ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

THINKING POLITICALLY AND MAPPING THE SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

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Adaptive challenges present situations where no known solutions have been established for the problem. Solving adaptive challenges will involve inclusion and participation of various groups of people in the society and organizations. Adaptive challenge in its nature is complex and solving it may require change in the approach which may touch things and values that people in the society hold dear. Understanding organization political relationships is key in ensuring smooth and successful execution of an adaptive work.

In his book on adaptive leadership, Ronald Heifetz used the metaphor of vegetable stew to explain the challenges experienced by people of good will when leading an adaptive change. Making good vegetable stew requires cooking different ingredients enough to give up their original color and taste; else one may end up with a pot of crunchy vegetables. Cooking vegetables too much will make each vegetable lose its distinctive qualities.

Obtaining the variety of vegetables to make the stew can be an easy process but how do you ensure commitment of each vegetable to the course of making the right stew? Thinking politically requires you to think of each vegetable as stakeholders in your good course of adaptive work. Your goal is to get your stew just right. It is likely that you will not get all involved vegetables in one room to discuss your goal. Your team may however comprise of the representative from each vegetable type. For each representative in the change initiative, they have knowledge that they will have to return to their respective land. Thinking of the consequences and the expectations of the society in respective lands may result in a huge collaboration barrier.

An adaptive leader is required to focus beyond the representatives who are directly involved. Paying attention to the carrot, onion, tomato when they return to their respective lands contaminated with other vegetable juices helps narrow the gap hence influences commitment. Because of this, one is required to look at the society as a web of stakeholders and be required to determine the answers of the following items by engaging various stakeholders:

1) **Values -** *what does a stakeholder value? What are the beliefs influencing behaviors and also decision-making processes? What are the commitments for each stakeholder?*

2) **Loyalties -** *What responsibilities does the person have to people around their immediate group?*

3) **Losses at risk -** *Should things change, what does one fear losing?*

4) **Hidden alliances -** *What are things in common the person has with other people in other groups? How do those people in respective groups influence the decision making?*

Stakeholders take various forms depending on the roles the groups play. In our next lesson we will look in detail different types of stakeholders who will influence the success of your adaptive work.

STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders refers to groups of individuals who have vested interest in adaptive work. They may be involved directly or indirectly and as the issues change, they are likely to change. The change is influenced by the sets of expectations to be satisfied and level of commitment towards the core objective of solving an adaptive challenge. Let's think about poaching as an adaptive challenge, stakeholders will include all groups that have vested interest. These are African countries, IUCN, China, animal rights groups, environmental groups, African Wildlife Foundation, Governments, private groups, NGOs, local community and military.

With the expected changes and the level of commitment, stakeholders can further be mapped under the following groups:

1) **Factions:** *these are small organized groups based on perspectives. As perspectives change, they also change. Factions are united by a common goal that differs in some aspects from the rest of the group. For poaching, factions may comprise anti-poaching, business opportunities in poaching, lovers of animal parts- tusks, bones, pelts*

2) **Participant:** *Are people who will be taking part in the adaptive work.*

3) **Constituencies:** *Are people who have a common goal. The common goal drives their commitment. Examples of constituencies in poaching include conservationists, business men, poachers, animal product lovers.*

4) **Allies:** *Allies are people on your side and who you will be acting together and protecting one another*

5) **Confidants:** *Confidants are people we trust. They listen to us and help us make sense of our experience as we try to get difficult work done.*

SCENARIO

Racial discrimination continues to affect the world. Discrimination mostly is directed to a person or people on the basis of their membership to a particular racial or ethnic group, typically a minority or marginalized groups. Racism is a social disease, passed from one generation to the other. It is not passed through genes but it is taught; as the human race we remain genetically the same.

Effects of racism are many. It has led to poor mental and physical health and in many occasions led to deaths. Taking United States as an example, racism remains a daily experience with approximately 66% of blacks reporting day to day racial discrimination.

The poor mental and physical health is due to mental trauma as a result of blocked opportunities for example being turned down for a job opportunity, lack of promotions and poor pays.

Deaths have been reported as a result of racism with the 25 May 2020 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis by a white police officer and the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery on 23 Feb 2020 in Brunswick by a white father and son being the latest deaths that have led to outrage and protests across the world.

Many policies and anti-racism organizations such as UN Human Rights Council and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance were formed to eradicate racism in the world. Activists and people of good will have also joined in taking lead against racism. Despite these, people continue suffering. The question is what happens during the implementation of the policies and measures put in place? Are all groups represented and are they prepared to go back to their respective societies with the proposed measures?

In leading this adaptive challenge, understanding the political landscape is key to its success. One needs to engage the stakeholders and understand their values, loyalties, losses and hidden alliances. Stakeholders will include but not limited to Black Americans, Black Africans, Latinos, police system, justice system, politicians, policy officers, national police unions, leadership such as Donald Trump, American White, movement builders, activists such as Black lives matter activists.

One will need to establish values; what influences one's behavior. Values may include human dignity, equity, fairness, equal opportunity, representations, access to resources, culture, patriotism. Loyalties to consider may include ancestry, ideologies, system, societal expectation. Privileges, favors, struggle like the rest, significance, power, status, identity, prestige, relevance is some of the losses that may influence participation. Hidden alliances

may include Black Americans, Black Africans, Latino, racial discrimination, opportunities, access to resources, lack of sense of belonging, inadequate reaction, police brutality, cycle of injustice, police violence, demand for change, violation of civil liberty of the people.

RECAP

In this book, we introduced thinking politically. We identified the four key items which are the values, loyalties, losses at risk and hidden alliances that you need to figure out for each stakeholder. We went further to explain stakeholders and various groups that stakeholders can be mapped to base on their influence and involvement in the adaptive work.

Feel free to revisit any lesson in this session to gain a deeper understanding of the concept. We encourage you to reflect on the way you will engage your teams in discussions on formulating the best way of solving adaptive challenges. More important is to step back and appreciate the pressure from external people who represent the environment where adaptive work will be executed. Thinking and finding ways to help your team get back to society and collaborate with the society is crucial in determining success in your adaptive work.