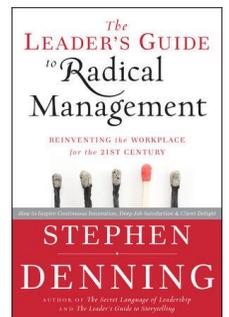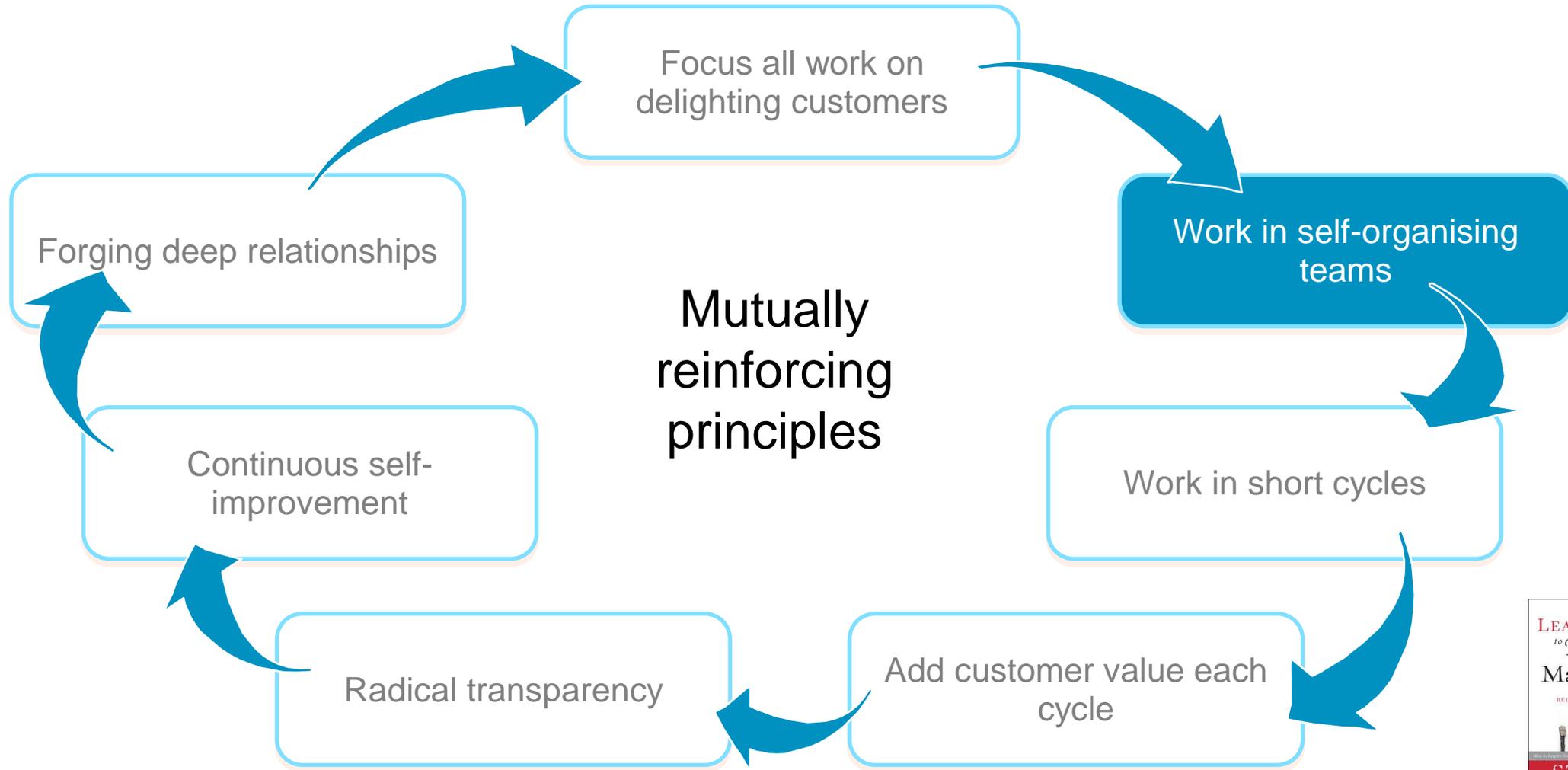
Self-Organisation

- Ability of a system to spontaneously arrange its components or elements in a purposeful (non-random) manner, under appropriate conditions but without the help of an external agency. It is as if the system knows how to 'do its own thing.' Many natural systems such as cells, chemical compounds, galaxies, organisms and planets show this property.

- Animal and human communities too display self organization: in every group a member emerges as the leader (who establishes order and rules) and everybody else follows him or her, usually willingly

    Source: BusinessDictionary.com

" Why do human communities tend towards a leader?

How does this impact self-organization and the value it provides?

Zappos example, Holacracy push and attrition impact

Ladder of Leadership

Level	Worker Says	Boss Says	Further Questions
7	I've been doing …	What have you been doing?	What more can you do, where is your most value at?
6	I've done ….	What have you done?	
5	I intend to …	What do you intend to do?	Is it technically correct and safe to try? How does it support the goals of the organisation? What should be done first?
4	I would like to …	What would you like to do?	What are your suggestions? What are the options?
3	I think …	What do you think?	How sure are you? How strongly do you feel or support this?
2	I see …	What do you see? Tell me more.	Tell me about that? What do you see here? Tell me more? And what else?
1	Tell me what to do.	I'll tell you what to do?	

Exercise: Building Leaders at Every Level

- Over a 24 hour period have people record and document conversations in the workplace about decisions (use card on next page)

- Evaluate where you and your staff are on the ladder

- Provide feedback and alternative scripting to move people higher up the ladder

Advanced discussion points:

- What factors are causing you to operate at that point on the ladder?

- What factors do you find worked best to move people higher up the ladder?

- Start small movements up the ladder first

Small steps video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h25znxZEL3g

Critical Skills for Adaptive Leaders

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Presence

Presence can be seen as being
"fully conscious and aware in the moment".
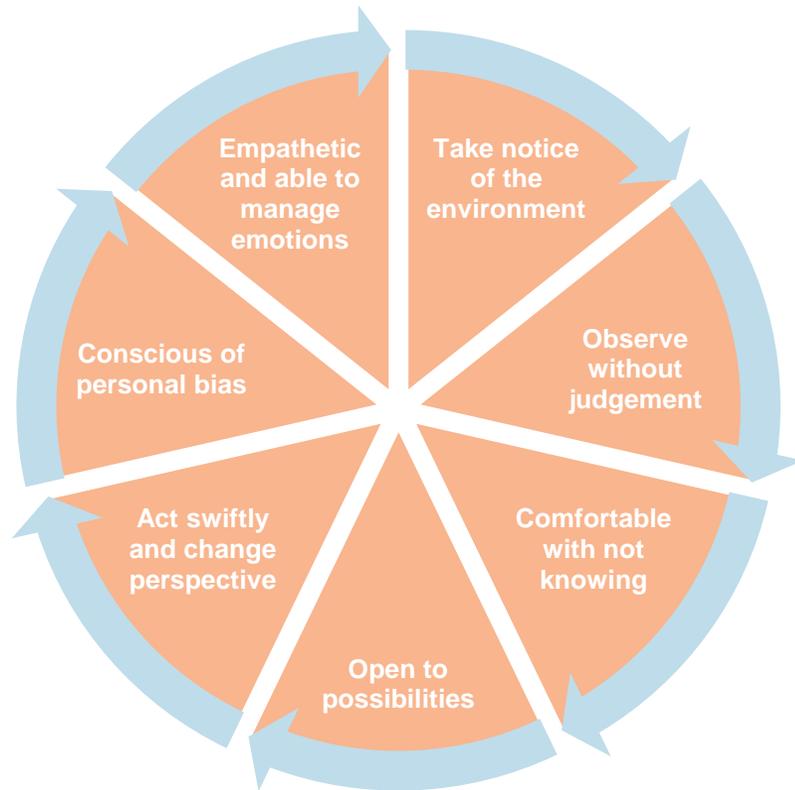
> Presence is a state of awareness, in the moment, characterised by the felt experience of timelessness, connectedness, and a larger truth.

Doug Silsbee
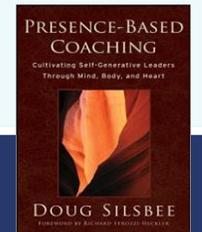
Learn more…
Doug Silsbee, *Presence Based Coaching*

Active Listening

Active listening involves self-management to know when to speak

Paying **attention**	Actively **absorbing** information
Showing that you are **listening and interested**	Providing **feedback** to the speaker so they know the message was received

Level 1 Listening
"It's all about my thoughts, my judgements, my feelings, my expertise"

Level 2 Listening
Hard wired connection to another, losing awareness to the outside world

Level 3 Listening
Soft focus on other, aware of whole environment, including your intuition
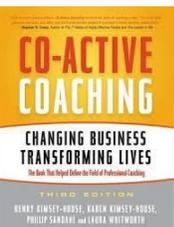
Powerful Questions

Curiosity is at the heart of coaching and it **starts with a question**
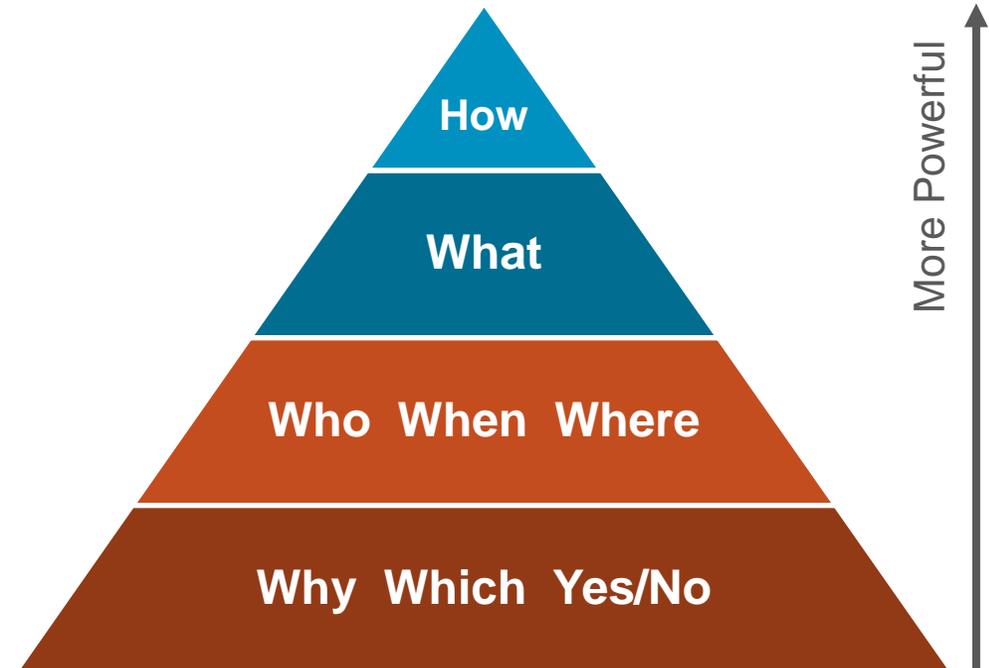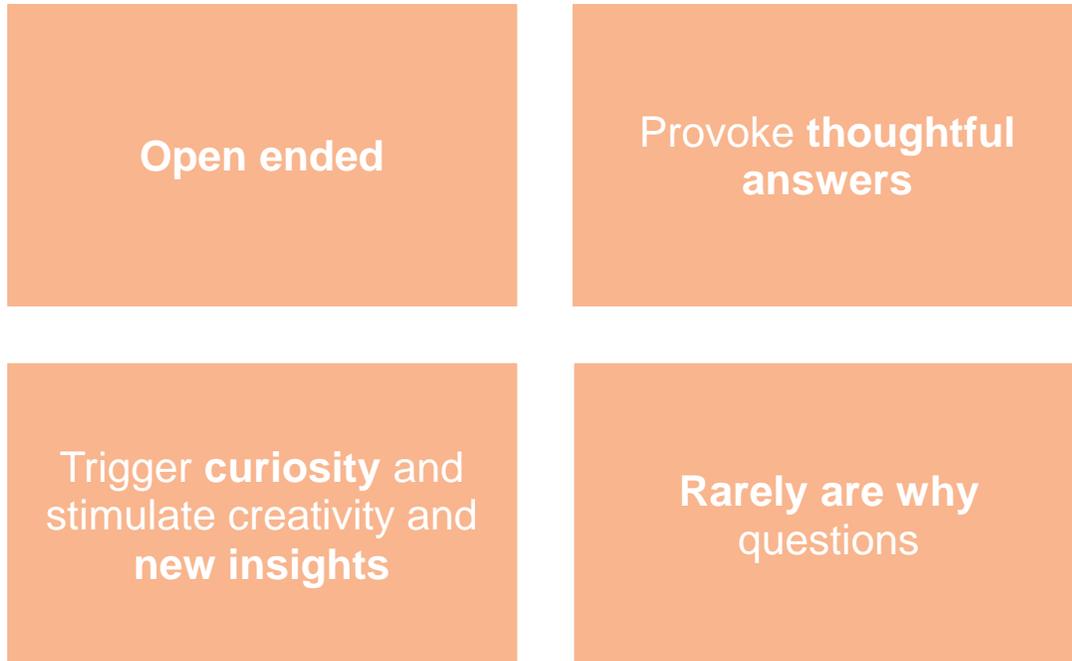
Open ended

Provoke **thoughtful answers**

Trigger **curiosity** and stimulate creativity and **new insights**

Rarely are why questions

More Powerful

How

What

Who When Where

Why Which Yes/No
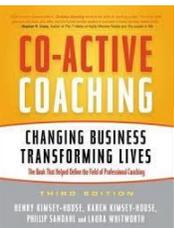
Silence

Sometimes the response to a powerful question will be silence. This may mean that they don't understand the question or are **thinking about the answer**.

Resist the urge to jump in

Wait and count to 10

In a group environment **look around** at other team members

Waiting shows your coachee that **they have the answers**; you are not there to provide the answer for them.

Radical Candor

Radical Candor is the ability to **challenge directly** and **show you care personally** at the same time.
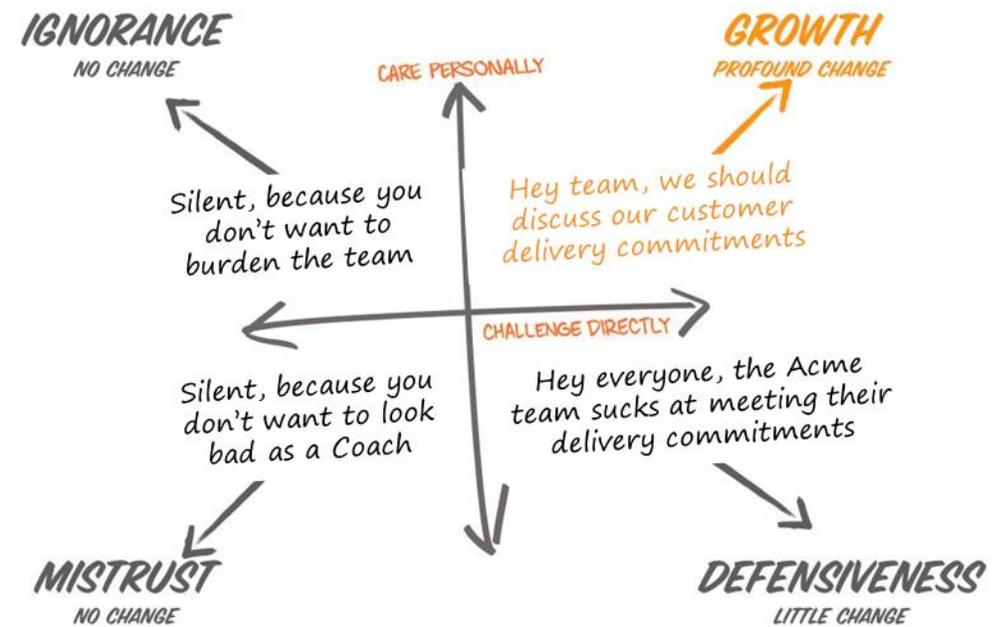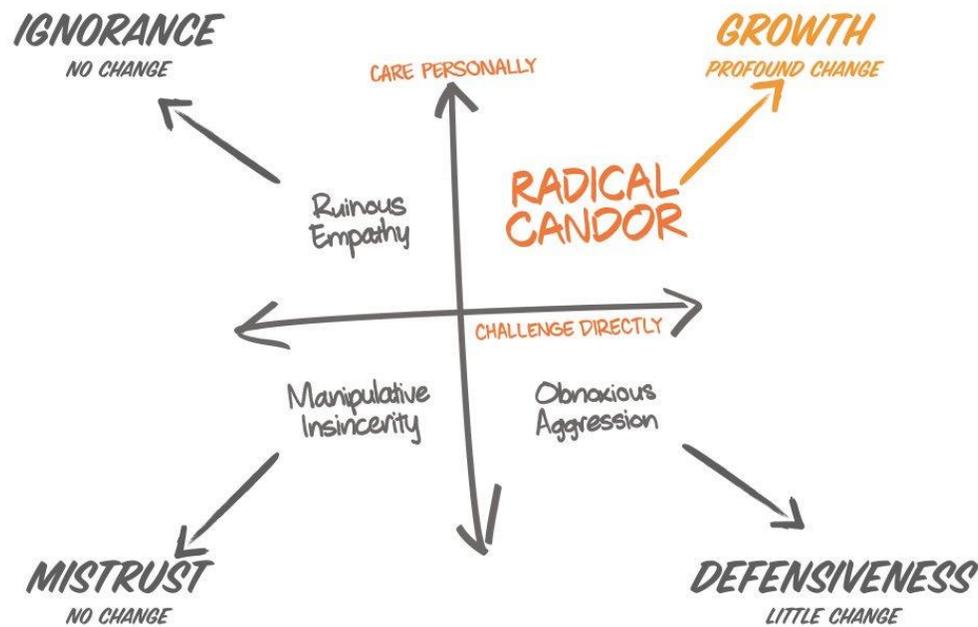
Learn more…
Kim Scott, *Radical Candor*
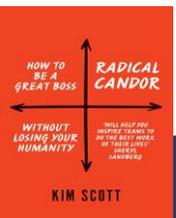
Recommended Reading
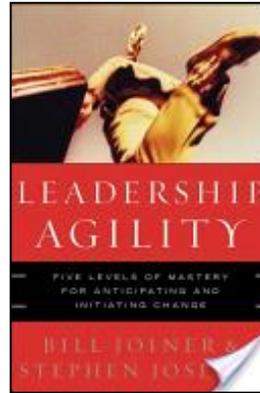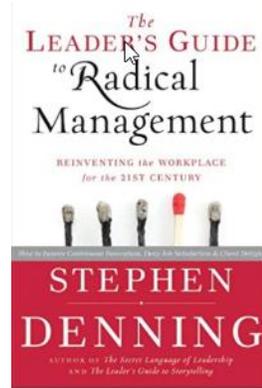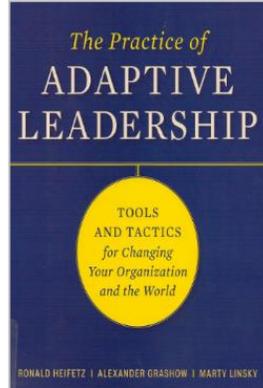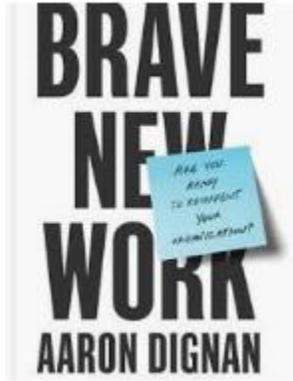
Thank You!

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- Customer centric learning company: Providing what you need based on how you need it. Based in New Zealand and operating in multiple geos

  - Live training both physical and virtual, coaching, consulting, free content (web seminars, podcasts, blogs)
    - Public and on-site classes
    - Current 50% off public discount on any course using code **DM0620**

  - Focus areas: Agile (in alignment with ICAgile), Business Agility, DevOps, Business Analysis, Software Testing and Adaptive Leadership

  - Strong skills in Learning Journey development and bridging the gap between mindset change and skills development in transformations

  - Special offer on new Agile Product Management course, taking a value management/product mindset to your project office

Adaptative Leadership two-day Course

- Pat Reed: International Expert https://www.linkedin.com/in/reedpat/

- Two-day program or three half days live virtual training

  - https://www.softed.com/course/adaptive-leadership-with-pat-reed
- Learning to lead adaptively, focus on the future and increase awareness, engagement and confidence

- Understanding the perils and practices of leading change

- Understanding the laws of performance and practice diagnosing and mobilizing an adaptive performance management challenge

- Practice adaptive leadership tools like re-framing work in terms of value, designing effective interventions, diagnosing adaptive challenges, storytelling, orchestrating healthy tension, taming complexity, balancing polarities, amplifying learning through reflection and journaling and creating an environment conducive to building an adaptive culture

- Mapping and mobilizing customers and stakeholders and effectively navigating political landscapes