

Objective

- Emerging from a pandemic in an unsteady state world, leadership teams and organizations must adapt. We must mitigate social pathologies like racism and organizational pathologies like inertia.
- Education leaders and ecosystems are faced with these wicked problems every day, defying linear either/or solutions requiring leadership to go beyond convenient metaphors and practicing linear complexity.
- Addressing these wicked problems by decolonizing education systems is a good way to focus less on top-down power and more on relationality, where adaptable leadership teams can understand their very potential to adapt, i.e., their **adaptive capacity**.
- Adaptive capacity is a way to characterize the potential of leadership teams to adapt.
- **Understanding the very potential of a team to emerge (adapt) as a high-capacity leadership team gives us insight into how we can help organizations become more creative, innovative, and adaptable to meet the demands of today's increasingly complex world.**

Describing the Adaptive Capacity of Leadership Teams

- In a recent doctoral dissertation focused on senior leadership team adaptability in a state-level healthcare organization serving over 1 million people, we found the *proactivity feature* among the lowest adaptability features found in cases of low adaptability teams.
- **We know adaptability and proactivity are considered important leadership skills and by taking an ecosystem approach to linking these two traditionally different team features, we develop a convincing indicator of adaptive capacity.**
- By plotting adaptability against proactivity on a comparative 2D matrix we describe a leadership team's adaptive capacity, or ability to emerge (see Figure 1).
- **Plotting adaptive capacity leads to understanding the very potential of a team to adapt or to change.** We found adaptive capacity is a strong indicator of a leadership teams' ability to emerge as a high-capacity leadership team.

The Leadership Team Adaptive Capacity Matrix

- We propose a framework and taxonomy, the **"Leadership Team Adaptive Capacity"** matrix (see Figure 1).
- In line with Wane et al. (2023), this matrix uses relational organization models and complexity approaches to describe a team's potential to become high-capacity leadership networks.

Our Theoretical Framework

- We found a leadership team's **adaptability**, can be characterized as a mixture of features: (1) tension, (2) diversity/redundancy, (3) paradox thinking, (4) trust, (5) relational network communication, (6) *proactivity*, (7) issue attractors, and (8) innovation.

Proactivity

- We focus here on proactivity where proactivity is characterized from two theoretical frameworks.
 - (1) the *competence* and *motivation* of a leader to engage in actions necessary for change and because proactivity is not composed of an explicit set of behaviors, but instead reflects a process of anticipating, planning, and striving to have an impact, (2), the seven behaviors of *proactive personalities*; (1) scan for opportunities, (2) set effective goals, (3) anticipate/prevent problems, (4) do different things, or do things differently, (5) take action, (6) persevere, and (7) get results.
- We know the most effective people are those who are proactive rather than reactive.
- And proactivity is a continuum, not a dichotomy. The proactive process involves finding new ways to add value, experiment, innovate, and "change things, in an intended direction, for the better". Alternatively, the reactive process involves working to maintain, getting along, conforming, reducing experimentation, and being good custodians of the status quo.

Adaptive Capacity

- **Adaptive capacity** is a function of the teams' **adaptability** and **proactivity** score. This means we can plot, on a 2D matrix, low- and high-capacity team features. **High-capacity teams are the ideal.**

Decolonizing Dialog for Leaders: Towards a Framework for Describing the Adaptive Capacity of Leadership Teams

- We offer a comparative matrix displaying adaptability on an abscissa vs. proactivity, in a 2D plot (see Figure 1), for two senior team member groups – Team Delta, and Team Tango, indicating the adaptive capacity of the leadership teams for emergence. Adaptive capacity is a fluid dynamic.

Findings

- We found both Team Delta and Team Tango were in non-reciprocated fractured relational networks. Both teams evidenced low adaptability with proactivity being **among the lowest score** feature found (see Table 1).

Results and Conclusions

- Because adaptive capacity is a function of the teams' adaptability and proactivity score, we can plot low- and high-capacity team adaptive capacity (see Figure 1). **High-capacity (Hi-Flex/Hi-Pro) teams are the ideal.**
- We plot scores for both teams with adaptability scores on the X axis and proactivity scores on the Y axis (see Figure 1), creating the *Leadership Team Adaptive Capacity Matrix*.
- **This allows us to link these two, traditionally different team features, for each participant and leadership team.** We know a team's adaptive capacity is shaped by individual-level factors providing some teams a higher capacity to adapt based on the characteristics of individual team members.
- Both teams were shaped by their reactive approach and dedication to the status quo. To confirm, we found all the features of highly adaptable, high-capacity networks of executive level senior leaders, but their adaptive capacity (potential to adapt) was constrained.

Adaptive Capacity Matrix (Figure 2)

The Upper Right Quadrant: The optimal zone for high-capacity teams that can change.

- Using a metaphor of a high-performance Formula 1 racing team, a leadership team in this zone is a perfect mix of high-performance car and driving team. The car can go as fast as needed while the team adapts to the conditions of the race. This is a highly flexible/highly proactive team. We label this Hi-Flex/Hi-Pro. This team is a nimble, rock star team capable of learning their way forward with experimentation.

The Upper Left Quadrant

- The leadership team in this zone has a high-performance car that can go as fast as needed but the driving team isn't able to manage it. The team does very little experimentation to energize emergence. This is a Low-Flex/Hi-Pro team. This is a frustrated team, unable to emerge through experimentation.

The Lower Right Quadrant

- The leadership team in this zone know how to handle a high-performance car, but they don't have one. The crew tries to experiment but is unable to innovate and energize emergence. This is a Hi-Flex/Lo-Pro team. This team is flexible as a unit, but they are reactive.

The Lower Left Quadrant

- The leadership team in this zone is constrained by a low performance car and their inability to manage a high-performance car, even if they had one. This leadership team is constrained by both their reactive approach and their dedication to the status quo. This is a Lo-Flex/Lo-Pro reactive team, locked in a cage of inability to leverage the features of both adaptability and proactivity. Innovation and change are only incremental, experimentation is nonexistent.

The Scholarly Significance

- The Complexity Leadership Framework of Leadership for Organizational Adaptability (see Figure 3) highlights the need for organizations to engage the generative tension between the need for innovation and the need to produce. While Entrepreneurial Leadership and Operational Leadership create important outcomes for an organization, **Enabling Leadership is a crucial form of leadership for adaptive organizations.**
- Enabling Leadership requires (demands) adaptive capacity from its senior leadership teams. **This means knowing the potential, or adaptive capacity of a team, becomes ever more important.**
- **Understanding the very potential of a team to emerge (adapt) as a high-capacity leadership team gives us insight into how we can help organizations become more creative, innovative, and adaptable to meet the demands of today's increasingly complex world.**
- Taking an ecosystem approach to linking two traditionally different team features, i.e., adaptability and proactivity, can help us see and describe teams with great potential to emerge as high-capacity teams – offering a new way to see and describe adaptive capacity.