ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP
A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEADING IN COMPLEXITY, CHANGE & UNCERTAINTY

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES		ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES	
The Solution	Is clear	The Solution	Requires learning
The Problem	Is clear	The Problem	Requires learning
Whose work is it?	Experts or authority	Whose work is it?	Stakeholders
Involves	Facts & logic	Involves	Values, loyalties, beliefs
Characteristics	Predictable & consistent	Characteristics	Uncertain & inconsistent
Focus on	Content	Focus on	Process
Act	Efficiently	Act	Experimentally
Type of work	Business as usual, status quo	Type of work	Venturing into new territory
Timeline	ASAP	Timeline	Longer Term
Expectations	Fix the problem	Expectations	Make Progress
Attitude	Confidence & Skill	Attitude	Curiosity & Improvisation
Outcome	Can be right or wrong	Outcome	A more or less effective organisational outcome

SKILLS OF OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION
WHAT IS GOING ON & WHY?

OBSERVATION

Collect data

What do you see, hear and feel? What do you know? What are the facts?

INTERPRETATION

Make multiple 'best guesses' about what has been observed

Safe _____ to _____ **Conflictual**

Personal _____ to _____ **Organisational**

Technical _____ to _____ **Adaptive**

DEEP LISTENING

Deep listening is about being open, curious, and attentive to others.

Key skills:
- Slowing down to reflect
- Become present
- Cultivate silence.

What gets in the way of listening:
- Judgment
- Hearing what validates position
- Lack of openness
- Jumping to conclusion
- Assumptions

There are four types of listening*:
1. **Downloading,** where we are purely listening to reconfirm our judgements. "I know that already." We are looking for what we already know.
2. **Factual**, where we are paying attention to the facts to gather more data. We are looking for what we don't already know.
3. **Empathic**, where we are able to listen with an open heart and connect with another person by engaging in real dialogue and paying careful attention to them and their story. We forget about our own agenda and see the world through their eyes.
4. **Generative**, where we connect at a deeper level, and to something larger than ourselves. This experience is hard to describe; it has an "out of this world" quality, where things slow down, and we are fully present to what is unfolding.

[*Otto Scharmer, 'Theory U' 2016]

EXPERIMENTATION
YOU ARE NOT LEARNING IF YOU ARE NOT FAILING

Designing 'safe to fail' experiments:

BEFORE

- What is the purpose of your experiment?

- What are you curious about?

- What do you want to have happen?

- What do you think will happen?

- What assumptions are you testing?

- What is your plan?

- What is the timeframe?

- On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (very high) where would you rate the risks?

- If you rated the risk at 6 or above, how can you take it down a point or two?

- How will you monitor progress?

AFTER

- What did you learn?

- What will you try next?

SPECTRUM OF REASONS FOR FAILURE

A nuanced understanding of failure's causes and contexts can help avoid the blame game and institute an effective strategy for learning from failure.

Mistakes fall into three broad categories:

1. Preventable - in predictable, technical contexts.

2. Unavoidable - in complex, adaptive systems.

3. Intelligent – designed with the express purpose of learning & innovating.

Type	Description
Deviance	Choosing to violate a prescribed process or practice
Inattention	Inadvertently deviates from specifications
Lack of ability	Doesn't have the skills, conditions, or training to do the job.
Process inadequacy	A competent individual adheres to a prescribed but faulty or incomplete process.
Task challenge	Face a task too difficult to be executed reliably every time.
Process complexity	A process composed of many elements breaks down when it encounters novel interactions.
Uncertainty	A lack of clarity about future events causes people to take seemingly reasonable actions that produce undesired results.
Hypothesis testing	An experiment conducted to prove that an idea or a design will succeed, fails.
Exploratory testing	An experiment conducted to expand knowledge and investigate a possibility leads to an undesired result.

'Strategies for Learning from Failure', Amy Edmondson, HBR Apr 2011

YOUR STORY

Life stories

Share with your table team members your story.

- **This activity is about you and your story up to now.** This is a chance to share aspects of your past; what has influenced you; what and who has been significant in your life; how this impacts who you are now and how you know yourself, particularly the crucible moments that have shaped who you are. You will have up to 15 minutes to share your story.

- In preparing your story please feel free to be creative, expressive, use coloured pens, diagrams, words etc. There will be flip chart paper available for you to draw your story. Drawing your story is a powerful way to get your points across.

- Themes you may want to share in your stories could be:
    - Significant events that have shaped you
    - Significant people who have influenced you
    - Challenges that you have faced
    - When you have felt at your best
    - What times have been your favourites
    - What is important to you

- Find some space where you will not be disturbed or interrupted. Take 10 minutes of personal time to create your own time line and personal story

Time

10 minutes for individual preparation
Approximately 10 to 15 minutes per person to share their story
(Note: you need to self-manage your group process and timing)

Report out

This is only for your table team. There is no expectation of any reporting back into the larger group.

Examples of how a personal story can be shown