

Adaptive Vs. Technical Change

"Perhaps the most serious mistake leaders can make is to throw technical solutions at an adaptive challenge."

Ron Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers

Okay, great, but how do you tell the difference? Basically, a technical problem is one we know how to fix and where to find the answer. We know the expert to call, the steps to take, the plan to put into action. And even if the problem is new to us, others have been there and done that – we can find the answers from them. Adaptive challenges, however, are when we haven't got a clue. We are steeped in the unknown - the old fixes have been tried and failed. It's not that we need to *do* differently, we need to *think* differently. A popular analogy is that while breaking an ankle requires technical changes, losing a leg is an adaptive challenge. It requires learning a whole different way of living.

Let's look to the business world for a moment. Two sets of companies can illustrate the point. What comes to mind when we say Kodak, or Borders, or Blockbuster? What comes to mind when we say Panasonic, or Amazon, or Netflix? Kodak thought they were in the film business, until that business died. They failed to recognize that really they were in the image business. Film was simply a delivery system. When trains declined rapidly upon the arrival of commercial airplanes, they realized too late that they were *actually* in the transportation business. They could have adapted. But they didn't. By the way, there was a small development group deep within Kodak that tried desperately to get their bosses to fund their experiments with something called digital imaging. They were turned down.

Think about the state of the Church in America right now. We are smack in the middle of a deep post-Christendom decline. At the congregational level, the default to technical solutions is so strong, it's hard to switch off. A better preacher, a youth leader with charisma, a slick fundraising plan, big overhead screens and modern music. Technical responses that may work briefly in some contexts, but none of them are warding off the pervasive trend of decline. A church consultant friend of ours said, "You know, if the 1950s come back again, boy are we ready!" We know how to do *that* version of church! If we tweak it, they will come. We act as if we believe that. But people aren't shopping. Fewer and fewer each year are looking to affiliate with a religious institution of *any* kind.

We Presbyterians have the historic tag line that may be the worst suited descriptive for such a time as this: "Decently and in Order". A hallmark of Adaptive Leadership is chaos, commonly called 'Creative Disruption'. We in the PCUSA can rename, restructure, redesign better than most. It's in our DNA. Technical changes, all. What is far scarier is the free-wheeling work of the Spirit, that third partner of the Trinity that is traditionally non-linear, messy, unpredictable, and essentially ADAPTIVE! It requires dwelling in the pit of the unknown – the darkest hours of Holy Saturday – and having faith that serving God and the people with 'energy, intelligence, imagination and love' will get us where we need to be. In MBTI lingo, it's tough on STJs, it's comes more naturally to Intuitives.

The trademark sign of the need for Adaptive Leadership is perceived crisis. That's the beginning of Hope! That's the Aha moment when we recognize that simple solutions and binary thinking are deadly. Red v. Blue, Black v. White, Black v. Blue, etc. Complexity must dance with Imagination. Re-framing the questions will together – not bottom up or top down – lead us to the New Possibilities. That's Adaptive Change.



ADAPTIVE CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR PRESBYTERY

What can my Congregation Expect?

PneuMatrix is honored to begin working with your Presbytery to discern adaptive challenges facing their congregations. Over a 12-month period we will be working with ten congregations, first through a brief assessment process, followed by a time of framing the primary adaptive issues, then through a focused discernment process. Each of the ten congregations will be matched individually with eight Adaptive Change Apprentices (members of your Presbytery), who, together with PneuMatrix Principals the Revs. Deborah Wright and Jim Kitchens will work as teams to take this adaptive journey together. The Apprentices will be studying Adaptive Change Leadership while gaining case-in-point learning throughout the journey. At each phase it will be important to bring along the Session, and eventually the congregation about the Team's progress.

Your church will be responsible for naming an **Adaptive Change Transformation Team**—your pastor(s), together with six to eight leaders from your congregation. While you may have a session member or two, the team should be a broad band of folks reflecting the diversity of your church family. Adaptive Change work is non-linear, sometimes chaotic, and can be difficult for folks who have a hard time dwelling for a while in the unknown. “Creative Disruption” is a key element of Adaptive work. The team will pick a time to meet each month, and can expect some homework/exercises to complete between meetings. Deborah or Jim will be a call-in or skype participant in the monthly team meetings, and your Apprentice will be with you at your meetings, often facilitating our exercises. On average, the team should expect to spend 2-4 hours per month total in meetings or on ‘homework exercises’.

Assessment Phase – Collecting the data, learning the context

- Mission Incite report (provided by the presbytery)
- Completion of the Presbyterian Foundation Financial Health Assessment (online, free)
- Proof of Insurance of all property
- Ten-year trend report of your congregation – online at pcusa.org
- Any recent reports from past assessments like New Beginnings or Holy Cow, bring them to the table

Framing the Primary Adaptive Challenges – Peeling down the layers of the onion

Through a series of exercises, short readings, deep team discussions and practical homework, we will articulate the primary adaptive challenges facing the congregation. We will learn how NOT to default to technical solutions. We will dwell in the unknown, open to the ‘Creative Disruption’ period necessary to get to the heart of our issues. Eventually, ‘Aha moments’ will emerge! This phase can be messy and uncomfortable and chaotic, but oh, so worth it! Because Adaptive change work is so radically contextual, this phase can't be described in a linear fashion. TRUST is the key element.

Discerning the Way Forward – Options and Actions

Focus in this phase is on engaging the Session and the congregation in the process. Some of the exercises we did as a team can be used with these two groups as well. Eventually a series of options for concrete adaptive changes will emerge. Using an Energetics Tool, we will define the options, then measure the congregation's readiness for change regarding each option. We will measure the options on 3 scales: Spiritual Depth, Financial Capacity, and Commitment Energy.