

# Leadership Skill Builders

## Five Principles of Adaptive Leadership

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Timing: 30 minutes

Objective: Distinguish between technical and adaptive work.

- List the characteristics of technical problems and adaptive challenges.
- Provide examples of technical and adaptive work.
- Diagnose the technical and adaptive aspects of issues you are currently facing in your agency / department.

Preparation:

1. On a whiteboard or flipchart page, draw the following table, which will be completed in Part 1: Review of Concepts.

	Technical Work	Adaptive Work
<b>Resides in people's...</b>		
<b>The Problem and Solution</b>		
<b>Whose Work Is It?</b>		
<b>Type of Work</b>		
<b>Objective</b>		
<b>Timeline</b>		

2. Pre-identify a few issues your team or agency is facing. You can use these, if necessary, to help jump start a conversation in Part 2: Classifying Our Issues.
3. Print one copy per participant of the *Group Discussion: Technical vs Adaptive Work Handout*.

## Part 1: Review of Concepts (10 minutes)

**SAY:** Let's review the key concepts on Technical and Adaptive Work.

**DO:** Complete the following chart with input from members of your team.

	Technical Work	Adaptive Work
Resides in people's...	Heads	Hearts and guts
The Problem and Solution	Are clear	Require learning
Whose Work Is It?	Experts Authority	Stakeholders Self
Type of Work	Apply existing know-how	Experiment within the system Stretch one's own boundaries
Objective	Fix the problem	Make progress
Timeline	Shorter term Predictable	Longer term Illusive

## Part 2: Classifying Our Issues (20 minutes)

**SAY:** We are going to look at some of our issues and identify whether they are technical problems, adaptive challenges, or complex challenges which incorporate both technical and adaptive elements.

**DO:** Pass out copies of *Group Discussion: Technical vs Adaptive Work Handout* and review the instructions.

**DO:** Ask for examples of issues your team and/or agency is currently facing. Lead a discussion to diagnose the technical and adaptive aspects of the work. To jump start the conversation, you may have to start with some issues that you have pre-identified.

**DO:** Facilitate a discussion on your organization's challenges.

## Group Discussion: Technical vs Adaptive Work Handout

**DIRECTIONS:** Identify an adaptive challenge your organization currently faces. Explain what makes this an adaptive challenge. If this is a complex challenge, categorize what work is technical and what work is adaptive.

Some things to think about and discuss:

1. What could be fixed right now with existing know-how? Or by applying existing ways of thinking, relating, and operating? These things are technical aspects of the work.
2. What part of the challenge seems elusive? What makes progress difficult? These things are probably adaptive.
3. What behaviors, beliefs and values are impeding progress? Addressing people's behaviors, beliefs and values is adaptive work.
4. Who does the work belong to? Can it be resolved by an expert or authority figure? Then it's technical work. Do the stakeholders need to work on the issue? Then it's probably adaptive work.
5. Does your organization need to evolve to adjust to a changing environment? What is essential? What is expendable? What needs to be transformed? Figuring out what to conserve from past practices, determining what to discard, and inventing new ways that build from the best of the past is at the core of adaptive work.
6. Do we have any issues currently that may be adaptive challenges that we are trying to fix with a technical solution? Are you encountering a cycle of failure when trying to solve the problem? This often is an indicator that technical solutions are being applied to adaptive challenges.