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LEADERSHIP

WITHOUT

EASY

ANSWERS

Introduction

We are facing a crisis in leadership in many areas of public and private life. Yet we misconceive the nature of these leadership crises. We attribute our problems too readily to our politicians and executives, as if they were the cause of them, and we frequently use them as scapegoats. Although people in authority may not be a ready source of answers, rarely are they the source of our pains. Pinning the blame on authority provides us with a simple accounting for our predicaments. *"Throw out the rascals! They're the reason we're in this mess!"* Yet our current crises may have more to do with the scale, interdependence, and perceived uncontrollability of modern economic and political life. The paucity of leadership may perpetuate our quandaries, but seldom is it the basis for them.

Furthermore, in a crisis we tend to look for the wrong kind of leadership. We call for someone with answers, decision, strength, and a map of the future, someone who knows where we ought to be going—in short, someone who can make hard problems simple. Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways.

To meet challenges such as these, we need a different idea of leadership and a new business contract that promotes our adaptive capacities, rather than inappropriate expectations of authority. We need to re-conceive and revitalize our business life and the meaning of company citizenship.

These challenges are the subject of this book. To introduce them, it seems only fair that I introduce myself and the baggage and resources I carry into this study. I am a psychiatrist, musician, and lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government, where I direct the school's Leadership Education Project.

As a physician, I carry several biases.

The first bias is a belief that many problems are embedded in complicated and interactive systems. In medicine, for example, we want to know how the body will react to the opening in its defenses when illness sets in.

The second bias from biology is to assume that much of behavior reflects an adaptation to circumstances. An organism's responses to stress—whether the stress is induced by the climate, competition, food supply, sexual activity, or parenthood—

represent adaptations developed over the course of evolution. Often, biological adaptations are transformative, enabling new species to thrive in changing environments. As in biology, business adaptations run the gamut from minor to transformative change. By adapting, I do not mean accepting the status quo or resigning ourselves to a new and bad situation.

The third bias, I think of authority relationships in terms of service. My job as a physician consists of helping people solve the problems for which I have some expertise. That is why they authorize me: Authority is a trust. If in some problem situations my latitude for action—my authorization—must expand, then the basis of my trust may have to change.

Their behavior is their effort to adapt. As a consequence, I intervene in people's lives and business systems with the aim of increasing their adaptive capacity—their ability to clarify values and make progress on the problems those values define.

Chapter 1 - Values in Leadership

Leadership arouses passion. The exercise and even the study of leadership stirs feeling because leadership engages our values. Indeed, the term itself is value-laden. When we call for leadership in our organizations, we call for something we prize. If one asks: "Would you rather be known as a leader or a manager? A follower or a leader?" the response is usually "a leader." The term leadership involves our self-images and moral codes.

Yet the way we talk about leadership betrays confusion. On one hand, we use the word to denote people and actions of merit. In our organizations, we evaluate managers for their "leadership," by which we mean a particular constellation of valued abilities. Our media routinely use the term leader to denote people in authority or people who have a following. We talk about the leader of the gang, the mob, the organization—the person who is given informal or formal authority by others—regardless of the values they represent or the product they play a key part in producing.

We cannot continue to have it both ways. We may like to use the word leadership as if it were value-free, particularly in an age of science and mathematics, so that we can describe far-ranging phenomena and people with consistency. Yet when we do so, we ignore the other half of ourselves that in the next breath speaks of leadership as something we desperately need more of. We cannot talk about a crisis in leadership and then say leadership is value-free. Do we merely mean that we have too few people in our midst who can gather a following? Surely, we are not asking for more messiahs of Waco and Jonestown who meet people's needs by offering tempting visions of rapture and sacrifice. The contradiction in our common understanding clouds not only the clarity of our thinking and scholarship; it shapes the quality of leadership we praise, teach, and get.

Understandably, scholars who have studied "leadership" have tended to side with the value-free connotation of the term because it lends itself more easily to analytic reasoning and empirical examination. But this will not do for them any more than it will do for practitioners of leadership who intervene in organizations and communities everyday. Rigor in social science does not require that we ignore values; it simply

requires being explicit about the values we study. There is no neutral ground from which to construct notions and theories of leadership because leadership terms, loaded with emotional content, carry with them implicit norms and values. For example, when we equate leadership with holding high office or exerting great influence, we reinforce a tendency to value station and power. We are not simply studying or using power; we unwittingly communicate that power has intrinsic worth.

We have to take sides. When we teach, write about, and model the exercise of leadership, we inevitably support or challenge people's conceptions of themselves, their roles, and most importantly their ideas about how social systems make progress on problems. Leadership is a normative concept because implicit in people's notions of leadership are images of a social contract. Imagine the differences in behavior when people operate with the idea that "leadership means influencing the company to follow the leader's vision" versus "leadership means influencing the company to face its problems.

In the first instance, influence is the mark of leadership; a leader gets people to accept his vision, and the business addresses problems by looking to him. If something goes wrong, the fault lies with the leader. In the second, progress on problems is the measure of leadership; leaders mobilize people to face problems, and businesses make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them do so. If something goes wrong, the fault lies with both leaders and the business.

This second image of leadership—mobilizing people to tackle tough problems—is the image at the heart of this book. This conception builds upon, yet differs from, the culturally dominant views.

In business, we see an evolution of the concept of leadership. For decades, the term leadership referred to the people who hold top management positions and the functions they serve. In our common usage, it still does. Recently, however, business people have drawn a distinction between leadership and management, and exercising leadership has also come to mean providing a vision and influencing others to realize it through non-coercive means.

In the military, the term leadership commonly refers to people in positions of command, who show the way. Perhaps because warfare has played a central role historically in the development of our conceptions of leadership and authority, it is not surprising that the ancient linguistic root of the word "to lead" means "to go forth, die."

In biology, leadership is the activity of flying at the front of a flock of geese. The leader has a particular set of physical attributes (big, assertive, fast). The leader functions as a focal point of attention by which the rest of the group instinctively organizes itself. Leadership is equated with prominence and dominance.

Hidden Values in Theories of Leadership

Perhaps the first theory of leadership—and the one that continues to be entrenched in American culture—emerged from the nineteenth-century notion that history is the story of great men and their impact on society. Although various scientific studies discount the idea, this trait approach continues to set the terms of popular debate. Indeed, it saw a revival during the 1980s. Based on this view, trait theorists have examined the personality characteristics of "great men," positing that the rise to power is rooted in a "heroic" set of personal talents, skills, or physical characteristics.

Beginning in the 1950s, theorists began to synthesize the trait approach with the situationalist view. Empirical studies had begun to show that no single constellation of traits was associated with leadership. Although this finding did not negate the idea that individuals "make" history, it did suggest that different situations demand different personalities and call for different behaviors.   Primary among these synthetic approaches is contingency theory, which posits that the appropriate style of leadership is contingent on the requirements of the particular situation.

The field of inquiry soon expanded into the specific interactions between leaders and followers—the transactions by which an individual gains influence and sustains it over time. The process is based on reciprocity. Leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well. A leader earns influence by adjusting to the expectations of followers. In one variant of the transactional approach, the leader reaps the benefits of status and influence in exchange for reducing uncertainty and providing followers with a basis for action.

Each of these theories is generally considered to be value-free, but in fact their values are simply hidden. The great-man or trait approach places value on the history-maker, the person with extraordinary influence. Although the approach does not specify in what direction influence must be wielded to constitute leadership, the very suggestion that the mark of a great man is his historical impact on society gives us a particular perspective on greatness. Placing Hitler in the same general category as Lincoln does

not render the theory value-free. On the contrary, it simply leaves its central value—influence—implicit.

Toward a Prescriptive Concept of Leadership

Leadership, which has long been linked to the exercise of authority or influence, usually suggests playing a prominent and coordinating role in an organization. To capture these uses of the term in a definition, we can use the word "mobilize," which connotes motivating, organizing, orienting, and focusing attention.

Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a business structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an activity.

The common personalistic orientation to the term leadership, with its assumption that "leaders are born and not made," is quite dangerous. It fosters both self-delusion and irresponsibility.

So, we ought to focus on leadership as an activity—the activity of an employee from any walk of life mobilizing people to do something. Leadership is more than influence.

To address this problem, the leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns suggested that socially useful goals not only have to meet the needs of followers, they also should elevate followers to a higher moral level. This is known as transformational leadership.

Business schools and schools of management commonly define leadership and its usefulness with respect to organizational effectiveness. Effectiveness means reaching viable decisions that implement the goals of the organization. This definition has the benefit of being generally applicable, but it provides no real guide to determine the nature or formation of those goals. Which goals should we pursue? What constitutes effectiveness in addition to the ability to generate profits? From the perspective of a town official viewing a local corporation, effectiveness at implementation seems an insufficient criterion. A chemical plant may be quite effective at earning a profit while it dangerously pollutes the local water supply. We are left with the question: Effective at what?

This study examines the usefulness of viewing leadership in terms of adaptive work. Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior. The

exposure and orchestration of conflict—internal contradictions—within individuals and businesses provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways.

Leadership requires orchestrating these conflicts among and within the interested parties, and not just between the members and formal shareholders of the organization. Who should play a part in the deliberations is not a given, but is itself a critical strategic question. Strategy begins with asking: Which stakeholders have to adjust their ways to make progress on this problem? How can one sequence the issues or strengthen the bonds that join the stakeholders together as a community of interests so that they withstand the stresses of problem-solving?

To clarify a complex situation such as this requires multiple vantage points, each of which adds a piece to the puzzle. Just as clarifying a vision demands reality testing, reality testing is not a value-free process. Values are shaped and refined by rubbing against real problems, and people interpret their problems according to the values they hold. Different values shed light on the different opportunities and facets of a situation. The implication is important: the inclusion of competing value perspectives may be essential to adaptive success.

The point here is to provide a guide to goal formation and strategy. In selecting adaptive work as a guide, one considers not only the values that the goal represents, but also the goal's ability to mobilize people to face, rather than avoid, tough realities and conflicts. The hardest and most valuable task of leadership may be advancing goals and designing strategy that promote adaptive work.

People discover and respond to the future as much as they plan it. Those who lead have to learn from events and take advantage of the unplanned opportunities that events uncover, they have to improvise. In the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt called for "bold, persistent experimentation. As he put it, "It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something".

There are several advantages to viewing leadership in terms of adaptive work. First, it points to the pivotal importance of reality testing in producing outcomes useful to a company—the process of weighing one interpretation of a problem and its sources of evidence against others. Without this process, problem definitions fail to model the situation causing distress.

In this study, leadership is oriented by the task of doing adaptive work. As we shall see, influence and authority are primary factors in doing adaptive work, but they also

bring constraints. They are instruments and not ends. Tackling tough problems—problems that often require an evolution of values—is the end of leadership; getting that work done is its essence.

We need a view of leadership that provides a practical orientation so that we can evaluate events and action in process, without waiting for outcomes.

In addition, because adaptation is a metaphor from biology where the objective is survival, leadership as "activity to mobilize adaptation" may connote an overemphasis on survival. Clearly, we have a host of quite precious values—liberty, equality, human welfare, justice, and community—for which we take risks, and a concept of adaptation applied to human organizations must account for these squarely.

Chapter 2 - To Lead or Mislead

Living systems seek equilibrium. They respond to stress by working to regain balance.

When a fire burns down a forest, the seeds that routinely blow in from a distance now take root in the ash. Knocked out of equilibrium, living systems summon a set of restorative responses.

These responses to disequilibrium are the product of evolutionary adaptations that transformed into routine problems what were once nearly overwhelming threats.

By definition, the successes survive while the failures disappear. The roads of evolution are strewn with the bones of creatures that could not thrive in the next environment. In natural selection, the failures abound alongside the successes. Evolution works by trial and error.

Developing a robust adaptation to a new challenge is, in a sense, a learning process for a species. Through the hit-or-miss survival of some individuals over others, a species makes its way toward new adaptive capacities. As the survivors pass on to their offspring the traits that gave them a slight edge in the competition for resources, these better-adapted capacities become "hardwired" into the genetic programs of the species; the gene pool that determines the anatomical features and refinements of the next generation becomes changed.

Adaptive Work

The concept of adaptation arises from efforts to understand biological evolution. Applied to the change of companies, the concept becomes a useful, if inexact, metaphor. Species change as the genetic program changes; companies change by learning. Evolution is a matter of chance—a fortuitous fit between random variation and new environmental pressures; companies, by contrast, can respond to new pressures with deliberation and planning. The concept of adaptation applied to a company raises the question: Adapt to what, for what purpose?

In biology, survival of individual members of a species and their gene-carrying kin basically define the direction in which the species adapts. A situation becomes a "problem" for the species, or more accurately an adaptive challenge, because it threatens the capacity of individuals to pass on their genetic heritage.

Adapting to human challenges requires that we go beyond the requirements of simply surviving. In companies, adaptive work consists of efforts to close the gap between reality and a host of values not restricted to survival. We perceive problems whenever circumstances do not conform to the way we think things ought to be. Thus, adaptive work involves not only the assessment of reality but also the clarification of values.

Assessing circumstances is made complex because we cannot always define problems objectively. The methods of science make a major contribution to reality testing; yet they cannot reliably define our problems both because the scientific method has limited capacity to make predictions and because our problems can only be diagnosed in light of our values. With different values, we screen reality for different information and put the facts together into a different picture.

If we define problems by the disparity between values and circumstances, then an adaptive challenge is a particular kind of problem where the gap cannot be closed by the application of current technical know-how or routine behavior. To make progress, not only must invention and action change circumstances to align reality with values, but the values themselves may also have to change. Leadership will consist not of answers or assured visions but of taking action to clarify values. It asks questions like: What are we missing here?

Disequilibrium Dynamics

Like living systems, companies under threat try to restore equilibrium. Generally, equilibrium means stability in which the levels of stress within a company are not increasing. Yet there is nothing ideal or good about a state of equilibrium per se. Indeed, achieving adaptive change probably requires sustained periods of disequilibrium. How to manage sustained periods of stress consequently poses a central question for the exercise of leadership.

The patterns of disequilibrium in a company take three forms:

1. The current problem presents no new challenge and a response from the current repertoire may restore equilibrium successfully

2. When the company has no ready solution for the situation, the business system may still try to apply responses from its repertoire, but may only restore equilibrium in the short term and at the cost of long-term consequences

3. Third, the business may learn to meet the new challenge

Thus, there are three basic possibilities:

1. The current response may both restore equilibrium quickly and solve the problem

2. The current response may restore equilibrium in the short term through a variety of expedient measures but may not solve the underlying problem

3. The current response cannot solve the problem, but the business system may mobilize to produce a new adaptation sufficient to meet the challenge

Companies fail to adapt for several reasons. In some cases they may misperceive the nature of the threat. In addition to threats within common knowledge, however, some threats remain to be discovered. Companies can respond only to those threats that they see. In some other cases the company may perceive the threat, but the challenge may exceed the culture's adaptive capability.

Finally, companies fail to adapt because of the distress provoked by the problem and the changes it demands. Their managers resist the pain, anxiety, or conflict that accompanies a sustained interaction with the situation by holding onto past assumptions, blaming authority, scapegoating, externalizing the enemy, denying the problem, jumping to conclusions, or finding a distracting issue that may restore stability and feel less stressful than facing and taking responsibility for a complex challenge. These patterns of response to disequilibrium are called *work avoidance* mechanisms in this study, and they are similar to the defensive routines that operate in individuals, small groups, and organizations.

Identifying blind spots and options that others cannot see, or strengthening a companies problem-solving capacity, will generate conflict and distress. Thus, a key question for leadership becomes: How can one counteract the expected work avoidances and help people learn despite resistance?

Though differing in form depending on the culture and complexity of the business system, work avoidance mechanisms seem to operate in any social context. In a small group, less powerful members will sit back and "watch the gladiators fight" as the chairperson and a colleague who represents a challenging perspective engage in an angry exchange that diverts attention from the issues on the table and diminishes a sense of shared responsibility. In an organization, people will follow standard operating procedures even when they know the procedures do not fit the situation. Yet, though we frequently avoid adaptive work, we seldom do so deliberately. Work avoidance mechanisms are often unconscious, or at least disguised from the self.

Reality testing—the effort to grasp the problem fully—is often an early victim of disequilibrium.   Initially, people will apply routine practices for realistically assessing and addressing problems. But if these do not pay early dividends, restoring equilibrium may take precedence over the prolonged uncertainty associated with weighing divergent views and facing the need for changing attitudes and beliefs. With sustained distress, people may lose sight of their purposes. They "take their eyes off the ball."

Distinguishing work from work avoidance is no science. Each business culture will have its own typical patterns of response to stress work-producing as well as work-avoiding. While more research should clarify the distinction between productive and avoidance behaviors in different business systems, some rules of thumb are useful.:

• one might detect work avoidance when the subject of discussion is suddenly taken off the table (diversion)

• when the level of stress associated with an issue suddenly drops (often following an apparent technical fix)

• when the focus shifts from attending to the problem itself to alleviating the symptoms of stress

• when responsibility for the problem is displaced to an easy target (scapegoating)

One ought to take a skeptical stance, at least momentarily, when some action suddenly makes everybody feel good.   Of course, what looks like momentary periods of work avoidance from one vantage point may be part of someone else's strategy. Leadership often requires pacing the work in an effort to prepare people to undertake a hard task at a rate they can stand.

Chapter 3 - The Roots of Authority

In our everyday language, we often equate leadership with authority. We routinely call leaders those who achieve high positions of authority even though, on reflection, we readily acknowledge the frequent lack of leadership they provide. Intuitively, we sense there is a difference. Usually, we attribute this difference to personal skill, temperament, and motives. Some people "have it" and some people don't. But rarely is the personal dimension the whole story. Context also plays a key part. Frequently, there are impediments to leadership intrinsic to the setting that would make it hard for anybody to lead.

One of these key impediments is authority. Because we so commonly equate leadership with authority, we fail to see the obstacles to leadership that come with authority itself. Having authority brings not only resources to bear but also serious constraints on the exercise of leadership. We need to understand these resources and constraints. To do so, we first need to identify the indispensable functions that authority serves in our lives.

From Dominance to Authority

I define authority as conferred power to perform a service. This definition will be useful to the practitioner of leadership as a reminder of two facts: First, authority is given and can be taken away. Second, authority is conferred as part of an exchange. Failure to meet the terms of exchange means the risk of losing one's authority: it can be taken back or given to another who promises to fulfill the bargain.

Stress and Charismatic Authority

Authorities usually have the know-how to fulfill our expectations and what they do not provide in terms of guidance, prevailing cultural norms provide.

What happens at the start-up of an organization when corporate norms have yet to be formed, or when an established group faces an adaptive challenge and must renew itself? At the beginning of an organization's life, the authority's job of directing, protecting, orienting, resolving conflicts, and establishing norms becomes paramount. The leader may appear larger than life because they are indeed doing so much. As the source of the organization's energy, they infuse people's work with meaning. Over

time, as "a way of doing business" develops, the office of senior authority takes on a life of its own. The charisma is transferred from the person to the office, where it then rubs off on whoever holds it; and depending on the stresses of the time and the person's ability to act as the repository of people's hopes, the magic may rub off a little or a lot.

The office itself and the routines it embodies can no longer carry the load, and we expect the officeholder to provide, as in the days of the founder, decisive direction, protection, orientation, control of conflict, and the restoration of norms.

When the stress is severe, we seem especially willing to grant extraordinary power and give away our freedom. In a historical study of thirty-five dictatorships, all of them emerged during times of social distress. Unhinged from their habits, people look with greater intensity to authority figures for remedies. We invest in them not only various formal powers with which to meet our needs but our personal trust that they can deliver. We rally to a person, a point, or a symbol; in so reacting we expect to discover, or to be told, how to respond. Hitler, who came to power only weeks before Roosevelt, described the phenomenon with great insight: "That is the mightiest mission of our Movement, namely, to give the searching and bewildered masses a new, firm belief, a belief which will not abandon them in these days of chaos, which they will swear and abide by, so that at least somewhere they will again find a place where their hearts can be at rest."

We attribute charisma to people who voice our pains and provide us with promise. Sometimes in our desperation we do so without critical thought. Perhaps similar to chimpanzees who require an arousing alpha to serve as a reference point, we too in times of disorientation seem inclined to endow our authorities with idealized gifts. As long as they serve this need, we imagine them larger than life. We do not realize that the source of their charisma is our own yearning. When shared norms can no longer provide sufficient orientation, the capacity of authority relationships to contain the stresses of business provides a key backup system. Mismanaged, however, dependency on authority discourages people from engaging with problems when they must. Instead of generating creativity and responsibility, charismatic authority can generate a mindless following or devolve into bureaucratic institutions that rely on central planning and control.

Chapter 4 - Mobilizing Adaptive Work

In times of distress, we turn to authority. To the breaking point, we place our hopes and frustrations upon those whose presumed knowledge, wisdom, and skill show the promise of fulfillment. Authorities serve as repositories for our worries and aspirations, holding them, if they can, in exchange for the powers given them.

In our organizations, we look generally to our authorities for direction, protection, and order:

- Direction may take the form of vision, goals, strategy, and technique

- Protection may take the form of being assured that our company provides a safe, fair workplace for today and tomorrow

- Order consists of three things: orienting people to their places and roles, controlling internal conflict, and establishing and maintaining norms

Distinguishing Adaptive from Technical Work

Type I - situations in which an employee's expectations are realistic: the manager can provide a solution and the problem can be defined and solved on the basis of (1) using the manager's expertise, and (2) shifting the persons burden primarily onto the manager's shoulders.

Type II - situations, the problem is definable but no clear-cut solution is available. The manager may have a solution in mind, but cannot implement it. A solution that cannot be implemented is not really a solution; it is simply an idea, a proposal. The employee must create the solution in Type II situations, though the manager may play a central role.

Type III - situations are even more difficult. The problem definition is not clear-cut, and technical fixes are not available. The situation calls for leadership that induces learning when even the manager does not have a solution in mind. Learning is required both to define problems and implement solutions.

Table 1 - Situational Types

Situation	Problem definition	Solution and implementation	Primary locus of responsibility for the work	Kind of work
Type I	Clear	Clear	Physician	Technical
Type II	Clear	Requires learning	Physician and patient	Technical and adaptive
Type III	Requires learning	Requires learning	Patient > physician	Adaptive

Leadership Expertise

When the leader does not know the answer, they can induce learning by asking hard questions and by recasting the employee's expectations to develop their response ability.

When the leader switches from operating as a technician to operating as an agent of adaptive work, they do not know what adaptation the employee's ought to make. The expertise that derives from their professional experience tells them that major adjustments of some sort are called for; it also provides practical guidance for stimulating those adjustments. In addition, their technical expertise gives them information about the business conditions that are forcing the adaptive change. But the manager does not presume to know what the results should look like. True, they need expertise, both technical expertise and leadership expertise. Their actions are nothing if not expert, but they are expert in the management of processes by which the people with the problem achieve the resolution.

Leaders use their authority relationship like a containing vessel for the employee's learning process. As one would use a pressure cooker, turning the heat up but keeping it within the carrying capacity of the vessel (its walls and relief valve), a leaders authority give them opportunities to regulate the levels of stress in order to maintain a tolerable yet productive range. When the leader raises hard questions and left the adaptive work to the employee, the pressure would rise.

Leaders help the employees take responsibility. They neither shield them from their problems, nor do they abandon them. Developing responsibility-the ability to respond-takes time and strategy.

Implications

In a complex business system, a problem will lack clarity because a multitude of factions will have divergent opinions about both the nature of the problem and its possible solutions. One faction's fix is another faction's adaptive challenge. Competing values are often at stake. Furthermore, in a large business system the experts often disagree even on the fundamental outlines of a problem, particularly at the early stages of problem definition.

As we turn to large business systems, three general implications are worth considering.

1. First, an authority figure exercising leadership has to tell the difference between technical and adaptive situations because they require different responses

2. The authority figure must ask the key differentiating question: *Does making progress on this problem require changes in people's values, attitudes, or habits of behavior?*

3. If people recognize the problem and can repeat a well-worked solution, then the authority figure can engage an authoritative response with practical efficiency and effect

In situations that call for adaptive work, business systems must learn their way forward. Even when an authority has some clear ideas about what needs to be done, implementing change often requires adjustments in people's lives.

Hence, with adaptive problems, authority must look beyond authoritative solutions. Authoritative action may usefully provoke debate, rethinking, and other processes of business learning, but then it becomes a tool in a strategy to mobilize adaptive work toward a solution, rather than a direct means to institute one.

As suggested, this requires a shift in mindset. When using authoritative provocation as part of a strategy, one must be prepared for an eruption of distress in response to the provocation and to consider early on the next step. One has to take the heat in stride, seeing it as part of the process of engaging people in the issue. In contrast, the mindset which views authoritative action as a solution to an adaptive problem would

logically view an aggravated team as an extraneous complication to making headway, rather than an inherent part of making progress. Operating with that mindset, an authority figure would likely respond defensively and inappropriately when the team retaliates.

Second, having an authority relationship with people is both a resource for leadership and a constraint. Authority is a resource because it can provide the instruments and power to hold together and harness the distressing process of doing adaptive work. Authority is a constraint because it is contingent on meeting the expectations of their employees. Deviating from those expectations is perilous.

Third, as learning takes place, Type III situations may be broken down partially if not completely into Type II and Type I components. This involves both process and technical expertise. When an authority distinguishes conditions from problems, they can bring tractable issues to people's attention. By managing attention to issues instead of dictating authoritative solutions, they allow invention. People create and sort through alternative problem definitions, clarify value trade-offs, and test potential avenues of action. Creativity and courage can sometimes transform adaptive challenges into technical problems by expanding people's technical capabilities.

Chapter 5 - Applying Power

To lead from a position of authority requires knowing how to tend and deploy the power that comes with the position. Authority can be divided into two forms: formal and informal. With formal authority come the various powers of the manager, and with informal authority comes the power to influence attitude and behavior beyond compliance. Formal authority is granted because the manager promises to meet a set of explicit expectations, whereas informal authority comes from promising to meet expectations that are often left implicit.

Managing the Holding Environment

A holding environment consists of any relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of another party and facilitate adaptive work. I apply it to any relationship which has a developmental task or opportunity—including the relationships of coaches with their teams and managers with their subordinates.

The holding environment can generate adaptive work because it contains and regulates the stresses that work generates. For example, a friend who listens with empathy to a painful story or who can tell a joke that fits the moment will provide respite and perspective that buffers distress. The friendship is a holding environment. Business structures and hopeful visions of the future during times of hardship reduce employee distress.

Of course, the point of the holding environment is not to eliminate stress but to regulate and contain stress so that it does not overwhelm. People cannot learn new ways when they are overwhelmed. But eliminating the stress altogether eliminates the impetus for adaptive work. The strategic task is to maintain a level of tension that mobilizes people.

To return to our pressure-cooker metaphor, the cook regulates the pressure of the holding environment by turning the heat up or down, while the relief valve lets off steam to keep the pressure within a safe limit. If the pressure goes beyond the carrying capacity of the vessel, the pressure cooker can blow up. On the other hand, with no heat nothing cooks.

To build trust, we need to know what generates it. Trust in management relationships is a matter of predictability along two dimensions: values and skill. Quite sensibly, employees often expect consistent, predictable values and problem-solving skills from their managers.

How fast leaders can change the expectations of their teams requires three broad determinants:

1. the severity of the adaptive challenge and the stress it generated

2. the resilience of the team and their support system

3. the strength of the holding environment the leader provided for containing and channeling the stress of the challenge

Leaders regulate the level of stress by *pacing and sequencing* the flow of information about the adaptive tasks and by organizing support services that would meet various specific needs. The more the team trusted their leaders abilities the more distress the leader could contain. Thus, a stronger professional relationship would permit the leader to push them faster to confront the adaptive work: its trade-offs, challenges, and uncertainties. *Pacing consisted of gauging the correlation between how much pressure the team could stand and how much pressure the next piece of adaptive work would generate.*

Directing Attention

Attention is the currency of leadership. Getting people to pay attention to tough issues rather than diversions is at the heart of strategy. Because the team looks to the leader for direction, the leader has the power to direct their attention to the questions they thought they needed to face. Furthermore, the leader could diminish the odds that they would distract themselves with peripheral issues. Being at the focal point of attention, of course, can also be dangerous. The leader could be scapegoated by the team, used as a distraction. A team may say, "The problem is not the issue, the problem is that we have the wrong leader."

Of course, the team may be right. The leader may be incompetent. Blaming the leader is not always a form of work avoidance. But for people faced with harsh realities, the strong temptation to scapegoat authority may prevent critical thinking about the causes of the problem or the routes to meeting the challenge.

Given this dynamic, the leaders strategic task is to redirect attention from themselves to the issues that are generating distress. Leaders accomplish this by shifting attention away from the technical issues and directing it toward the hard questions of adaptive change, at a rate the team can tolerate.

Reality Testing

People in positions of authority are expected to provide answers to problems of direction, protection, and order because they are expected to know. They are expected to have or to mobilize their expertise to solve the particular problems at hand.

Authority figures are supposed to be agents of reality testing: they are supposed to investigate problems more objectively than people in the problems' grasp. By virtue of their authority, they are given a special vantage point from which to survey and understand the situation. Yet being responsible for reality testing puts them at risk when their team does not want to know the facts or hear contrary points of view. Often people want to hear good news, and their resilience for hearing bad news will determine the rate at which an authority figure can challenge them with it.

Because authorities are expected to know, they are given *access to information*. Access to information, therefore, does not translate directly into latitude for taking action. An authority may be given wide access to diagnostic data without a clear authorization to communicate it. In leading, one has to communicate with subtlety, taking into account the particularities of the team, their networks of support and the harshness of the news.

Orchestrating Conflicting Perspectives

The leadership of adaptive work usually requires the orchestration of conflict, often multiparty conflict. The leaders authority provided them with two key resources for resolving conflict: the right to mediate and the power to arbitrate.

Choosing the Decision-making Process

Authorities commonly have the power to choose the decision-making process. In essence, they must decide on the presence and relevance of conflict, and whether and how to unleash it. Deciding which process to use—autocratic, consultative, participative, or consensual—requires judgment based on several factors. We have

begun to introduce three of these factors already: the type of problem, the resilience of the business system, and the severity of the problem. To these we should add a fourth: the time frame for taking action. The first factor is relatively straightforward. In technical situations, where the authority has the expertise to define and solve the problem, people generally opt for autocratic or consultative decision-making. Anything else makes little sense, unless one is using a technical situation for training purposes. Otherwise, let the experts do their job.

Adaptive situations, however, tend to demand a more participative mode of operating to shift responsibility to the primary stakeholders. Because the problem lies largely in their attitudes, values, habits, or current relationships, the problem-solving has to take place in their hearts and minds. One produces progress on adaptive problems by working the conflicts within and between the parties. Yet when faced with an adaptive challenge, an authority might still choose a more autocratic mode as a result of other factors.

First, the organization may have too little resilience to bear the stresses of adaptive work. Giving the work back to people may overwhelm them and run counter to prevailing norms. Low adaptive capacity may derive from lack of experience in conflict resolution, absence of shared orienting values, reluctance to endure short-term pain to obtain long-term benefit, or feeble bonds of identity and trust among the parties. There may be no familiarity with shared responsibility for common problems, no tradition of teamwork. The strategic challenge would be to use autocratic action to begin developing adaptive capacity. For example, an executive might change the performance appraisal system to reward experimentation and teamwork rather than individual success alone.

Second, even in a highly resilient system, an authority may opt for autocratic action when confronted with an adaptive challenge so severe that it generates stress likely to overwhelm the business. A participative process might further intensify friction among competing factions. In that case, authorities will have to bear more of the weight for defining and solving problems, even if their solutions will knowingly require a large degree of midcourse correction down the road. Foremost among priorities, the authority will have to reduce the level of disequilibrium, often by autocratic behavior, to bring the distress down into the range in which the factions in the business can begin working productively on the issues. For example, Franklin Roosevelt took hurried and autocratic action in 1933, and did so because calming the nation meant as much to the cause of economic recovery as any programmatic experiment."

Third, in a crisis situation, there may not be enough time to engage in a more participative process. A leader may have to take action knowing that he is guessing and will need to correct for it later. Roosevelt illustrates this as well. He immediately declared a bank holiday upon taking office, closing the nation's banks and stopping the widespread run that was driving many of them into bankruptcy. Autocratic action broke the momentum of the run and created time for a more deliberative process to develop a long-term bank policy.

These three factors can be distilled into the following rule of thumb: *One becomes more autocratic when the issue is likely to overwhelm the current resilience of the group given the time available for decision.*

Chapter 6 - On a Razor's Edge

In spite of the resources that come with it, authority is also a strait jacket. Power is received in the promise of fulfilling expectations—people in management, we insist, must provide direction, protection, and order. These expectations often make good sense. In technical situations, adequate preparations for the current problem have been made already. Procedures, lines of authority, role placements, and norms of operation have been established. Managers have a sufficiently clear idea about what needs to be done and how to go about doing it. Creativity and ingenuity may be needed, but only to devise variations on known themes, not new themes altogether.

Our expectations of management become counterproductive when our organizations

Table 2 - Leadership with Authority in Adaptive Situations

Business Function	Situational Type	
	Technical	**Adaptive**
Direction	Authority provides problem definition and solution	Authority identifies the adaptive challenge, provides diagnosis of condition, and produces questions about problem definitions and solutions
Protection	Authority protects from external threat	Authority discloses external threat
Role orientation	Authority orients	Authority disorients current roles, or resists pressure to orient people in new roles too quickly
Controlling conflict	Authority restores order	Authority exposes conflict, or lets it emerge
Norm maintenance	Authority maintains norms	Authority challenges norms, or allows them to be challenged

face an adaptive challenge—when the application of known methods and procedures will not suffice. We continue to expect our managers to restore equilibrium with dispatch. If they do not act quickly to reduce our feelings of urgency, we bring them down.

We sometimes call these situations "crises in leadership" which is symptomatic of the problem of habitually blaming management. Stymied by our expectation that management should provide, in adaptive situations, what they can and do provide routinely, we blame them for the persistence of frustrating problems that demand our

own adaptive work. And so, predictably, our management supplies us with fake remedies and diversions. We ask for it. If they want to maintain the authorization we give them, they have to deliver, or provide promises of deliverance. When we discover that our managers have failed, too frequently we expiate our failures by scapegoating them and looking for someone with fresh promises.

When managers do provide the quick fixes we repeatedly demand, they may be setting a course for crisis, both for themselves and their people. Maybe the storm that's brewing will hit on someone else's watch, and they will escape unscathed; maybe not. Many heads of American businesses went the same route during the last decade by failing to mobilize adaptive responses to foreign competition.

Exercising leadership from a position of authority in adaptive situations means going against the grain. Rather than fulfilling the expectation for answers, one provides questions; rather than protecting people from outside threat, one lets people feel the threat in order to stimulate adaptation; instead of orienting people to their current roles, one disorients people so that new role relationships develop; rather than quelling conflict, one generates it; instead of maintaining norms, one challenges them.

Of course, real life is fluid. A manager, even in adaptive situations, will have to act differently to fulfill each of these business functions depending on several factors, as just mentioned: the severity of the problem, the resilience of the business system, the ripeness of the issue, and time. For example, in an organization one may have to act firmly to maintain norms and restore clear role assignments, while challenging people with questions and raising conflict about direction. But to make tactical decisions to move between technical and adaptive modes along each of these five dimensions, one first needs a clear conception of the differences. Table 2 outlines the shifts that adaptive situations require of managers.

In adaptive situations, fulfilling the business functions of management requires walking a razor's edge. Challenge people too fast, and they will push the manager over for failing their expectations for stability. But challenge people too slowly, and they will throw him down when they discover that no progress has been made. Ultimately, they will blame him for lack of progress. To stay balanced on the edge, one needs a strategic understanding of the specific tools and constraints that come with one's authority.

Yet in either case, a management figure cuts his feet. When he is the focus of hopes and pains that are beyond his magic, or any magic, some people are bound to attack,

at least in words. Even the most agile cannot dodge these attacks completely, nor shield themselves, mentally and physically, from an assortment of wounds.

Leadership is a razor's edge because one has to oversee a sustained period of business disequilibrium during which people confront the contradictions in their lives and adjust their values and behavior to accommodate new realities. We have begun to explore the resources that management brings to directing this process. These tools can be organized according to five strategic principles of leadership:

1. *Identify the adaptive challenge*. Diagnose the situation in light of the values at stake, and unbundle the issues that come with it.

2. *Keep the level of distress within a tolerable range for doing adaptive work*. To use the pressure cooker analogy, keep the heat up without blowing up the vessel.

3. *Focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions*. Identify which issues can currently engage attention; and while directing attention to them, counteract work avoidance mechanisms like denial, scapegoating, externalizing the enemy, pretending the problem is technical, or attacking individuals rather than issues.

4. *Give the work back to people, but at a rate they can stand*. Place and develop responsibility by putting the pressure on the people with the problem.

5. *Protect voices of leadership without authority*. Give cover to those who raise hard questions and generate distress—people who point to the internal contradictions of the business. These individuals often will have latitude to provoke rethinking that authorities do not have.

I have suggested that authority, formal and informal, is a key component of the holding environment—the containing vessel—for the stresses of change. In the short run, people in authority must regulate the stresses directly. They have to work within the vessel's current carrying capacity. In the medium term, the authority figure can reinforce their contribution to the holding environment by strengthening their own authority relationships within the company, and thus increase the company's resilience during their tenure.

For the long term, the vessel can be given enduring resilience so that it can tolerate the higher pressures that tougher issues generate, somewhat independent of the personal presence and power of the authority figure. People in authority can spur the development of business associations that generate internal networks. They can

create rituals that embody and strengthen shared orienting values. They can model norms of collaboration, responsibility-taking, and effective conflict resolution. They can authorize broadly. And they can promote an ethos of learning and creativity. Over time, a business can become familiar with adaptive work, its pain and its profit.

The primary focus of this book is on the short-run task of making progress on an adaptive challenge. The long-term task of leadership—developing adaptive capacity—is largely beyond our current scope, although to some extent the long term is served by accumulating progress and capturing lessons from individual successes. In focusing on immediate problems, a person intent on leading must ask four practical and related questions:

1. How can a leader identify an adaptive challenge

2. Keep attention focused on the ripening issue

3. Regulate stress to keep it within a productive range

4. Take action to promote business learning so that a new equilibrium is reached

Chapter 7 - Falling Off the Edge

When Pacing the Work Becomes Work Avoidance

There may be several good reasons to avoid or delay the distress, conflict, and learning required to do adaptive work. First, if the issue does not represent an immediate threat, delay may permit giving priority to more important issues. Second, if the challenge overwhelms the businesses ability to adapt, delay may not only reduce destructive disequilibrium but may also provide time to strengthen the businesses problem-solving abilities.

Placing Oneself

Any authority figure must decide where to place themselves in relation to an issue. In general, they have three strategic options:

1. Circumvention, with the risk of backing into a potential crisis

2. Frontal challenge—getting out in front and becoming the "bearer of bad tidings" by introducing the crisis

3. Riding the wave—staying just in front of the crisis, anticipating the wave and trying to direct its power as it breaks

Chapter 8 - Creative Deviance on the Frontline

We see leadership too rarely exercised from high office, and the constraints that come with authority go far to explain why. The scarcity of leadership from people in authority, however, makes it all the more critical to the adaptive successes of a business where leadership can be exercised by people without authority. These people—perceived as entrepreneurs or deviants, organizers and troublemakers—provide the capacity within the system to see through the blind spots of the dominant viewpoint.

Because we are not used to distinguishing between leadership and authority, the idea of leadership without authority is new and perplexing.

The question, however, remains, can someone exercise leadership without any authority, formal or informal? I think the answer is yes, and in several ways. In segments of the larger business that these leaders influence, they lack both kinds of authority. In a sense, they lead across two boundaries: the boundary of their formal organization and the boundary defined by the wider network of people with whom they have gained informal authority (trust, respect, moral persuasion).

In fact, on a daily basis, many people go beyond both their job description and the informal expectations they carry within their organization and do what they are not authorized to do. At a minimum, these people exercise leadership momentarily by impressing upon a group, sometimes by powerfully articulating an idea that strikes a resonant chord, the need to pay attention to a missing point of view. An engineering assistant will speak up at a meeting even though she has no authority to do so. Or someone will run an unauthorized experiment and later announce the results.

Over time, a person who begins without authority or who leads beyond whatever authority they may have, constructs, strengthens, and sometimes broadens their base of informal authority in order to get more leverage. They may find that an initial, rebellious leadership action puts them in an informal authority position that requires trust, respect, and moral force in order to sustain progress. An emerging leader may need a base from which to speak to hard issues without being ignored or cast out. Furthermore, to involve the relevant departments in the company, they may need people across departments to believe that they represent something significant, that they embody a perspective that merits attention. When that happens, they have to

respect both the resources and constraints that come with authority, formally from their own group, and informally from beyond. Just as leading with authority requires protecting voices of dissent, a leader without authority will have to "take counsel" from their adversaries, incorporating in their strategy whatever wisdom of theirs connects to their central thesis.

As they seek informal authority from those across company or departmental boundaries, they have to place their cause in the context of the values of their opposition. In addition, they may have to learn from their antagonists in order to correct for the possible narrowness of their own views. They are not just teaching; they are being taught.

In order to strengthen bonds of trust to bolster their formal authority and hold people's attention, people who begin without any authority often have to place their contributions within an on-going tradition or organization that provides a vessel of trust to hold the distress they generate. Since they have less leverage to shape the holding environment, they must make use of the vessel that is there.

The Benefits of Leading Without Authority

Leadership, as used here, means engaging people to make progress on the adaptive problems they face. Because making progress on adaptive problems requires learning, the task of leadership consists of choreographing and directing learning processes within their company. Progress often demands new ideas and innovation. As well, it often demands changes in people's attitudes and behaviors. Adaptive work consists of the process of discovering and making those changes. Leadership, with or without authority, requires an educative strategy.

Senior authority generally includes the power to manage the holding environment, direct attention, gather and influence the flow of information, frame the terms of debate, distribute responsibility, regulate conflict and distress, and structure decision processes. Yet the constraints of authority suggest that there may also be advantages to leading without it:

- The absence of authority enables one to deviate from the norms of authoritative decision-making. Instead of providing answers that soothe, one can more readily raise questions that disturb. One does not have to keep the ship on an even keel. One has more latitude for creative deviance.

- Leading without or beyond one's authority permits focusing hard on a single issue. One does not have to contend so fully with meeting the multiple expectations of multiple departments and providing the holding environment for everybody. One can have an issue focus.

- Operating with little or no authority places one closer to the detailed experiences of some of the stakeholders in the situation. One may lose the larger perspective but gain the fine grain of people's hopes, pains, values, habits, and history. One has frontline information.

Establishing the Norm of Leadership Without Authority

When people gain informal authority from some in the company, it was not a precondition for leading but a product of leading. Though providing tools, the authority gained also acted as a constraint. In turn, the constraints served both as a limit and as a prod toward creativity.

Distinguishing leadership and authority is more than an analytic and strategic tool. It is also a means to describe the personal experience of leading. As we often experience it in real-time, leadership means taking responsibility for hard problems beyond anyone's expectations. Ironically, many people wait until they gain authority, formal or informal, to begin leading. They see authority as a prerequisite. Yet those who do lead usually feel that they are taking action beyond whatever authority they have.

Chapter 9 - Modulating the Provocation

The principles of leadership that we have discussed—identifying the adaptive challenge, keeping distress within a productive range, directing attention to ripening issues and not diversions, giving the work back to the people, and protecting voices of leadership in the company—apply to leaders with or without authority. However, because the benefits and constraints differ, those who lead without authority must adopt strategies and tactics that are at once more bold and subtle.

First, without authority, one has very little control over the holding environment. One can shape the stimulus, but one cannot manage the response: one cannot institute an organizing structure, pick a temporizing side issue, secure a new norm, or provide a calming presence. A leader without authority can spark debate, but they cannot orchestrate it. Without authority, a leader must regulate distress by modulating the provocation.

Furthermore, without authority one may have a frontline feel for a single issue in depth, but not as broad a sense of the multiplicity of challenges facing the community which affect its stance on any particular issue. This may render the leader without authority less aware of the other crucial problems confronting the business and the ripeness of their issue in relation to other pressing issues that may need to take priority.

In monitoring levels of distress, any leader has to find indicators for knowing both when to promote an unripe issue and whether the stress generated by an intervention falls within the productive range for the business system at that time. Different organizations will have different sources and levels of resilience, and each business system requires serious analysis. But as a general rule, the leader operating without authority can read the authority figure as a barometer of issue ripeness and systemic stress because business systems generally charge authority figures with the particular job of resolving ripe issues.

Second, in attracting and directing attention to an issue, a leader without authority has to take into account the special vulnerability of becoming a lightning rod. Rather than orchestrating the debate among competing factions, one becomes a faction readily targeted for attack. Of course, authority figures frequently get attacked as well, but the resources at their disposal for deflecting attention and letting others take the heat are often unavailable to leaders without authority.

Third, just as people look to authority to solve problems, leaders without authority commonly make the mistake of assuming that only authority figures have the power to affect change. As a result, there is a strong temptation to identify the authority figure as the audience for action: "If only we could bring him around, everyone else would move in the right direction." In general, however, people in power change their ways when the sources of their authority change the expectations. Their behavior is an expression of the executive team that authorizes them. Thus, a strategy that mobilizes the stakeholders in the business may be quite a bit more likely to get work done than the strategy of "challenging authority."

Reading the Authority Figure as a Barometer

A leader needs indicators. But because they are inclined to focus on a single issue, one who leads beyond his authority will often have little information about the other sources of stress in the business. They may challenge the business too far and too fast and invite their own suppression. They have to understand, therefore, the response patterns of the business into which they intervene. Inevitably, they gain this understanding through trial and error in action, by analyzing the sources of their wounds as they get them. But are there other, better ways for leaders operating beyond their authority to know when they have gone too far?

One barometer of systemic distress is the behavior of people in senior positions of the business. Connected into the many issues facing the whole business, senior managers tend to respond as a sum of the forces at play. They are called into action as the stressed people gaze upward for direction, protection, and order. They often react to these appeals by taking action to restore equilibrium, and that reaction indicates when the business has reached the limits of its tolerance—at least in the view of the managers.

Of course, in the same positions of management, different people will act in different ways. They will each have their own distinct, personal styles; and while some will encourage their constituents to confront change, others will cling to old realities. But if managers do not always lead, they almost always act at some point to reduce stress, which they are adept at perceiving. In general, managers are exquisitely sensitive to the fears and expectations of those who authorize them, as they must be in order to keep their jobs. Managers are at least partly reactive: they may be puppets as much as

puppeteers, and, as puppets, may provide useful cues to those who lead without authority.

Becoming a Lightning Rod of Attention

Attention has its costs and benefits. Authority figures, like silverback gorillas in mountain forests, draw attention by virtue of their height and position. For them, being the center of attention is not necessarily dangerous. Groups are inclined to protect their authority figures for quite a while, out of habit as much as fear of the disorientation that might follow their dismissal. It takes a prolonged period of disappointment for a community to turn on its authorities.

But without authority, a leader stands relatively naked before the people, often appearing to be not only the identifier of a distressing problem but also the source of the distress itself. All eyes turn to the person who raises disturbing questions, and some of those eyes are hostile. Groups can avoid problems, at least temporarily, by shooting the messenger. Thus, although attention is a major tool of leadership, it also makes one a likely target of attack. If a person lacks authority, people take issue not only with the substance of his point of view but with his right to raise it. Indeed, they often attack the right and ignore the substance.

The mechanisms for killing the messenger are varied and subtle depending on the culture, the organization, and the problem. Yet attacks often follow a general pattern:

- First, a person or faction raises a difficult question that generates some distress by pointing to a potential conflict over values and purpose, norms and organizational relationships, power, or strategy.

- Second, in response, the disquieted members of the business will turn their gaze to a senior authority figure, expecting him to restore equilibrium.

- Finally, the authority figure, pressed by these expectations to reduce distress, feeling emotionally compelled to act, neutralizes or silences the "problem" faction, directly or indirectly. These moves happen fast. The authority figure may not even be aware of the way others have gotten him to perform the role of executioner on their behalf.

A major challenge of leadership, therefore, is to draw attention and then deflect it to the questions and issues that need to be faced. To do so, *one has to provide a context for action*. The audience needs to readily comprehend the purpose of unusual or

deviant behavior so that it focuses less on the behavior itself, or the person, and more on its meaning.

Mobilizing the Stakeholders

Leaders without authority—deviants, as they often are perceived—have to think hard about where they direct their challenge. Indeed, the better the quality of their argument, the more likely it will touch on an internal contradiction in the community and thus arouse or aggravate conflicts, which then call forth authoritative efforts to restore order. Hence, a leader who pushes the authority figure in an attempt to solve important problems should expect the authority figure to strike back, not necessarily from personal motivations but from the businesses pressure on them to maintain equilibrium.

Authority's rejection of challenge represents a complex dynamic. A leader without authority can easily oversimplify the complexity of the situation by interpreting the rejection as an indication of a flawed presentation, an inadequate argument, or the personal bias of the authority figure. Certainly, there may be some truth here and important lessons to draw in devising the next move. However, the rejection generally originates with the businesses stakeholders that resist a disturbance of their equilibrium. Indeed, the authority may be personally sympathetic but may see no options, given the expectations they carry. Thus, returning to the authority figure with an "improved version" of the presentation that takes his biases into account often leads nowhere.

Any challenge must mobilize the real stakeholders, not just their proxies. One begins with four questions:

1. Who are the primary stakeholders in this issue, and how might they need to change their ways?

2. What expectations do they have of their authority?

3. How could the authority figure begin to reshape those expectations to provide himself with latitude to take action?

4. What could one do, leading without authority, to reshape those expectations to pave his way?

Pacing the Work

Clearly, challenging people to face harsh realities can be brutal work. The pains of change deserve respect. People can only sustain so much loss at any one time. Leadership demands respect for people's basic need for direction, protection, and order in times of distress. Leadership requires compassion for the distress of adaptive change, both because compassion is its own virtue, and because it can improve one's sense of timing. Knowing how hard to push and when to let up are central to leadership.

There are numerous methods to pace the work, and we have already seen them in operation in various contexts. Strengthening the holding environment indirectly affects pacing because it increases the businesses tolerance for stress. Thus, creating a trustworthy set of relationships, both between authority figures and stakeholders and among employees, increases people's adaptive capacity. Deciding what issues to focus attention on, how to frame them, and how to manage the flow of information are all direct mechanisms of pacing. Finally, choosing the decision-making process provides a means to pace the work because it determines both the breadth of participation and where the weight of responsibility falls. An autocratic or consultative process gives less of the burden to people than a delegative or consensual mode of operating.

Thus, the questions one would ask in pacing the work derive from familiar concerns:

1. How stressful is the question or problem being raised? How much loss does it involve?

2. How resilient are the people being challenged? Are they accustomed to learning or are they likely to reach quickly for an avoidance mechanism with which to restore equilibrium?

3. How strong are the bonds of authority that give one the power to hold people's attention to brutally hard questions?

In each business, people will have different tolerances for the stresses of adaptive work and different situations will generate different levels and symptoms of distress. Leadership requires knowing the business system well enough to predict how stressful the challenge facing it will be and how capably it will absorb the stress. If the

organization has lived in a stable environment for thirty years, with a stable authority structure headed by the same person, an event like a transition in authority may provoke a moderate to high level of stress. If the transition is sudden, then the stress will be greater. If the transition has been long in coming and well prepared for, then the stress will be lower.

Leadership operates within particular worlds and requires an experimental mindset—the willingness to work by trial and error—where the businesses reactions at each stage provide the basis for planning future actions. Research about each particular context is crucially important, but no analysis or catalogue can substitute for a leader's improvisational skills. Thus, a leader stays alive not by "playing it safe" but by taking deliberate risks based on their ongoing assessment of the territory, knowing that corrective action will almost always be necessary. They take the risk of challenging people, directly or indirectly, slow or fast, soft or hard, guided by their comprehension of and sensitivity to the changes people have to make in their lives as they take account of the questions they raise.

In pacing the work, a leader has to take account of the strength of their hold on people's attention and commitments. If they have authority in the business system, then they have some leverage over the holding environment. They can reduce the distress by being an authoritative and hopeful presence, providing clear direction and protection, orienting people with the reasons for undergoing hardship, adding internal structures, controlling conflict, and framing the debate in less challenging ways. Conversely, leaders elevate distress when they put pressure on stakeholders, unleashes conflict, includes provocative voices, and frames the debate more starkly. Thus, a leader must monitor repeatedly his own informal authority in the business as it fluctuates. With a strong hold, they can generate more productive stress and move faster. With a weak hold, they have to move more slowly.

In contrast, when a leader has little or no authority in the business, they can only control the severity of their challenge. They cannot contain the distress by structuring the process, corralling stakeholders into a meeting, or issuing calming statements.

Unlike rote learning situations in which the answer is supplied, though paced, by the teacher, adaptive learning situations demand that people discover, invent, and take responsibility. Leadership is a special sort of educating in which the teacher raises problems, questions, options, interpretations, and perspectives, often without answers, gauging all the while when to push through and when to hold steady.

As a model of leadership, this neglects human truths. The learning required to accomplish adaptive work is not simply conceptual. Logical argument is rarely sufficient. Sifting through the old and fashioning something new takes emotional work. To move at the pace of logic alone, people would need an unusually high level of rationality and intellectual freedom from habit, tradition, and pride. The leader as educator has to engage the parties in a process of inquiry that accounts for their fear or pain, if learning is to be produced.

The Temptation of Martyrdom

As we have seen, businesses generate charismatic authority during times of distress when people search desperately for someone to relieve their pains. A powerful authorizing relationship, often left informal, results when an individual steps forward with great promise. The charisma derives not only from the person's skills, personality, and devotion but also from the businesses investment.

The long-term challenge of leadership is to develop people's adaptive capacity for tackling an ongoing stream of hard problems. The point is not to foster dependency but to counteract the inappropriate dependency on authority that distress tends to produce in adaptive situations. Yet in the actual exercise of leadership, dependency must wax and wane. People need to rest the weight of their burden on someone's shoulders. How many of us manage without the hope of being protected or rescued in times of distress? Leadership requires carrying that burden, containing the distress, for a time, sometimes a long time, while people adapt sufficiently to take it back.

Charisma can provide a very strong hold over people's attention while they undergo a period of sustained distress, mobilization, creativity, and change.

The pitfall of charisma, however, is unresolved dependency. People can fail to move on, to discover their own "magic," their own capacity for responsibility. They may not grow to realize their capability for self management. Rather than establish new norms, understandings, and authorizing structures, they may focus their sights and energies on the single charismatic individual. No one else can compare to him. The charismatic and his people develop a relationship in which promises insulate against the distress of facing problems. For the charismatic, it feels good to be idealized. For his people, it feels good to have someone who assures deliverance in the long-run, and in the short-run provides direction, protection, orientation, the control of conflict, and clear norms.

Sometimes, for a long period of time, these charismatic bonds may be all that hold a business together in its effort to face major change. If no charismatic leader emerges, people may be truly bereft and lost in a sea of forces and pressures beyond their adaptive capacity. If someone does emerge, people may understandably attribute the new charismatic leaders rise to "divine grace." Indeed, if they exercise leadership, they may well save the business and help it to renew itself. The new charismatic leader gains their peoples confidence by:

1. Binding people together by powerfully articulating their values, hopes, and pains

2. Weave these hopes into some image of the future

3. Provide energy, strategy, and faith that the vision can be realized

In mobilizing their employees, their confidence and strength fosters a necessary dependency that only over time can be dismantled. Yet to sustain adaptive change, the business has eventually to discover and develop its own capacity for doing work, including the capacity to authorize other employees without expecting magic.

Chapter 11 - The Personal Challenge

Why is it lonely on the point? Because those who lead take responsibility for the holding environment of their business. The myth of leadership is the myth of the lone warrior: the solitary individual whose heroism and brilliance enable them to lead the way. This notion reinforces the isolation. From the perspective of the individual who leads with authority, people confer power in exchange for being relieved of problems. If the leader shows reluctance or weakness in shouldering the burden, they will often feel betrayed, and the leader will be diminished in their eyes.

The strategic challenge is to give the work back to people without abandoning them. Overload them and they will avoid learning. Under-load them and they will grow too dependent, or complacent. Thus, a leader has to bear the weight of problems, for a time. That is a very real burden. Unloading that weight on people unprepared to respond would be negligent. Shouldering the pains and uncertainties of an institution particularly in times of distress comes with the job of a leader. It can only be avoided at the businesses peril.

Those who lead without authority also must bear a heavy weight. While authority figures become repositories of hope by virtue of taking responsibility, people who lead without authority shoulder what they perceive as the needs and opportunities of a business because they take personal responsibility for framing hard questions about purposes and possibilities. Identifying themselves with those questions, they often invest their own love, pain, and outrage. Their lives would be less stressful if they did not care. Then, as they build a team and become known, they gain informal and sometimes formal authority and begin to carry other people's aspirations and passions as well. As they begin to disturb people beyond the bounds of their sympathetic teams, they generate stress in the larger system. They have to stomach the repercussions of that distress at the same time that they provoke it. They cannot expect to be properly valued by the authorities in the business they challenge, at least not in the short-term.

To lead and yet sustain the personal stresses that come with leading requires inner discipline. So far, we have focused on a strategy for managing the business environment. In concluding our study, we briefly address the equally critical capacity to manage oneself. What follows, then, are seven practical suggestions for bearing the responsibility that comes with leadership without losing one's effectiveness or collapsing under the strain. They are:

1. get on the balcony

2. distinguish self from role

3. externalize the conflict

4. use partners

5. listen, using oneself as data

6. find a sanctuary

7. preserve a sense of purpose

Getting on the Balcony

Leadership is both active and reflective. One has to alternate between participating and observing. Walt Whitman described it as being "both in and out of the game." For example, Magic Johnson's greatness in leading his basketball team came in part from his ability to play hard while keeping in mind the whole game situation, as if he stood in the stands. Bobby Orr played hockey in the same way.

Although the principle may be easy to grasp, the practice is not. Rather than maintain perspective on the events that surround and involve us, we often get swept up by them. Consider the experience of dancing on a dance floor in contrast with standing on a balcony and watching other people dance. Engaged in the dance, it is nearly impossible to get a sense of the patterns made by everyone on the floor. Motion makes observation difficult. Indeed, we often get carried away by the dance. Our attention is captured by the music, our partner, and the need to sense the dancing space of others nearby to stay off their toes. To discern the larger patterns on the dance floor—to see who is dancing with whom, in what groups, in what location, and who is sitting out which kind of dance—we have to stop moving and get to the balcony.

How can one get to the balcony, particularly in an unfamiliar situation, when fast music is sweeping everyone up in the dance? The following diagnostic framework summarizes the reasoning behind the strategic principles of leadership we have explored: identifying the adaptive challenge, regulating distress, directing disciplined attention to the issues, and giving the work back to people.

Identifying the Adaptive Challenge. As we have seen, an adaptive challenge consists of a gap between the shared values people hold and the reality of their lives, or of a conflict among people in a business over values or strategy. In both cases, these

internal contradictions are likely to generate distress. Thus, we can offer the diagnostic principle that distress itself, if it cannot be alleviated through the application of technical know-how and existing procedures, provides a clue to what the adaptive challenge is.   Although some people might suggest that distress may in some situations be more a matter of perception than of reality, the testing and changing of perceptions is often at the heart of adaptive change.

   The problem causing the distress frequently will not be on the surface. Although the superficial conflict may be over procedures, power, schedule, structure, and lines of authority, these seemingly technical issues often act as proxies for underlying conflicts in ways of life.

   This idea reverses the more common notion that substantive issues are really proxies for conflicts over power. Frequently, when we see two people butting heads, we interpret the conflict as a personal power struggle and lose sight of the perspectives each represents on the issues.   Although gaining advantage in a power conflict may motivate some individuals to take particular stands on an issue, from a systems view, a person's power interests can only be realized if they represents the sentiments and perspectives of a faction in the business. As a diagnostic matter, that an individual sees personal advantage in espousing a particular substantive point of view indicates support in the business for that point of view. Thus, diagnosing a conflict in terms primarily of power stakes among individuals will miss the underlying issue conflict among factions in the business.

   Undoubtedly, a person's individual personality shapes enormously their actions. Yet, as with power motives, individual actions themselves are shaped powerfully by the business context and its pressures and incentives. Indeed, personality diagnoses in general have little practical value unless one also identifies the issues that person represents in his organizational role and the forces acting on him as a result. Jumping to personality explanations, like jumping to power explanations, will often overlook the systemic causes of the problem.

   Building on the principle that people represent issues, that interpersonal conflicts among people with formal or informal authority represent issue conflicts among their people, we can further propose that problems in working effectively within a team will often mirror the problems the business aims to solve. Internal rivalries, misunderstandings, and patterns of disrespect will mimic patterns in the business environment.

This mirroring, inexact as it might be, provides diagnostic clues for comprehending the dysfunctions and impediments in the business that the organization needs to address. Indeed, if one can get on the balcony instead of getting caught up in recreating the problem internally, one can seize the opportunity of using the organization as a case in point—a laboratory—for identifying challenges and inventing options for taking action outside, which was the organization's original aim.

Regulating Distress. We have explored the principle that the distress generated by an adaptive challenge must be contained within limits in order to produce progress, and I have described the holding environment as a vessel within which people facing adaptive work can accomplish the necessary learning. The containing vessel is made up of various sorts of glue: an authority structure, shared purposes, common identifications, professional associations, and trustworthy institutions. Thus, of vital importance in mobilizing people to meet an adaptive challenge is the job of regulating, to the extent possible, the level of disequilibrium. From an authority position, this will mean using the powers and influence given formally and accrued informally to strategically frame the issues, orchestrate conflict, develop structures and processes, provide a measure of orientation and protection, and maintain those norms that should endure. In short, one has to pace the work. Operating without authority, one has to gauge when and how hard to press people to pay attention to issues they might otherwise avoid.

Every community and culture will have its own particular sources of cohesion and limits of tolerance for productive distress, and each will have its own distinctive methods of modulating distress and restoring equilibrium. Thus, to keep people within a productive discomfort zone, one clearly has to know the local symptoms of distress and the local habits of response. One must know the local history of problem-solving.

To identify the tolerable range of distress and discern how to regulate its level within a particular setting, we add a further set of questions to the framework:

6. What are the characteristic responses of the business to disequilibrium—to confusion about future direction, the presence of an external threat, disorientation in regard to role relationships, internal conflict, or the breaking up of norms?

7. When in the past has the distress appeared to reach a breaking point—where the business system began to engage in self-destructive behavior?

8. What actions by senior managers traditionally have restored equilibrium? What mechanisms to regulate distress are currently within my control, given my authority?

Directing Disciplined Attention to the Issues. We have examined the principle that business systems frequently try to restore equilibrium by reducing the overt manifestations of their internal tensions. Initially, they will try to apply their current problem-solving methods. When these do not seem to work and the disequilibrium persists, the system often will use work avoidance mechanisms to reduce generalized distress. The work avoidance, if effective, diverts attention enough to make people forget temporarily about the real problems that gave rise to the disequilibrium in the first place.

Thus, a key diagnostic task from the balcony is to identify patterns of work avoidance so that, when resuming action, one can redirect attention to the issues. In so doing, it is useful to assume that people's efforts to restore equilibrium at the cost of facing hard problems are often not conscious or deliberate. Often, they are convenient misdiagnoses of the situation. For example, when people say to themselves, "If only we had the right leader our problems would be solved," they are not intending to avoid work. They often believe that statement because it fits their way of understanding the cause of problems.

Moreover, if we propose that work avoidance and destructive conflict are symptoms of people contending, however ineffectively, with an adaptive challenge, then the task is both to counteract these behaviors at the same time that one affirms the significance of the issues and stakes. For example, instead of saying, "We are avoiding the issues here," which would annoy people to no end, one might say, "We are working, perhaps too indirectly, on a difficult issue; let's address it more directly," which affirms the effort.

If work avoidance is symptomatic of an adaptive challenge, then work avoidance patterns can provide clues to the work issue itself. When a leopard moves through the forest after a rain, a biologist can spot its trail more easily than she can spot the leopard. Similarly, when work avoidance takes the form of scapegoating, for example, the faction or person being scapegoated provides clues about the work issue. The question is: What distressing perspective does the faction or person represent in the organization?

Furthermore, we have proposed that authority figures are barometers, that they too provide clues to the issues. If one can use them as data, or use one's own reactions to

situations as data when in the authority position, then the actions of an authority figure, even in work avoidance, may indicate the intensity and the nature of the issues causing distress. For example, in a meeting one might ask oneself what issue was on the table when the authority figure stepped in and stifled someone's report, or halted the conversation by calling a break before the set time?

Just as every business and culture will have its own distinctive responses to distress, so also will it have its own patterns of work avoidance. Some will be more inclined to externalize the enemy, while others may tend to perpetually reorganize in the hope of a structural fix, blame authority, scapegoat, or the like. Obviously, one has to become familiar with the specific patterns by which a business sacrifices problem-solving to restore equilibrium.

The dance within organizations is made more complex because there are usually several adaptive problems at once challenging the system. It is as if several bands were playing dance music at the same time. Consequently, another key diagnostic task is to distinguish ripe from unripe issues. Each requires a different strategy. Ripe issues have already galvanized attention and generated urgency in a critical proportion of the community. The challenge then is to keep attention focused on the dimensions of the problem requiring adaptive work by the interested parties. An unripe issue, however, usually captures the attention of a small minority in the community, and the task for them is to draw attention to the issue, often in the face of resistance by the larger community having other concerns. We have seen the process of ripening play out in the case of voting rights.

In order to identify the issues that need attending and to counteract patterns of work avoidance, we ask the following additional questions:

9. What are the work and work avoidance patterns particular to this business?

10. What does the current pattern of work avoidance indicate about the nature and difficulty of the present adaptive challenge and the various work issues that it comprises?

11. What clues do the authority figures provide?

12. Which of these issues are ripe? What are the options for tackling the ripe issues, or for ripening an issue that has not fastened in people's minds?

Giving the Work Back to People. I have proposed that a business can fail to adapt when its people look too hard to their managers to meet challenges that require

changes in their own ways. Indeed, the higher and more persistent distresses accompanying adaptive problems accentuate the dependency dynamic. And authority figures often respond by employing or colluding with work avoidances that shield people from responsibility and pain.

Thus, what one observes from the balcony has to take into account one's own placement on the dance floor in terms of formal and informal authority. One has to assess the pressures that can unwittingly dominate one's behavior. Because leadership will often require cutting against the grain of expectations, one has to become sharply aware of what those expectations are in order to set strategy. If one is in a position of authority, what are the likely seductions? If one is operating without or beyond authority, what kinds of diversions might one generate, for example, by engaging in a direct contest with authority figures or when becoming a lightning rod?

We have examined the principle that giving the work back to people frequently takes the form of orchestrating conflict. Adaptive work often requires the engagement of parties with competing interests, and in leading the community of interests one has to comprehend the stakes and potential losses within it. In essence, identifying the issues consists of recognizing the kinds of changes that various people may have to make in order to make joint progress. Developing a strategy to get them to accomplish change, and perhaps realize losses or create mutually beneficial solutions, requires knowing with some intimacy the texture of interests in people's lives.

In order to identify the relevant parties, the nature of their adaptive work, and the pitfalls of shielding them from responsibility, we ask these questions:

13. Changes in whose values, beliefs, or behaviors would allow progress on these issues?

14. What are the losses involved?

15. Given my role, how am I likely to be drawn into work avoidance?

Without undertaking an analysis from the balcony, one becomes all too quickly a subject of the dance floor. Yet, however important the balcony may be, it is not a place to retreat. Diagnosis is meant to enable action. Midcourse assessment enables midcourse correction. In viewing social processes from the balcony, one becomes merely a temporary observer before the next round. In practice, this transition back and forth between analysis and action is no easy task. It involves skills that often do not

come naturally. There are a number of common human impediments to appreciate. What follows is a discussion of some of these skills and impediments.

The Role/Self Distinction

Exercising leadership and bearing personal responsibility requires seeing the difference between oneself and one's role. A person who leads must interpret people's responses to their actions as responses to the role they play and the perspective they represents.

Distinguishing role from self is not a prescription for keeping emotions—values and passions—at a distance and disingenuously playing a role. But it enables an individual not to be misled by his emotions into taking statements and events personally that may have little to do with him.

Externalizing the Conflict

When conflicting criticisms seem to damn whatever one does, the distinction between role and self can be life saving. Making the distinction enables one to externalize the conflict, thereby focusing attention on the issues and giving the conflict back to its rightful owners.

Internalizing the conflict causes serious difficulties. It leads to a misdiagnosis. The issue readily becomes personalized and gets interpreted as a personal problem even when it is not. Furthermore, it produces work avoidance because it allows people to deflect their attention from the issue to the person, and to shift responsibility to him. Moreover, the person taking the heat of a personalized conflict often feels compelled to react with a personal defense, which can perpetuate the dynamic.

Getting a strategic perspective is critical to staying alive longer. But how can one distinguish self from role and externalize the conflict in the midst of the storm, when thrown overboard, threatened by sharks, and about to go under? One needs partners.

Partners

Even if the weight of carrying people's hopes and pains may fall mainly, for a time, on one person's shoulders, leadership cannot be exercised alone. The lone-warrior model of leadership is heroic suicide. Each of us has blind spots that require the vision of others. Each of us has passions that need to be contained by others. Anyone can lose

the capacity to get on the balcony, particularly when the pressures mount. Every person who leads needs help in distinguishing self from role and identifying the underlying issues that generate attack.

Partners come in two general types: the confidant and the ally. The confidant is the person to whom one can cry out and complain. A confidant can provide a holding environment for someone who is busy holding everybody else. People attempting to lead need partners who can put them back together again at the end of the day. These partners, often friends, spouses, lovers, or close colleagues, provide perspective. They help one climb back up to the balcony to understand what has happened. They help ask questions like, "What's going on here? What's the distress about? What can be learned from the mistake? What are the options for corrective action?"

The second general type of partner is an ally. The ally is a partner usually operating across a line of authority or organizational boundary. Although allies will share a value or point of view and will often confide in each other about specific strategic questions, the presence of a boundary will limit the information flowing between them.

Alliances operate in at least three basic ways: across different organizations and, within an organization, from junior authority looking up and from senior authority looking down. Across different organizations, one of the allies may have senior, equivalent, or junior authority, but most significantly the allies have no direct authority over one another. Their alliance is shaped not by the strong forces that affect authority relationships within an organizational unit but by an often more malleable indirect authority relationship defined by each's standing in his own organization and the relationship between their organizations. Clearly, these kinds of alliances are very common in government, between government and political movements and interest groups, and across divisions within large corporations where shared and overlapping tasks require the engagement of people in different places.

Alliances are not necessarily explicit. Leaders often work across an authority or organizational boundary covertly because making an overt alliance might create a diversion from the work at hand.

Forming alliances with various authority figures from a position of little or no authority played a central role in developing strategies.

A leader operating from above needs allies close to the frontline. People there see challenges that senior people cannot see. Furthermore, they may have more latitude for raising hard questions. Moreover, their participation is often necessary to defining

and solving the problem. Not only will they have information and perspectives that need to be taken into account for framing the problem, but the solution will often consist of changes that they must implement.

Clearly, junior allies may not agree with the perspective of senior authority. Even when in open disagreement, however, junior allies can take some of the weight off the senior's back and prevent premature closure on the issues. From a senior position within an organization, backing and protecting deviations in the lower ranks (whether or not one agrees with the deviant position) may keep alive productive conflict. Indeed, one might deploy a maverick junior to a committee for such a purpose.

This is consonant with the principle that those who lead from senior positions must protect voices of leadership without authority. Yet, how can a person in authority recognize these voices? I suggest a counter-intuitive rule of thumb. Because the pressures on authority are to restore equilibrium, one's emotional impulse will often be to squash those in the community who raise disturbing questions. Consequently, an authority should protect those whom he wants to silence. Annoyance is often a signal of opportunity. By restraining himself and examining the potential value of getting people to address the provocative questions being raised, he can look past the person's style. What perspective does the annoying person represent? Deviants may be the senior's best sources of leadership.

Listening: Using Oneself as Data

Not only is the balcony a psychological vantage point from which to observe others, it is also a vantage point from which to observe oneself and the way one listens. To interpret events, a person who leads needs to understand their own ways of processing and distorting what they hear. To sustain the stresses of leadership, they need to know enough about their own biases to compensate for them. If they react automatically to reject advice when it is given in a way that appears condescending, for example, they need to become sufficiently acquainted with that reflex that they can listen and respond flexibly, according to the needs of the situation. Compensation requires the inner discipline to step back and test the accuracy of one's own perceptions and the appropriateness of one's reaction. Listening is a trial-and-error process of making an interpretation, seeing where it falls short, and revising it. To listen, one has to live with doubt.

Learning about the tuning of one's own harp-strings, how one is inclined to resonate more with certain themes than with others, is an ongoing process. Even the most intense programs of self-examination do not provide full self-understanding. More likely, if successful, such a program provides the skills and courage to continue learning over time.

How do people maintain an adequate level of self-examination? Though different people may need different methods, two general principles apply. First, we learn by reflecting on daily actions, successes and failures, of ourselves and others. In particular, we can learn from those habits that repeatedly get us into trouble and from those behaviors that surprise us. They often provide clues to our own peculiar mesh of internal drives and social forces. We can ask ourselves, "What drew me to behave inappropriately in this situation?" Or, "Where did that behavior come from?" Second, we can use partners as a hedge against self-deception. They may be formal partners hired for the purpose, like a consultant, coach, or therapist. More often, they will be informal partners who, when permitted to do the job of debriefing us, can promote reflection because they are the people to whom we ordinarily can talk openly.

In adaptive situations, where improvisation is the norm, listening and intervening go hand in hand. Each action ought to be viewed as an experiment. Improvisation demands ongoing assessment. In practice, a person who leads must intervene and then hold steady, listening for the effects of the intervention. They must move from balcony to dance floor, back and forth and they have to allow for silence. Holding steady gives the system time to react to their intervention. It also gives them time to listen. By listening, they refine their interpretation of events and take corrective action. Based on what they hear, they intervene again. By this approach, interventions are not simply proposed solutions; interventions are ways to test the waters and gather information to refine the strategy.

If they know them self, they can listen by using themselves as an instrument. As a member of the business system, they inevitably resonate with various issues, trends, and themes in the company. They can pretend to be a solo player, but they can never actually become one. By virtue of taking a role, they become subject to business forces and expectations. At best, they can intermittently transcend the influences by getting to the balcony.

Even from the balcony, however, people who lead never really get an objective picture because they never entirely dispense with the filters through which they perceive

events. Nor can they ever be entirely free of the businesses force field. But they can learn about their own filters and biases and factor them into their interpretations. They can then listen to themselves for clues to what may be going on around them. Resonating with the business system, their own thoughts and feelings indicate at once something not only about themselves but also about the environment.

Finding a Sanctuary

Listening to oneself requires a place where one can hear oneself think. Working amidst the cacophony of a multiple-band dance floor, one needs a sanctuary to restore one's sense of purpose, put issues in perspective, and regain courage and heart. When serving as the repository of many conflicting aspirations, a person can lose himself in the role by failing to distinguish his inner voice from the voices that clamor for attention outside. Partners can help greatly, as can a run, a quiet walk, or a prayer to break the spell cast by the frenzy on the floor. We need sanctuaries.

To exercise leadership, one has to expect to get swept up in the music. One has to plan for it and develop scheduled opportunities that anticipate the need to regain perspective. Just as leadership demands a strategy of mobilizing people, it also requires a strategy of deploying and restoring one's own spiritual resources.

Preserving a Sense of Purpose

Leadership oftentimes is a passionate and consuming activity. People need inspiration and drive to step out into a void which only later is recognized as a place of creativity and development. So strong are the emotions of leadership, they can overwhelm the person who has not developed a sufficiently broad sense of purpose. We have analyzed in this study the job of leadership and strategies to surmount its obstacles and sustain its pains. Yet the practice of leadership requires, perhaps first and foremost, a sense of purpose—the capacity to find the values that make risk-taking meaningful. That is where this book began, with an inquiry into the values that orient one who leads.

A sense of purpose is not the same as a clearly defined purpose. A sense of purpose generates defined purposes within any given context by asking these simple questions: What is the opportunity now? What should our purpose be? Organizations and societies are full of well-defined purposes, and these are essential. Defined purposes are the single most important source of orientation in doing both technical and

adaptive work, like a ship's compass heading at sea. But even more precious than any defined purpose is a sense of purpose that can enable one to step back and review, perhaps with doubt, perhaps with delight, the orienting values embedded in any particular mission.

Over time, specific purposes may no longer capture current reality or account for the way values have evolved. For example, the Constitutional value of ensuring domestic tranquility has remained the same over the course of two-hundred years, but programmatic purposes have changed in light of experiences that have clarified the application of this value in light of other precious values.

These changes are perhaps most apparent these days in business, where companies with long histories and well-honed purposes face markets that no longer support them. Many companies are flocking to retreat centers to reformulate their purposes which, having been etched in stone for decades, have lost their vibrancy and relevance. Somehow, in the previous market environment, a sense of purpose was lost, only to be regained from hard experience. Instead of maintaining a spirit of inquiry that, with one eye on the reality of the market and another on the values of the institution, would generate ongoing adaptive change, complacency set in.

Adaptive change becomes a high-risk enterprise, however, when we postpone it so long that a revolution becomes necessary. Companies may die instead.

The cases we have examined here demonstrate how progress can indeed be evolutionary and incremental. The fulcrum, however, is a sense of purpose that keeps people asking the question, particularly in times of plenty, "What's our next adaptive challenge?"

Preserving a sense of purpose helps one take setbacks and failures in stride. Leadership requires the courage to face failures daily. Otherwise, one cannot take corrective action. Moreover, a sense of purpose helps generate the freedom to change venues for leading when, after repeated trial, one sees no options for further action. Sometimes one has to give up entirely on an organizational or political situation. Without the personal freedom to change, however, the loss of a prized and familiar job and direction can lead to disorientation and despair. Often, to avoid the loss, we limit our sights instead and, staying in place, give up leading. The accumulation of wounds narrows our scope. In the short run, a personal equilibrium is restored, but over time a corrosion of spirit can set in as people lose the inspiration that comes from setting their

lives in a larger frame. A sense of purpose provides the ongoing capacity to generate new possibilities.

Leadership takes place every day. It is neither the traits of the few, a rare event, or a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In our world, business, we face adaptive challenges all the time. Every time we face a conflict among competing values, or encounter a gap between our shared values and the way we live, we face the need to learn new ways. When an executive sees a solution to a problem, technical in many respects except that it requires changes in the attitudes and habits of subordinates, the executive faces an educative task. When a subordinate close to the frontline sees a gap between the objectives they are told to implement and the facts they see in light of the organization's purpose, they face the risks and opportunity of leading without authority.

Leadership, seen in this light, requires a learning strategy. A leader has to engage people in facing the challenge, adjusting their values, changing perspectives, and developing new habits of behavior. To an authoritative person who prides themself on their ability to tackle hard problems, this may come as a rude awakening. But it should also ease the burden of having to know the answers and bear the uncertainty. To the person who waits to receive either "the vision" to lead or the coach's call, this may also seem a mixture of good and bad news. The adaptive demands of our businesses require leadership that takes responsibility without waiting for revelation or request. One may lead perhaps with no more than a question in hand.