

## Responding to Uncertainty: An Adaptive Leadership Perspective

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*Dr. Jacqueline A. Areola is an academic professional, community leader, author, and public servant whose work reflects a deep commitment to education, service, and personal development. Born on June 7, 1973, in Cebu City, Philippines, she has built a career grounded in perseverance, compassion, and purpose-driven leadership. A widow and mother of five, she draws strength from her Roman Catholic faith and Filipino values, which shape both her personal life and professional practice.*

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Based on my experience as a teacher, government worker, and academic, the effectiveness of adaptive leaders does not come from their title, position, or specialized knowledge, but rather from their thoughtful response to changing environments. An adaptive leader can be effective in complex environments where there are no immediate or obvious solutions to the problems presented. The characteristics that define effective adaptive leaders include discernment, flexibility, and value-based actions.

Adaptive leadership is less about providing immediate answers and more about helping others learn and engage with the process of transforming through change. An adaptive leader helps people and organizations change how they think, behave, and do things so they can adapt to new situations. Adaptive leaders know that many leadership challenges require significant time and energy from leaders and their followers and cannot be addressed by quick fixes or temporary solutions.

Agile leadership and adaptive leadership work well together. Agile leaders focus on moving quickly through iterations and responding rapidly to change, while adaptive leaders help people build the capacity to engage constructively and navigate uncertainty. In contrast to the other, adaptive leadership provides leaders with a means to develop a clear vision while keeping in mind their roles and responsibilities to others, and with the tools and resources to effect change. Technical challenges are relatively straightforward and can be resolved by following prescribed technical procedures. Adaptive challenges require leaders to help people change their value systems, beliefs, roles, and behaviors, shifting from expecting compliance to fostering collective learning. Leadership, in this

sense, is a method of systematically engaging with complexity rather than relying on control.

Adaptive leaders create the conditions in which people confront reality, take accountability for themselves and others, and fully participate in the transformation. While leaders can provide a stabilizing element for organizations, the true adaptation will only happen when there is courage, compassion, and shared accountability.

Additionally, scholars have noted that adaptive leadership involves balancing appropriate levels of pressure to drive change without placing workers or organizations under excessive stress. Leaders must exercise judgment and emotional self-control when creating pressure and providing space for difficult conversations about necessary change.

From a broader leadership perspective, adaptive leadership aligns with learning-based approaches and, in some cases, has forced leaders to be more accountable and transparent about what needs to be preserved and what needs to be changed to ensure that adaptive efforts reinforce the organization rather than destabilize it.

In summary, adaptive leadership is not a leadership style but rather is the inherent responsibility of a leader. Adaptive leadership supports agile leadership by ensuring that leaders intentionally develop value-driven, people-focused, responsive actions. Adaptive leadership is about addressing the complicated people aspects of change and enabling organizations to navigate complexity with purpose, integrity, and resilience.