

Aligning a Team/Organization to Address Adaptive Challenges

The scope and nature of organizational change needed today requires a different approach. Typically, we identify the problem and assign one or a core group of experts to devise a solution that gets implemented more broadly. However, if the challenge is more *adaptive* in nature, requiring people to change the way they work, behave, perceive the problem or think about outcomes, this approach often fails or meets with an inordinate amount of resistance, frustration, diminished productivity and a host of unintended consequences—all of which require more time and attention to resolve. The overall effort becomes unwieldy and ineffective.

GLI offers a change management approach that taps into the innate wisdom and motivation of the people who have the most to gain and lose from the organizational changes. We help groups employ a deeper strategy for adaptive change. Our approach—firmly grounded in brain and behavioral science—allows for a collective understanding among stakeholders of the issues and opportunities at play, builds greater willingness to change, and accelerates momentum towards shared action. Our method involves convening conversations and activities that:

1. Strengthen Relationships
2. Foster shared understanding of the challenges and goals facing the organization
3. Surface possibilities, experiments, hidden barriers and blind spots
4. Define realistic and attainable actions and commitments for getting the important work done.

The order of these conversations is critical. The depth of each is dependent on the group and the challenges being faced. Though we cycle back and forth, we do not make action commitments until we have moved through the other three conversations. Our rationale follows:

- 1. Strengthening relationships:** adaptive challenges often require concerted efforts on the part of multiple people or groups of people. We seek to build enough trust and mutual understanding of one another's motivations and values for groups to begin to tackle tough challenges together. This foundational element of adaptive change is often overlooked in more typical change efforts that fail to

account for climates where relationships *are* fragmented, trust is low and people are feeling isolated. This is evidenced by behaviors such as apathy, turf protection, false or half-hearted commitment to actions and an inability for groups to galvanize behind any difficult effort. Developing the relational capacity for people to work side-by-side toward mutually defined goals is at the heart of adaptive change.

- 2. Fostering shared understanding of challenges and goals:** to really understand the nature of adaptive challenges we must gather and integrate multiple perspectives. How does the issue affect others? We must define the current reality before we try to do something to change it. The typical approach at this stage of the process is to overly rely upon limited information and perspectives from an elite few, versus tapping into the wealth of knowledge and experience of all impacted. Fear of taking too much time, or giving leash to a rash of complaints that cannot be addressed often underscores this decision. Yet we are blind without this information. By acknowledging what is changing and giving voice to multiple perspectives with a goal of developing a collective understanding of the current reality, we can target solutions to meet real needs of more people. With their “fingerprints” on the outcome, people become more engaged and committed to taking action that serves the good of all.
- 3. Surfacing possibilities, experiments, hidden barriers and blind spots:** before taking action, it is important to consider some of the ways we might proceed. An adaptive challenge will likely have a host of possible solutions that are viable. In typical change efforts, the process is entered into with solutions already well formulated by the subject matter experts and the task is to “get people on board” and implementing the solutions. In our approach, we take more time to surface possibilities as well as naming the hidden barriers and potential blind spots that will undermine efforts and slow progress if not addressed. This takes a degree of trust and candor in a group to name the things that often go unspoken. However, when we have done our work in the previous two conversation themes, people are more likely to bring a creative and entrepreneurial (e.g. thoughtful risk taking) spirit to the task of creating new ideas together about how to proceed. This allows for the collective intelligence of a group to explore and ultimately land on the best approaches.
- 4. Defining realistic and attainable actions and commitments:** we know we need new actions to solve the challenges we face. The challenge is that even though we have done our best to align people, to really understand the problem, and to devise possible solutions, there is no guarantee of success. Adaptive challenges are often too complex to have that guarantee. In typical change efforts, there is

often no strategy developed for failure. In our approach, we anticipate the paralysis that often accompanies changes of this nature, and to overcome this reaction, we help groups devise actions that are realistic and measurable. We seek to build in ways for groups to learn from success and failure alike and to give the “actors” and “agents” permission to experiment, prototype and even fail within the scope and parameters of their work, with the goal of scaling up when success is proven. We help groups create ways to assess the impact of actions and make adaptations based on the changing landscape. When leaders reinforce this attitude, people are more likely to commit, and relationships are strengthened as a result of taking collective and commonly supported action. People become better at adapting, at responding to new conditions together.

How we work: GLI works in partnership with clients to define the goals and outcomes of a meeting, and ensures that high-leverage follow up actions are in place. We facilitate practical, efficient, cost effective and satisfying meetings and retreats that create lasting change.

Outcomes you can expect in 2 days include:

- A group of people more connected to each other
- A shared comprehension of what is changing and its impact on group
- A collective understanding of the scope of the challenge
- Awareness of the opportunities and the barriers in moving forward (e.g. turf protection)
- A commitment to trying new actions together
- Next steps that flow from the collective understanding of the challenge and possibilities
- Creation of guidelines on how the group will operate

Contact us for more information: www.GilburgLeadership.com

Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges

	Technical Challenges	Adaptive Challenges
Distinctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solved by Experts Head Requires logic & intellect; often c/b quick & easy solutions Easy to ID IE: Payroll issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot be solved by experts Heart & Stomach Requires changes in values, beliefs, behavior, roles, relationships, & approaches to work Difficult to ID & easy to deny IE: Climate change, shrinking budgets, team function
Nature of Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires change in 1 or a few places, often w/in organization boundaries Solutions can be implemented quickly – even by edict People are generally receptive to technical solutions Locus of Work: Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires change in numerous places; usually X organization boundaries “Solutions” often require experiments and new discoveries; can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict People often resist adaptive solutions (or acknowledging problem) Locus of Work: Stakeholders
Role of Leader/Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem Solver: solve or delegate to experts to solve Implement solutions by edict, resource assignments, etc Focus on SOLUTION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convener: bring together people with the problem do the work of solving it Allow for long-term outcomes Communicator: transparency Focus on PROCESS
Strategy*		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversations necessary for group thinking: <i>Relationship-building, Mutual Understanding, Possibilities, Actions</i>

Adapted from the work of M. Linsky and R. Heifetz