

Adaptive Leadership in Public Health

Developed for local, state, and regional public health leaders and teams



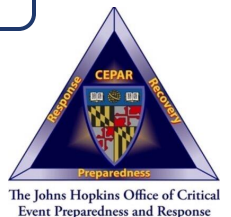
Center for Health Security



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response

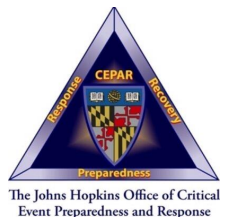
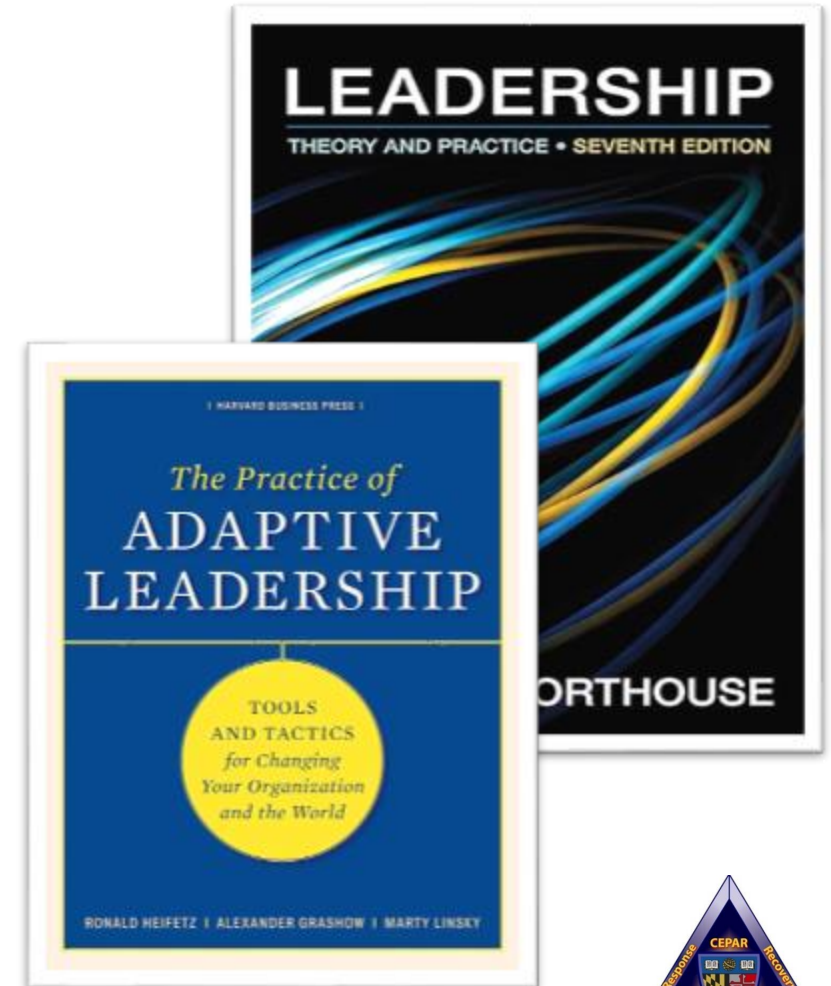
Session Overview and Objectives

- 1 Define adaptive challenges and distinguish from technical challenges
- 2 Introduction and application of adaptive leadership tools:
1) Getting on the Balcony; 2) Regulating Distress; 3) Giving the Work Back; 4) Protecting Voices from Below
- 3 Case-based discussion using a real-world public health examples
- 4 Take home adaptive challenge discussion



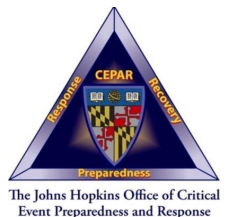
Resources

- Heifetz RA, Grashow A, Linsky M. (2009). The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Harvard Business Press
- McLaughlin, C., and Mark R. McMinn. "Developing and Evaluating an Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2013, pp. 107–118
- Leadership: Theory and Practice by Northouse, Peter Guy (2016)
- Nöthel S, Nübold A, Uitdewilligen S, Schepers J, Hülshager U. Development and validation of the adaptive leadership behavior scale (ALBS). *Front Psychol*. 2023 Sep 27;14:1149371. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1149371. PMID: 37829081; PMCID: PMC10565815.



Defining adaptive leadership

- Mobilizing people to **tackle tough challenges** and thrive amid change
- Focus on **learning, values, and behavior shift**, not just expertise or authority
- Unlike traditional leadership, it focuses on a **collective, collaborative process** to solve problems that don't have known solutions, emphasizing the importance of **change, experimentation, and empowering others** to lead and contribute
- Pioneered by Ronald Heifetz and others, it involves a leader **stepping back, identifying the core adaptive challenge, and enabling the collective** to do the hard work of change



Distinguishing Technical and Adaptive Challenges

TECHNICAL

A clearly defined problem with known solutions that can be solved by expertise and procedures

Ex. Electronic record downtime, data interoperability, treating disease, distributing supplies, setting up a shelter- these are mostly technical

ADAPTIVE

Is ill-defined, has competing values, and requires learning and behavioral change

Ex. Evolving attitudes of the public to recommendations, conflict in the workforce, morale, rebuilding trust in PH, and building cross-sector teams across agencies



Some problems are mixed and require both approaches to solutions, including dynamic shifts in priorities



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response

Real-world public health examples of adaptive challenges

- Financial and funding uncertainty issues and planning
- Burnout, morale issues, and turnover amongst public health teams



- Start thinking about some examples from your experience and jurisdiction
- Do any of these resonate with you?
- As we go through the tools, consider how you might apply them to your challenges



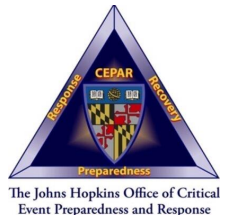
The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response



Tool 1: Get on the Balcony



1. Step back from the problem to see patterns, roles, and dynamics
2. Problem diagnosis- what is the core problem in your organization or jurisdiction?
 - a. Identify the stakeholders, winners, and those at risk from the issue
3. Avoid proposing solutions before diagnosing the problem

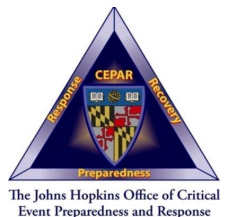




Tool 2: Regulate Distress



1. Prepare your team to work productively while learning, encourage a thoughtful discussion, dissuade either hot or cold comments
2. Normalize discomfort, pace the work, and create psychological safety
3. Hold steady in the storm: Support maintenance of disciplined attention and regulation of emotions in the face of uncertainty
4. How does this present in the real world?
 - 💡 Provide ground rules, facilitation, and agendas to improve the environment





Tool 3: Give the Work Back

1. Avoid over functioning and ask teams to generate options
2. Clarify roles and invite shared responsibility
3. Coach and don't carry the team
 - 💡 Empower autonomy in decision making
 - 💡 Adaptive leaders encourage people at all levels of an organization to suggest solutions for problems
 - 💡 This approach can lead to improved ownership of organizational issues, accountability, and innovation
 - 💡 Examples may include facilitating a community meeting for residents to discuss their challenges surround a particular PH behavior or issue and propose solutions



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical
Event Preparedness and Response



Tool 4: Protect Voices from Below

- Bring marginalized perspectives and lesser voiced ideas to the surface
- Establish guardrails so speaking is safe
- Use dissent for learning and not for derailment of your goal
- Example: Use anonymous input, round robins, or 1-2-all to widen participation



- Could use stakeholder or network mapping here
- Who else cares about this issue?
- Who needs to be at the table?
- Who could add a voice to this issue?



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical
Event Preparedness and Response

Mini Exercise: Diagnosing a Problem



Write down one leadership challenge



Is it technical, adaptive or both? Why?

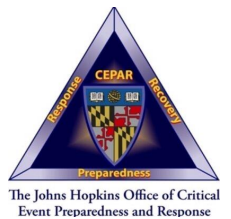


What would a "balcony" observation reveal?



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical
Event Preparedness and Response

Mini Exercise: Diagnosing a Problem



Improving Communication



Adaptive leadership relies on **clear and flexible** communication dynamics

- Understanding of skills, needs, roles, and responsibilities
- Understanding and communication of shared values/priorities



Includes communication **within an organization and across varied partners**

- Conflicting priorities should be understood, acknowledged, and maneuvered
- Build partnerships for improved workforce capacity/coordination



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response

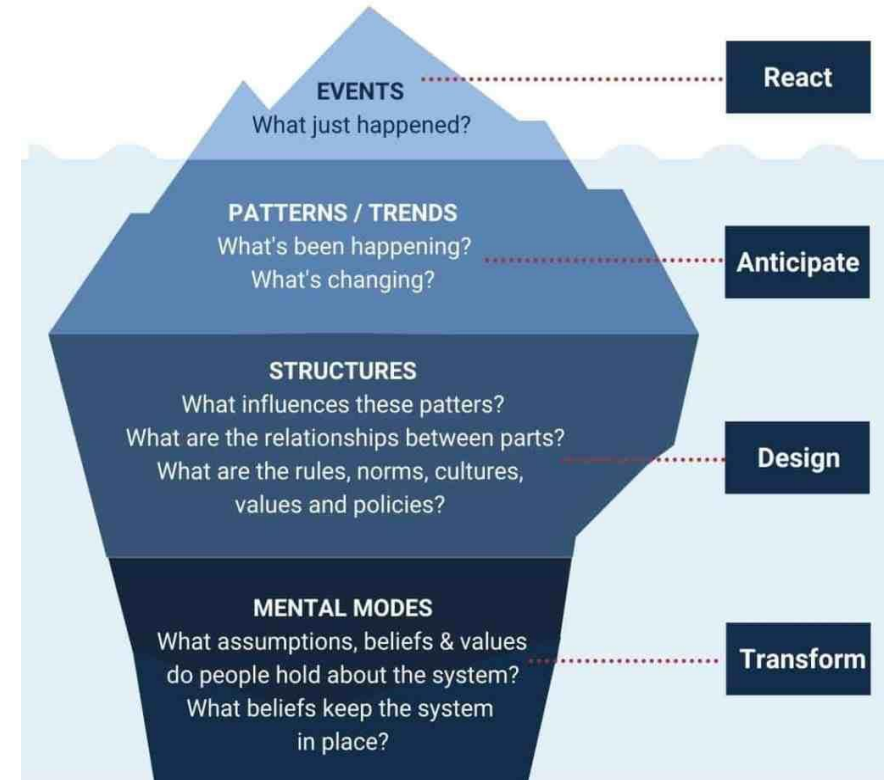
Map Partners and Interested Parties

- Who are the partners, collaborators, or community members involved and what do they value?
- Consider tools such as stakeholder mapping or power/interest grids
- Are there key alliances and neutral zones?



Examples of mapping or analysis tools include *Iceberg Analysis*, *5 Whys activity*, or *Collaboration Multiplier*

WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM?



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response

Organizational Readiness for Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership thrives in organizations that allow for it



Create a culture that values continued learning



Encourage increased self-efficacy among teams



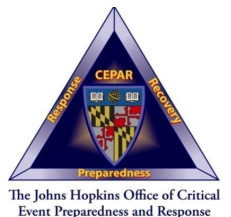
Develop processes and structures that embrace adaptive principles



Flexible mobilization of resources to allow adaptive leadership approaches

EXAMPLE

Incorporate adaptive leadership principles into individual work plans, leveraging flat leadership structures during crises, etc.

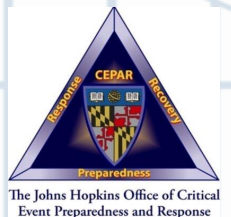




Case 1: Funding and financial uncertainty for public health preparedness and response

- Diagnosis and Symptoms
- Technical vs adaptive challenges
- First balcony steps, who are the right people to do this work, who might think of novel solutions?

- What organizational factors facilitate/hinder effective solutions?
- What emotional capacity is needed?
- What priorities need to shift?



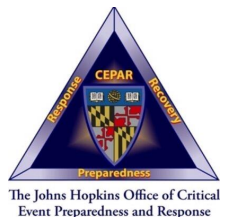


Case 2: Preparedness team burnout



- **Symptom:** increased turnover, cynicism
- **Adaptive work to consider:** workload norms, workload expectations, meaning of the work
- **Tools to use include:** regulating distress, giving work back, and protecting voices from below
- **Questions to ask:** How would you effectively communicate with your team or other partners? How would you ensure all voices are considered? How would you maneuver conflict? Foster psychological safety?

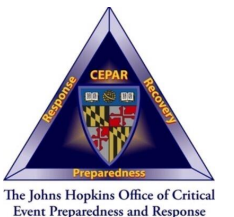
→ What are some solutions that could derive from this process?



2 week home trial of adaptive leadership



- Diagnose the problem and measures. What would be the result if it works?
- Define the smallest change that is safe to try in your work environment
- Consider doing a balcony check-in and retrospective with your team to get the process started



2 week take home: some practical scripts for choosing a challenge



"What are we pretending not to notice?"



"What might this change trigger?"



"What 10% of this work can we own this week?"



"What's happening in the bigger picture?"



"What are we seeing? Why is it happening?"



"Are there folks we could partner with to address the issue?"

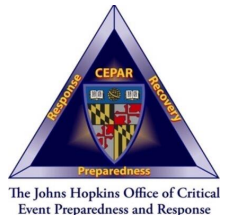


The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical
Event Preparedness and Response

2 week take home: facilitation moves for enacting change



- Set norms for candor and curiosity
- Use round-robins and set timed debates
- Park issues that appear technical, only address adaptive challenges
- Consider tools such as the Iceberg Analysis or 5 Whys



2 week take home: measuring impact



Encourage simple measurement
Track observed behaviors

Track observed behaviors

Identifying changes in processes
and structures

Make your desired impact
feasible



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical
Event Preparedness and Response

2 week take home summary



- Which adaptive challenge would you like to address in your team or jurisdiction?
- Who will you engage?
- When would you use the Balcony Tool to diagnose the problem? *Balcony, Iceberg, others?*
- How will you apply other adaptive leadership tools to approach the problem?
- What organizational factors are needed to better facilitate adaptive leadership?

