Aware of Ourselves as Connected, Adaptive Leaders

Session Four

Online 2020-21

Excellence in
LEADERSHIP

Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world

Aware of Ourselves as Connected, Adaptive Leaders

Session Four Participant Outcomes:

1. Choose a situation where you felt shamed and describe how practices of shame resilience can be helpful for individual growth.
2. Describe a situation in which you have a leadership role and how you might use the 'Critical Mass Theory'.
3. Discuss how the trust model can be used in your setting to improve communication and move forward with action items.
4. Through journaling, reflect, compare, and contrast the similarities and differences between human culture and God's reign. Note the necessary shifts in DNA that might need to evolve in order to align with God's reign.

Preparation for this Session:

- Conduct Renewal/Apostolate Interviews in your faith community.
- Continue to read *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown.
- Continue to read *Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ron Heifetz.
- Read this section of the manual.

Found in this Session:

Practices to Become Who We Really Are

Jesus' ministry begins with his baptism. In his baptism, he is immersed in his identity as God's beloved Son. Baptism is also a word used in terms of dying cloth—immersing the material until every fiber takes on the new color. Jesus soaks in God's love for him until every fiber of his being believes it, knows it, and acts on it. His true nature is revealed to his closest friends on the mountain of the transfiguration where once again the voice of God reaffirms Jesus' identity as Beloved Son. This is our journey as well, especially as Christian leaders, to find ways to soak ourselves in our true identity as God's beloved children until all the false personas, shame shields, myths of unworthiness, sins and mistakes are washed away; and we believe, know, and act on the truth of our beloved-ness. Before Jesus jumped into his ministry, he spent time alone in the wilderness to practice knowing this truth through and through in dependence on God alone.

Spiritual guides invite us into intentional practices which help with this process of dropping our false selves which include our sins, shame, and personas. Such practices always include prayer, self-reflection, meditation, and specific ways to deal with our personal attachments. All these practices are meant to help us awaken to who we are in God.

Brené Brown, in *Daring Greatly*, offers specific practices to help us deal with ways we are caught up in shame. Depending on our proclivity to shame, she offers ways to neutralize the shame and begin to see ourselves differently. Practices of gratitude, mindfulness, setting healthy boundaries, and cultivating connections with others are among those that bring about the most change. She also talks about cultivating values which touch us deeper than just our behavior. Values of honesty, integrity, respect, accountability, gratitude, and setting limits help us to become more of who we were created to be and to connect in meaningful ways with one another.

Through the ages, saints and sages have offered us wisdom to help us awaken to our true selves. Spiritual practices – being present, listening, being open to transformation, humility, dependence on God, openness to creation, meditative reading of Scripture, fasting, generosity, and silence – break open our hearts so that we might know more fully that each of us are beloved by God.

Critical Mass Theory

Critical Mass Theory helps us to understand what it takes to get a new initiative off the "drawing board" and into implementation. The diagram below shows the importance of getting the right people engaged to reach a "tipping point" of change in a community.
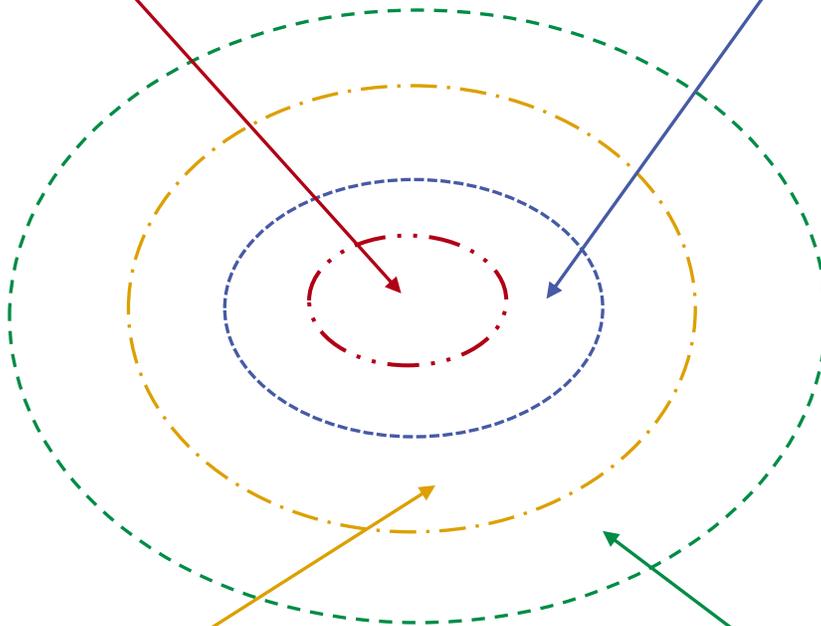
[A] High Competence and Commitment
People invested in all aspects of the organization's life; high degree of emotional maturity, competence, and commitment.

[B] Supporters
- Not as invested as the core.
- Possibly somewhat less competent or committed, yet are "with you" in the effort.
- Are aware of community values and norms and have decided to participate.

[C] Just Going Along
May have mixed feelings regarding commitment; may want to "just do my job" (the job defined in very narrow terms); competence may be in limited areas; may "go along" with culture at the center.

[D] Cynicism, Counter-dependency, Passivity
Most organizations have people that are not able or willing to take a healthy and productive stance. This may be a stance that the person typically takes or may be situational. We are all here at times.

The goal within organizations is to build a "critical mass" of people with outlooks in the first two categories: **High Commitment and Competence** and **Supporters**. To achieve this goal, leaders must work to develop organizational processes, values, and norms that reinforce a productive, empowering, healthy, and life-giving culture. Healthy leaders will accept people where they are at and appropriately encourage them to develop their abilities and willingness to invest themselves more broadly and deeply. Shifting the culture toward health means that leaders must both invite people and yet also place boundaries on behavior that undermines the well-being of the community's culture.

Whether thinking about the whole ministry of a congregation, planning a new project, or creating ministry goals for an initiative outside the community of faith, critical mass theory will help you be more successful in achieving your goals. These categories are fluid and are only meant for analysis purposes. Don't use them to pass judgment or exclude anyone from participation in the ministry.

Developing Critical Mass

⇒ **Building a Core of Highly Competent and Committed People**
- Think through the list of stakeholders and be clear about the gifts and motivations of this core group of people. Elected leaders have significant influence on decision-making and productivity and therefore need to be part of this core group.
- Acknowledge and reward those who are in this group. Make sure that the people in this group find meaning and personal benefit in the work they are doing.
- Provide encouragement and regular training to support and develop the gifts this core group of leaders is sharing with the wider community.

> *Culture eats strategy for breakfast every morning.*
>
> Author unknown

⇒ **Focus on Developing and Strengthening a "Critical Mass"**
- Accept people in whatever stance they have taken and invite them to develop their skills and interaction with the community, and to invest themselves more broadly and deeply in the direction and ministry of the whole community.
- Be aware of how we invite people into deeper relationship with God and with one another.
- Set boundaries on behavior that undermines healthy congregational life.
- Avoid getting caught up in trying to "fix" people in the less helpful last stance of **Cynicism, Counter-dependency, Passivity**.

⇒ **Develop Processes, Values and Norms that Create a Healthy Congregational Culture**
- Pay attention for the opportunities to pen up the paths for increasing participation.
- Develop and articulate a clear vision that includes your mission, primary tasks, core values, and broad direction.
- Create processes for the congregation to reflect on its own life and the surrounding context in which the community is located.
- Nurture congregational integrity, staying true to who the community is as followers of Jesus, while adapting to new forces in the congregation and external environment.

⇒ **Include Everyone as Much as Possible**
- **Supporters** – Offer ongoing training and formation; seek and encourage people who are ready to go further in their spiritual life and connection to the ministry.

- **Just Going Along** – Try to include people with low levels of commitment. When people find meaning and purpose in the ministries of the congregation, well-being can increase and make a difference in daily life.
- **Cynicism, Counter-dependence, Passivity** – Ignore the negative stance if possible. If their attitude needs to be challenged, engage people one-on-one by listening to their views, then share your vision for the congregation and invite the person to join in making the vision work. If their stance and activities threaten the congregation's direction and culture, seek ways to create boundaries that limit their influence in the system.
- There may be people who appear to vacillate among stances, e.g., at times they seem to have high commitment and at other times they simply support the work of others. It may be possible to stabilize this by inviting the person to maintain a more consistent stance and offering help as required. Their vacillating may also be an indication that something is happening in their personal life that may need pastoral care. Don't be afraid to reach out with care and concern.

⇒ **Attend to the "Emotional Field" of the Congregation**

If the emotional center of the congregation is held by those with more destructive tendencies or a passive stance, the priority will be to shift those at the current center and establish a "critical mass" of healthy and emotionally mature people. Congregations or subsystems of the congregation can find themselves captured by a form of emotional coercion by people motivated by anxiety or unrestrained ego. Others who may be more committed, competent, or emotionally mature may back away from leadership.

⇒ **Discern the Shape of the System Needed to Accomplish the Congregation's Mission**

Most congregations can tolerate a certain amount of just going along or even displaying cynicism, enmeshment, or passivity. Consistently selecting or rewarding people of higher competency may not always be possible. The goal for healthy leaders is to work with the people who show up, with all their gifts and brokenness, and slowly, over time, encourage and challenge them toward ever increasing relationship capacity.

This tool can also be used to assess the health of a congregation. Within a leadership group, you might want to use this tool to analyze levels of support. Do you have enough people in the healthier categories to move forward on an initiative, or do you need to do some pre-work to get more people on-board?

Trust Development

When any group forms (new Council, task force, working team, call committee), trust is one of the most critical ingredients. Developing trust doesn't necessarily just happen. Leaders must be intentional about structures, processes, and behavioral norms by which the group will function, and trust will grow.

Using congregation Councils as an example, most committees are not formed from scratch. Usually, members are continually going off and coming on an already established group. New members cannot be expected to immediately trust. Rather, trust must be tended to and nurtured if the group is going to work well and achieve desired ministry goals.

The following Trust Development table outlines a bottom to top path which names four steps needed in creating trust within a group. The bottom blocks form the foundation for the higher blocks. A sense of inclusion and acceptance leads to an open flow of information. Better communication leads to shared direction. Everyone pulling in the same direction builds internal commitment from individuals on the committee, which allows the whole group to function well as a cohesive whole. If you find your team is experiencing a breakdown in any one of these areas, assess that step as well as the steps below. One thing leads to the other.

The Target	The Issues	Examples
Internal Commitment	• Empowering the team to own the ministry • Increase authority with increased competence, commitment, and maturity • Mutual influence and accountability	• Create self-managing teams and a collective voice structure • Train in decision-making, action-planning, and negotiation • Review leadership roles and decision-making process
Shared Direction	• Decisions based on options • Free choice, not coercion or habit • Renegotiable	• Develop creative solutions and strategies • Move in the direction of the present team • Openly explore pressures felt to move in various directions • Be willing to revisit decisions
Open Flow of Information	• Openness of relationship climate • Offer useful and timely information • Conveners, facilitators, and leaders approach the group with a listening stance	• Create structures/processes to address pressure points, hear unspeakable, and establish norms • Train leaders in facilitation, use of newsprint, conducive environment • Train the group in feedback and communication skills
Inclusion and Acceptance	• Acknowledge people and the time they are offering • Connect to primary task and vision • Acceptance of the objectives of this meeting • Accept each person's role in relation to task • Acknowledge organizational culture re: information flow, decision making, degree of self-management	• Establish check-in and greeting norms • Respect people's time by keeping the task in front of the group • Review meeting objectives, test affirmations, and concerns • Allow people to participate in ways they most feel comfortable • Provide clear information about the culture of the group

Community Identity and Culture – "DNA"

DNA is something we are born with and defines our uniqueness. It is core to our identity and distinguishes us from others. The same is true for communities of people. Faith communities are born from the Holy Spirit working through a group of founders of the community. These leaders establish (consciously or unconsciously) the originating values, culture, purpose, social context – the things essential to survival and mission. As the community grows and changes, it adapts to new members, changing context, and redirection of purpose and mission. With these adaptations, some of the DNA shifts. The core identity usually remains the same, but some of the culture begins to evolve. Determining what is essential to a group's identity and what can be adapted is part of the work of adaptive leadership.

The discernment that guides adaptive leadership seeks to clarify core values, name founding myths, expose unhelpful assumptions, and discover an emerging purpose for the community. We need courage and persistence to shed our own perceptions and to gather the data that will guide us to discern what is essential and what is adiaphora[1]. The identity of the community has to do with the essential characteristics of its being: i.e., Christian, Lutheran, geographic location, neighborhood demographics, core values of Christianity, etc. Articulating these characteristics and what they mean to the group deepens the sense of community and adds to the collective identity.

Culture has to do with the way things are done, how decisions are made, and what beliefs are priority. Edgar Schein has studied culture in organizations and believes that there are three layers to culture.

- **Artifacts** are real things such as buildings, ways of communicating, practices, structures, etc.
- **Espoused values** are the beliefs, which may or may not be practiced, but are used in defining culture.
- **Deeper assumptions and myths** drive the beliefs and artifacts. These deeper assumptions may not be overtly stated but are the foundation of the community. Mining these depths may require the assistance of outside, objective eyes to see what has become unconscious to those within the group. Leaders must work hard to know all three layers of the community's culture.

The adaptive leader's challenge is to work with the community to discern what is essential for the ministry to thrive in their mission. In order to successfully lead the community into a healthy future, the leader must attend to three critical questions:

1) What needs to be conserved in the ministry in order to maintain its essential identity?
2) What no longer serves the congregation's mission in the current context, and what needs to be let go of in order to flourish in the emerging context?
3) What needs to be added or rearranged for the sake of thriving into the future?

---

[1] Greek for non-essential. Luther uses this concept as he finds himself more and more at odds with the Holy Roman Empire.

This deeper work is necessary for the long-term health of the congregation and requires more than just starting a new program to attract a new demographic group. This work calls for learning more about the congregation's functioning and identity. This work requires discerning ways forward that align with the congregation's current make up, identity, and purpose, while attending to the values and calling of God's reign. **The first step** is intentionally observing what is going on within the congregation, as well as in the local context. The **second step** is interpreting the data gathered in the observation, and then designing an action plan that provides an opportunity for the community to grow spiritually. The **final step** is to implement the designed plan. Once the plan has been implemented, the cycle of *observing*, *interpreting*, and *acting* begins again. We are called to this continual process of learning and adapting for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel to the world that hungers for the Good News.
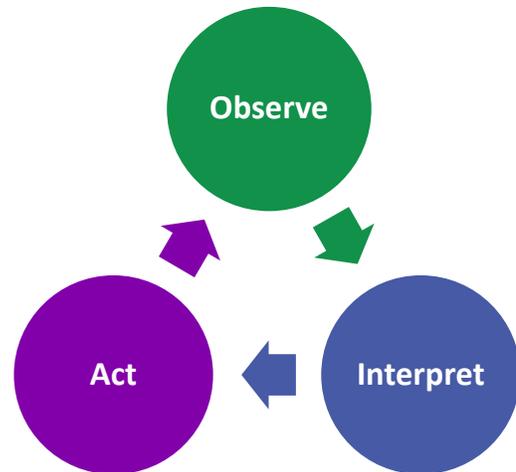
References for this Section

- Brown, Brené, *Daring Greatly*, Penguin Random House, 2012.
- Gallagher, Robert, *Fill All Things*, Ascension Press, 2008.
- Heifetz, Ronald, *Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Harvard Business Press, 2009.
- Schein, Edgar, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, 2004.