

Wicked Issues

Working With Complex Problems

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Leadership Context

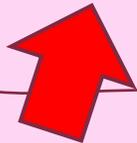
A self-contained organisation

- Clear boundaries
- Single chain of command
- Unambiguous sense of purpose
- A unified professional culture

A partnership

- Overlapping boundaries
- Shared leadership
- Multiple objectives
- A variety of professional culture

Children's Services



Better Together, For Children



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting direction• Commanding authority• Being accountable• Championing an institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking strategically• Communicating well• Developing a shared purpose• Being honest in relationships• Respecting others' achievements• Facilitating group processes• Involving others• Understanding impacts of change• Leaders learning from each other• Mediating conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Persuading through vision• Making trade offs• Modelling collaboration
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Tame

- Problems as puzzles
- Complicated rather than complex
- Resolvable and have technical solutions
- Management problems
- Examples are introductions of new systems and completion of reviews

Critical

- 'Self-evident' crisis
- Immediate and real threat
- Requires immediate action
- Legitimises coercion for public good
- Requires a commander
- Examples are safeguarding interventions and civil emergencies

Wicked

- Either novel or recalcitrant
- Complex rather than complicated
- Multi-faceted and requires collaboration
- No right or wrong solutions
- Coping rather than solving
- Inevitably uncertain and ambiguous
- Requires resourceful leadership to maximise potential capacity

Activity

Thinking of the challenges you are currently facing, which are Tame, Critical, or Wicked?

Reasons For Failure



The most common cause of leadership failure is treating a complex (or adaptive) problem with a technical fix



Adaptive work diminishes the gap between the way things are and the way things need to be to create a better future

Technical and Adaptive Challenges



Technical

What's the work?

Applying current know how

Who does the work?

'Experts' who know how to do it



Adaptive

What's the work?

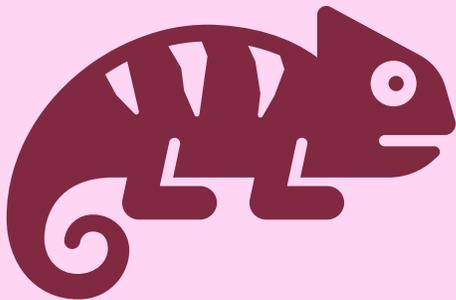
Learning new ways of being/acting

Who does the work?

The people with the problem

Adaptive Leadership

Beliefs behind Ron Heifetz' work



- Problems are embedded within complex systems
- Much of human behaviour reflects on adaptation to their circumstances
- People adapt more successfully by facing fears and painful circumstances and developing new attitudes and behaviours
- Leaders must create the conditions in which people will persevere in addressing complex system issues
- Leading change involves loss

A common leadership framework – adaptive leadership (Heifetz)

Get on the Balcony

- A place from which to observe the patterns in the wider environment as well as what is over the horizon (prerequisite for the following six principles)

Identify the Adaptive Challenge

- A challenge for which there is no ready made technical answer
- A challenge requiring the gap between values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to be addressed

Create the Holding Environment

- May be a physical space in which adaptive work can be done
- The relationship or wider social space in which adaptive work can be accomplished

Cook the Conflict

- Create the heat
- Sequence & pace the work
- Regulate the distress

Maintain Disciplined Attention

- Work avoidance
- Use conflict positively
- Keep people focussed

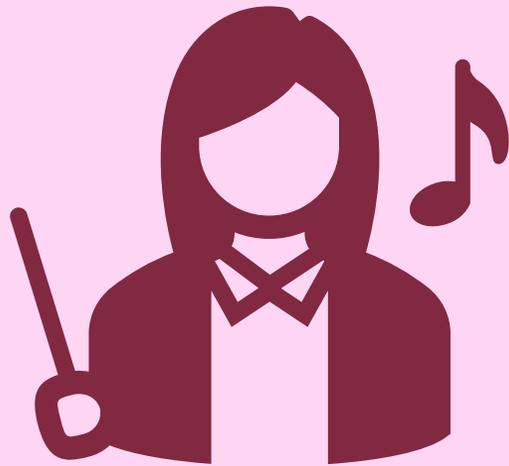
Give back the work

- Resume responsibility
- Use their knowledge
- Support their efforts

Protect the voices of Leadership from below

- Ensuring everyone's voice is heard is essential for willingness to experiment and learn
- Leaders have to provide cover to staff who point to the internal contradictions of the organisation

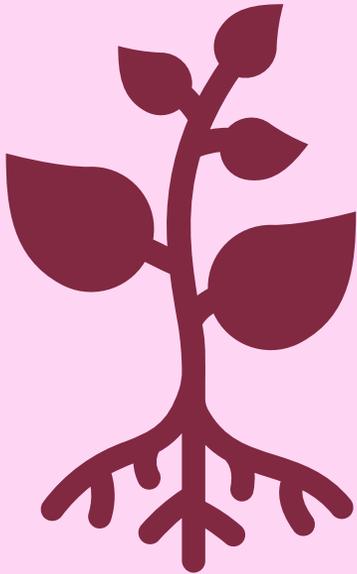
Get on the Balcony



- Reflect on the action you are part of
- Get perspective, leave the dance
- Look at what you are doing as well as what others are doing
- Unpick your emotions
- Look at authority figures for clues
- Listen to the song beneath the words
- Ask: What is really going on here?
- Step back in the midst of action

How might you frame your adaptive leadership challenge?

Create The Holding Environment



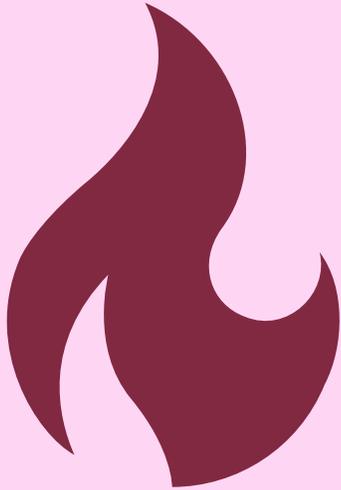
Staff who think together can develop:

- Confidence to handle complex problems
- Increased intelligence in making good decisions
- Increased experimentation and risk taking
- True recognition that ‘we’re all in this together!’
- Better behaviours, like compassion, forgiveness, and generosity
- Reduced stress and loneliness

Margaret Wheatley

Regulate Distress

'Cook the Conflict'



- Conflict is a necessary part of change and needs to be surfaces
- The leadership challenge is to harness the energy while diminishing the destructive potential
- To be effective, leaders must be able to tolerate hostility
- Effective leaders regulate the temperature to keep others within a productive zone of distress

Reflections

- How do you personally react to conflict?
- What differences might be inhibiting progress in your area of work?
- How might you cook the conflict (regulate distress) to release positive energy? Should you raise or reduce the heat?

Maintain Disciplined Attention



- Work avoidance is a natural response to loss
- A key leadership function is to identify patterns of work avoidance and champion the importance of 'real work'
- Focus on perceived threats or sense of loss
- Cultivate allies

What are the signs that people are avoiding the real work?

Give Back The Work



- Resist the temptation to always provide the solution
- Know where the work belongs
- Consider how to give people the work back without them feeling abandoned
- Avoid holding on to work that should be someone else's
- Resist the temptation to take responsibility for resolving the conflicts of others

Protect the Voice of Leadership From Below...

... because they raise sometimes uncomfortable questions, highlight contradictions, and, most importantly, provoke new thinking!

What are they really talking about?
Is there something you're missing?
What might they have to say about your leadership challenge?