



## 7 Behaviors of Adaptive Leadership

1 Get on the balcony

Leadership requires not only understanding the individual tasks of staff and regulating their performance (management), but also stepping back to view patterns, relationships, context, and implications (leadership). To discern the larger pattern you have to move from the dance floor (active) to the balcony (reflective), where you can observe who is dancing with whom, in what groups, in what locations, who is sitting out, and so on.

2 Think politically

Leadership is political—it's about motivating and mobilizing people to change. Leaders need to work hard at building relationships, creating allies, keeping close to the opposition, and finding ways to generate commitment from the uncommitted. This does not mean "sucking up" or giving up what is important.

3 Be open to all voices

Leaders are open to unexpected voices of leadership, including diverse voices or voices that differ from your view or the views of others in the group. Some of the best solutions may come from people who have not had an opportunity to make leadership contributions in the past. The adaptive leader provides opportunities for all players to give input. They also manage any attempts by others in the group to invalidate these new voices.

4 Regulate distress

The secret to effective leadership is to allow enough distress to facilitate change, without letting distress reach the point where people can no longer function. Heifetz et al refers to this as managing the thermostat.

5 Orchestrate conflict

Being open to all voices increases the potential for disagreement. People come with different points of view, and disagreements can escalate into conflict. Successful leaders use conflict; they don't shy away from it or suppress it, but see it as an engine of creativity and innovation.

Some of the most creative ideas come when people in conflict remain in conversation with one another rather than retreating into their own corners or staking out entrenched positions. The challenge for leaders is to develop structures and processes in which such conflicts can be productive.

6 Give work back to the people

The adaptive leader encourages team members to assert themselves and show their skills at appropriate times. Success is far more likely when everyone involved carries responsibilities for both the problem and the solution.

7 Hold steady

Confronting major change generates a lot of conflict and resistance. Managing the conflict, dealing with the politics involved, and making people accountable requires an ability to hold steady in the heat of action. As distress rises, it's easy for people to begin blaming others or to become lost in trivia. It's up to the leader to keep others focused on the task at hand.