



The Six Adaptive Leadership Challenges Checklist:

According to Dean Williams of the Harvard Kennedy School and author of *Real Leadership* there are six leadership challenges and each of these challenges require a different type of leadership. The six leadership challenges are:

- **The Activist Challenge: Calling attention to a contradiction in values**
- **The Development Challenge: Cultivating the latent capabilities needed to progress**
- **The Transition Challenge: Moving from one system of value to another**
- **The Maintenance Challenge: Protecting and sustaining what is essential during hard times**
- **The Creative Challenge: Doing what has never been done before**
- **The Crisis Challenge: Leading in a period of extreme danger**

At any time we may primarily face one of the six types of leadership challenge. Other challenges may be a combination of these. Depending on the challenge our adaptive work will be different, here are some things to consider:

Activist Challenge:

- Know what threat you represent.
- Be strategic in where and how you intervene.
- When putting yourself at risk, make sure you have attention and people are watching.
- When the group stalls you on one front, open up another.
- Find good partners to support you and keep you alive.

Development Challenge:

- Create a robust holding environment to keep people from getting distracted.
- Develop in stages: give the people time to discover what works.
- Find the right combination of levers to develop new values and capabilities.
- Give people a stake in developing their capacity.

Transition:

- Provide an 'orienting purpose'.
- Get people to own the change, or they will probably deceive you.
- Determine what must be preserved, and help people deal with losses.
- Become a visible symbol of the transition ideal.

Maintenance:

- Keep the fire burning: maintain hope.

- Maintain the mission and core values
- Attend to the little big things.
- When people succumb to their hungers, let them know and reorient them.
- Keep the destructive forces at bay.

Creative:

- Attend to the mood, energy, and focus needed to make a discovery.
- Keep the powerful from dictating “the” solution.
- Allow for friction, but keep people from fleeing.
- Be generous in wasting time and resources.
- Get people to set aside their notions of their truth long enough for the novel ideas to emerge.

Crisis:

- Dissipate the explosive fumes, and create some time to think.
- Hold steady – don’t get pulled into the fracas.
- Keep people from striking a match; remind them of the higher purpose.
- Don’t be pigheaded or naïve – explore every alternative

*Adapted from: Dean Williams “Real Leadership.: **Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges.** Berrett-Koehler Publishers*

Reflective Exercise

- Which of the above leadership challenges most resonate with you?
- What will you do to make progress on your current leadership challenge/s ?

Activist Challenge
Development Challenge
Transition Challenge

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Maintenance Challenge

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Creative Challenge

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Crisis Challenge

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