

Becoming an Adaptive Leader

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"One of the most difficult aspects of adapting to rapid change, particularly when it is accompanied by complex technology and multiplying data sources, is the ability to give up an old construct about the way things ought to be and develop a new one based on the current realities. Accepting a new version of reality – essentially telling a new story – requires cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence is the ability to observe, learn and understand our own culture as well as the culture of others. It is an essential skill in a diverse community and a global market.

There are four stages to adaptation: technology, economics, demographics and culture. We adapt easily to new technology, we accommodate new economic structures, we welcome new workers, but we resist changing cultural beliefs. Culture is basically the beliefs we have about the 'way things ought to be.' Culture always lags behind technological, economic and demographic shifts.

To be effective, leaders have to 'see it,' and be able to pass the vision on to every stakeholder. They must be able to tell the 'new story' if they expect their staff, constituency or clients to accept their leadership or their product. Because the last step in any adaptation process is cultural (visceral) change, it requires a compelling, believable story that is easily understood and linked to our deepest values and beliefs. The ability to tell a compelling story requires:

- *A set of ideas that you believe represents the future and that fit the current reality.*
- *A set of values that are connected to these ideas. Justice is always one of the core sorting institutions of change.*
- *Your personal ability to model this story through your emotional energy, creativity and edge.*
- *Your willingness to influence by telling the new story and motivating cultural change."*



N.I.M.H. Fellow, Academic Board Member, Excellence in Journalism, International Film Festival Gold Star, Cindy Award, Billboard Radio Personality of the Year – Jennifer James is a cultural anthropologist, lecturer, writer and commentator well known around the world for her innovative ideas that help people meet the challenges of today's transitions. Her speeches and seminars deal with adaptation to change and the development of thinking skills. She is a specialist in the areas of cultural change, diversity and marketing intelligence. Dr. James earned her Master's degree in history and psychology, and her Doctorate in cultural anthropology. She was Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington Medical School for twelve years. Jennifer's curriculums for the protection of children and the development of alternatives to violence are now taught in every state and in 37 other countries.

Dr. James regularly receives standing ovations, and is described by clients as *"inspiring, incredible, thought-provoking, innovative, humorous, energizing, empowering, just brilliant, the best speaker I have ever heard"* (clients include Georgia-Pacific, Lockheed Martin, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, and the National Association of School Boards). Her seven published books include *Windows*, *Success is the Quality of Your Journey*, and *Thinking in the Future Tense*.

This synopsis is based on Dr. James' insightful, provocative presentation; audience questions and responses; and information from her website.

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The intensity of this time in history is borne by the deepest, broadest, most universal changes ever. These changes have destabilized many of our leadership assumptions.

As we increasingly become 'cyborgs' – part technician and part human consciousness – successful adaptation requires changes in management and leadership. The new knowledge workers, the portfolio professionals, prefer to work as part of a diverse, empowered team with maximum independence and minimum management. They have different skills and a different character than any previous worker class.

Our new leadership assignment requires re-making our staff, our organizations and ourselves into more civilized, responsible and productive cyber forms. The key is the ability to think in new ways. The adaptive executive is future oriented. He or she understands both the current business environment as well as what the organization's place in the local and global market is likely to be."

Tearing the Tapestry

Tapestry is that body of assumptions, beliefs, customs and practices that we accept as foundational. They define who we are. In this time of great change, the tapestry is being torn rapidly and everywhere, and we begin to fall apart, becoming anxious and losing belief in who we are. We look backward. We become pessimistic about the present and the future because we can't envision a new tapestry. This tends to create a moral void, and that's why we need adaptable, visionary leaders. Consider the following tapestries. When were they torn and who was responsible for the tearing?

- the world is flat
- men can't take care of babies
- derogatory ethnic names make good athletic mascot names
- babies and animals don't require pain management
- health care is the responsibility of the professionals
- American cars are clearly better engineered and more durable than their Japanese counterparts
- it's okay to beat up "them" on Friday nights

Throughout history, the "end of the world" has been a recurring theme. That is, there are always a significant number of people who yearn for moving backward to "what was," to something they find more understandable and stable. But trying to hold on to an American future is exceptionally hard when one believes in the tapestry of Armageddon.

Unfortunately, this is happening politically and economically in the U.S. How does this affect business? Given a choice, long-term customers are unlikely to remain loyal when they can afford to consider other organizations. When their stomach is full, they have a choice. Other countries now prefer to buy non-U.S. sourced equipment and methods – their choice is no longer the U.S.

Thus, one chore for the adaptive leader is to tear the tapestry of the past and reweave it for the future.

In your organization, when was the tapestry woven? Does it hinder you or help you move forward? What would be the benefit of reweaving it? What would that entail?

Using Cultural Intelligence to Overcome Tribalism

Cultural Intelligence means giving up the old mythologies. This is nearly impossible to do while preserving the honor of the tribe, so many leaders opt out. In our society, law and medicine are two professions generally unwilling to back away from the lodge rituals of previous generations. Putting medical interns on 48-hour shifts has something to do with economics, to be sure; but it has more to do with making the fledgling doctors "do what we had to do" in order to gain admittance to the tribe.

To move away from tribalism, an adaptive leader has to see the future and be visionary about describing it. Consider these contrasts in approach and message:

- Nelson Mandela: letting go of mythology in favor of humanity.
Slobodan Milosovich: promoting a 13th century reality of revenge.
- Germany: apologizing for their actions in WWII and moving forward in the European Union.
Japan: unwilling to apologize and as a result losing their Chinese marketplace.
- The Civil War was a battle over racism as well as technology, demography, culture, economics.
But lack of an apology from either side still colors how the North and the South see each other.

"Carl Jung, the brilliant psychoanalyst, concerned himself for much of his life with the memories of injustice that follow a society. He believed that injustice becomes embedded in the psyche and passed on from generation to generation. If a group (South Africans, Germans, Cambodians, etc.) see their own past and provide resolution for its victims they move toward a more moral civilization. If they cannot (Serbia, Israel, Northern Ireland/England, etc.), then the conflict slowly corrupts their culture. Societies squander their moral capital as decades without resolution pass.

Jung believed that there was only one way to create a stable moral society, only one way to become a moral individual. A nation must be aware of the crimes it has committed, something as simple as accurate history books in the schools. An individual must be aware of the crimes he or she is capable of committing. Awareness comes thorough acknowledgement of the crimes you have already committed. That means an apology.

This is a familiar process. We made reparations to the Japanese Americans interred during World War II. The Canadians have recently provided their own resolution acknowledging the wrong done to Japanese Canadians whose property was confiscated and never returned. The British returned Hong Kong as they have other colonies. The Australians have apologized for taking more than 100,000 Aborigine children. A group in Oregon invited the Wallowa Band Nez Perce to return to their ancestral home.

The problem with reparations or land restoration is that these measures, while important, never quite resolve the personal or spiritual crimes. Money and goods don't provide a new moral start. We learn as little children that only an apology, an admittance of guilt, an "I'm sorry" with a hug or handshake, seems to do that.

We did apologize to Japanese Americans and pay reparations; the amount is rarely the significant part. The Southern Baptists have apologized for their historic racism. The Promise Keepers and the Million Man marchers apologize to their wives and children as part of their ceremony. Most faiths provide a system of penance.

Meeting the growing reparation demands of African-Americans would, without an abject and deeply felt apology, just postpone justice and deny the racism that we still live with every day. A true apology for our history would make reparation demands shrink."

The job of a visionary leader is to get the vision at the beginning, and to use cultural intelligence as a primary means of moving her/his organization forward without the constraints of tribalism.

To understand this we have only to look at world history which shows us that cultural intelligence is infrequent. Consider the catastrophe in Iraq. Until shortly before WWII, the geography now known as Iraq was controlled by ethnic tribes. The government of Iraq was artificially created by the U.S. and Britain to control oil resources. The U.S. and Britain also created monarchies in Jordan and Iran, scuttling pre-existing democratic movements. Now this region has "unities" and "states" that make no sense. Because it is so hard for the U.S. to admit it's wrong – that it is ridiculous to force people into an unwanted structure – the region is enduring enormous stressors on established tribal honors and nationalities.

When people have enough "stuff" they give up tribalism easily. They can process life by themselves. But when power, food, honor and basic resources and services are absent, tribalism flourishes. In Iraq, the desire to return to a religious tribal heritage is stronger than ever, and no doubt this will happen because that is where the regional loyalties are. There will probably be a Kurdistan as well as other ethnically defined countries carved out of present-day Iraq.

Since our democratic society is sustained by a large middle class and an interwoven gene pool, as Americans we don't get it. (In truth, most of us in the U.S. should be checking "other" instead of "Caucasian" or "African American" or "Asian" or "Hispanic" because very few of us are ethnically "pure".) But as we push more people off the edge – and this is indeed happening in politics, immigration and wealth distribution – people lose their connection and investment to society. So in our country, at least, one solution is to again fatten up the middle class.

The global workforce has created a new gene pool. Compare the dramatic shift in the ethnic makeup of western and northern Europe. What does a native-borne Swede or German or Brit look like? Easily identifiable physical characteristics are no longer the rule. Rather than a single tapestry there will continue to be multiple overlapping sub-tapestries, ever more layered as those that don't have "stuff" move to where they can obtain it. Said another way, the battle is between globalism and international tribal ethnicity. In the past, these issues were often handled through apartheid, segregation, and even annihilation. Now that's harder to do (although not impossible as witnessed by the on-going genocide in Darfur.) More usual now is assimilation. *"The world battle over economics is not as critical as the world wide battle over freedoms and honors."*

Visionary leaders are those who can bridge to the future. Although we may or may not agree with their politics, among the upcoming Adaptive Leaders are Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and U.S. Senator Barack Obama. All of them have very high levels of cultural intelligence.

Globalization is likely to eradicate war, but it will take a long time and it will hurt a lot of people and businesses as did the industrial revolution. Creating a world economy could destroy local markets. We are bound to go through a rough patch, but in the end, the world labor market will benefit. The world market needs to be stable or everyone suffers.

What are the tribes in your organization? What are the lodge rituals? Who belongs to them, and why? Who is not permitted in? How do they affect productivity? What adaptive actions would you recommend to senior leadership? To middle-range leadership?

Overcoming Mythologies by Telling a Compelling New Story

How do you manage, adapt and not fall off the edge? To attract the best workers, we have to know the mythologies, old and new, and be able to tell a compelling, forward-looking story that includes:

- a set of ideas that fit the marketplace and fit reality and don't operate in 1950-60 time warp.
- Ideas that resonate to deeply held values for all generations covered; e.g., respect for the environment and people. From this comes drive.
- a believable story teller.

In your own organization, who are the believable story tellers? What causes you to identify them as such? How do they exercise their power? At what levels are they heard and acknowledged?

Understanding The Multi-Generational U.S. Workforce

Consider the variations in worker generations that an Adaptive Leader has to take into account:

Silent Generation 1925 – 1942

- Respect for authority
- Dedication and sacrifice
- Stay on track. Get it done
- Conformity
- Strict / hard work
- Delayed rewards
- Hierarchy. Career Ladder

Baby Boomers 1943 – 1962

- Self-absorbed, naïve
- Require personal gratification
- Individual and team oriented
- Youth oriented
- Challenge traditions
- Demand multiple options

Generation X 1963 - 1977

- Currently 40% of work force
- Pragmatic and self-reliant
- Informal. Want to have fun
- Grew up during good economic times
- See themselves as free agents
- Work to grow and learn, not just to retire
- Jobs should be skill opportunities
- Dominate information technology

Net Generation 1978 - 2000

- 60 million of them, 3 times Generation X
- Proactive use of computers and e-commerce
- Biological spurt: healthier, smarter in many areas, much earlier physical maturity
- Diverse, including disabilities. 1 in 3 not Caucasian
- Interested in personal achievement
- Can be guided, coached and led, but not treated as crew
- Combination of individual and team, but not contact sports. Operate as a team but prove selves as individuals
- Much more mentally oriented, including bullying.
- High level negotiation skills
- Believe culture should change to suit them
- High self-esteem
- Value friendships at an early age, and stay with them
- Real-world oriented
- Cynical and questioning
- Frank, sophisticated, mature
- Optimistic and self-reliant (because of busy parents)
- Assertive: question, challenge and debate
- Sociable. Concerned about civic duty. Volunteers
- Work and play are inseparable
- Confident inability to navigate, synthesize, try out
- Don't see classroom as a prime learning methodology
- Emotionally smart. Recognize and manage emotions in self and others
- Organize social groups, "friendship clumps," around interests and values, not ethnicities, religion, gender. Long-term relationships are "second families"
- Authenticity is critical. See executives and managers who don't have it as "pimps" (Cowboy boots, no horse; i.e., looking good, adding no value)

Likewise, in employment the generations have different priorities:

	Boomer	Gen X	Net Gen
Training	Tell me	Show me	Why do I need it?
Respect	Automatic	Polite	Has to be earned
Change	Dislike	Accept	Demand
Communication	Phone	Cell	Constant: pagers, multi-tasking
Leadership method	Spell out	Create	Autonomous
Technology	Tolerate it	Accept it	Demand it
Government	Is there a dishonesty?	There is a dishonesty.	Is there any honesty?
Loyalty	Assumed	Earned	Built around being treated as competent and valued
Key motivator(s)	Organizational and financial stability Achievable goals Traditional retirement Well-defined roles Tacit employment contracts	Entrepreneurship Options "What's in it for me?" Well-funded retirement	Feeling valued. Resolution of conflicts Leadership with integrity and competence (or will sabotage) No secrets. Up-front Multiple compensation packages Fair accountability Expect contract to change when the situation changes No lifetime guarantees. Adaptability and flexibility Want jobs that have merit, value, interest

How can an adaptable leader deal with multi-layered and multi-generational employees? How does this change her/his way of leading? Today's leader has to:

- prove her/his competency
- be technologically astute
- tell compelling stories about her/his own value to the organization
- exhibit passion and authenticity

In your organization, which is the largest generational segment? How many of these are leaders? How does this affect how your organization functions? What would you change, if anything?

Evolution Instead of Revolution

Adaptive leaders are evolutionary rather than revolutionary; i.e., they don't dump the existing good as they move forward.

1. They know the myths, the clients, the workers, the core beliefs.
2. They are able to see long-term patterns.

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3. They are able to position the future so that people see it as having more power, not less.
4. They are aware of trends. How fast are they coming? What could change them? What does the five and ten year future look like?
5. They use technology to concentrate energy. For example, adaptive leaders understand how technology changes homo sapiens, i.e., they may take advantage of the biological revolution driven by the explosive advances of genetics and molecular biology.
6. They change the definition of intelligence. They don't ignore the old I.Q. tools (which date back to early 20th century France) but they also note the appropriate models that measure people for today's challenges.
7. They change the idea of character, defining it not only by what one is in the family, but also by one's effect in the larger community.
8. They understand the economic shift and seek the efficient use of energy with emphasis on the knowledge worker.
9. They understand the demographic shift; how it thins out power by changing structure. Who's a human being? Why should we let her/him in? They eliminate boxes in favor of a more blended, common humanity.
10. They evidence their adaptable leadership by:
 - a. Increasing their sophistication and ability to handle technology and complexity.
 - b. Rapid bonding skills: communication, negotiation, listening.
 - c. Being more effective, doing more with less, and by bringing energy into the room and managing it.
 - d. Exhibiting a deep sense of justice and loyalty.
11. They practice globalization by becoming more European, focusing on quality instead of quantity; seeing balance as essential to the quality of life; resisting the role of adolescent cowboy in favor of growing up and dropping anti-intellectualism.

In your organization, who are the adaptive leaders? What specifically do they do to earn that sobriquet? Who are the non-official adaptive leaders, and what is their influence up and down the organization?

Changing the Culture

There is a time lag in our ability to process change. Technology moves fast. So does the economy. Demography doesn't move as fast, and culture moves quite slowly. We often become anxious and want to return to the myth or old way of doing things. But the new challenge is for us to become sewer rats: fast, deft, Zen masters, able to morph to fit the situation. Or Harry Potter:

- combining different forms and managing them
- discovering where to learn information and judge accuracy, ethics, truth
- building diverse teams
- having vision
- fostering redemption to be more of what we are in the best possible ways
- setting the world on a moral course with new tapestries, new civility and new contracts which are inclusive, increase access to information, increase intimacy and advance civilization

Cultural change is driven by globalization. "When the peasant learns to read, the King starts to look stupid." People are crossing cultures at a rate never before seen. In today's world, nearly everyone knows where the "stuff" is, and those with entrepreneurial spirit are willing to go get it, or provide for their kids to go get it. This represents a dramatic shift in world awareness, and there is no way to stop it. As long as the world tolerates economic structures that are unbalanced, mass migration and its accompanying destabilization will continue, engendering a huge world-wide philosophical shift in business and life.

Cultural change patterns that have affected business: 1930 – 2006

- 1930s – Unions and the labor movement. Shrinking the average industrial worker's week from 60 hours to 50 hours
- 1940s – OSHA and basic civil rights. The 40 hour work week
- 1950s – Martin Luther King: racial desegregation
- 1960s – Women's rights: equal pay for equal work
- 1970s – Animal theology: penalties for treating animals unkindly
- 1980s – Americans with Disabilities Act: laws requiring access for disabled persons
- 1990s – Legal protections for gender minorities. Telecommuting
- 2000s – The digital worker who handles problem solving while technology handles production

How does your own organization pay attention to cultural shifts? How much of the attention is "real," and how much is lip service? If there is a significant gap, what can be done about it? By whom?

Doing Business In The Twenty-First Century

Irrespective of generation, industry, or demography, the ingredients of a satisfying job are:

- *Interesting and challenging work.*
- *Management that makes employees feel they are important as individuals.*
- *Never being bored at work; opportunities to learn.*
- *Management that provides feedback on performance.*
- *Rewards strongly related to performance.*
- *Management good at setting goals.*
- *Status and personal growth.*
- *Opportunities for advancement and independence.*
- *Consistent success in your jobs.*
- *Getting along with your boss, comfortable with work team.*
- *Management that avoids crisis management.*
- *Management that assigns reasonable work loads.*

Therefore, organizations that will flourish in the 21st Century must serve as:

- exemplars for other institutions in society.
- global citizens acting locally, while thinking globally.

- advocates of the living economy, practicing their social and resource accounting.
- organizations committed to serve, aware of their identity as producers of moral effects.
- communities of wellness, aware of the full range of corporate stakeholders.
- models of environmental concern.
- pioneers in appropriate technologies, skilled in technology assessment.
- organizations led by biopoliticians who are fully aware of their responsibility to realize the destiny of modern men and women.

Jennifer James' Change Management Check List

Use the following check list to evaluate your own organization. It can sharpen your ability to see reality and to adapt to it.

1. *What do the leaders pay attention to and talk about: Identify their actual priorities vs. what gets lip service.*
2. *How are rewards and status determined? Who gets bonuses, special trips or opportunities, the best work space, and why? Does performance make the difference, or is it who you know that matters?*
3. *Compare what the company's training programs teach its managers with the actual behavior of executives who are the role models. Is their style workaholic, aggressive and secretive, or balanced, equalitarian and decent?*
4. *How do the leaders conduct themselves – like colleagues or like kings?*
5. *How does management respond to organizational crises? Who is blamed, who is downsized (management or labor), is there cooperation or conflict?*
6. *Have the recruitment, selection, promotion and retirement policies favored one group, or have they promoted diversity? Who has been hired, promoted, sidelined or fired in the last five years?*
7. *What is the nature of the organization's structure, systems and procedures? How long is the rules list, how dense are the regulations? Can you talk to just about anyone: Is there support for empowered team building and risk taking: Does the organizational chart look like a pyramid, or has it been flattened?*
8. *How do the formal statements of organizational philosophy compare to reality? Does the action match the motto on the company coffee cups? When was it last updated?*
9. *What impression is created by the company's building and the layout of physical space? Do visitors see a fortress with cubicles for the workers and carpeting that leads to the executives: Or is it open and inviting for everyone?*
10. *What goes on at company meetings and conferences, where are they held and who is invited? What do such gatherings say about who is important, who is worth spending money on?*
11. *What are the stories that company leaders tell about important events and people in the organization's history? Who is remembered at special events? What does this tell you about the company?*

