

Worksheet 3h.A1

Competency: Problem Solving— Through an Adaptive Lens

Adaptive and technical challenges are quite different. See below for an explanation of the distinctions between adaptive and technical challenges, then move to the questions to analyze your issue through an adaptive lens.

Technical Challenge	Adaptive Challenge
Perspectives of major stakeholders are aligned	Because families often have multiple risks or co-occurring needs, child welfare agencies must cooperate and collaborate with other entities. At times, this can mean working with others who have different perspectives or services. For instance, a mental health agency may propose a wraparound solution that a child welfare agency does not believe will be effective in a case of maltreatment; a substance abuse program may not focus on the impact of abuse on parenting; a mental health perspective might focus on treatment and medication; a juvenile justice agency focuses on community accountability and safety. As a result, leadership is not as easy, because legitimate perspectives must all be considered.
Definition of problem is clear	Because each agency has different perspectives about what the problem is, each agency must be at the table to define the challenges.
Solution and implementation of the solution is clear; knowledge for how to solve the problem exists	Find new ways of looking at and implementing a solution by exploring and understanding the various perspectives represented at a collaborative table. Find ways to maximize all available resources from various agencies, determine where the gaps are, and then identify other needed resources.
Primary locus of responsibility for organizing the work is leadership	In technical solutions, the leader proposes the answer. In adaptive work, the leader cannot solve the problem alone. Moving forward to develop and provide individualized responses to families and children requires a shift in the values, attitudes, and behaviors of those around the table. It is not enough to have all parties at the table. The child welfare leader has to create the environment for new learning to occur.



Examples of Technical and Adaptive Challenges

(1) Improving productivity through distribution of better technology.

- Provide new laptops to all casework staff (Technical)
- Help new users understand the value of technology in social work; overcome their uncertainties (Adaptive)
- Foster openness to changing how work is done (Adaptive)
- Train staff in using new software and hardware (Technical)

(2) Implementing strengths-based assessments.

- Change values to focus on the strength of families rather than their challenges (Adaptive)
- Create a new intake form (Technical)
- Use strength-based language on the form (Technical)

(3) Increasing parent/family involvement.

- Make sure families receive notice of meetings (Technical)
- Recognize that families drive the decision process (Adaptive)
- Make child care available so parents can attend (Technical)
- Foster values and attitudes that are inclusive of families (Adaptive)

(4) Promoting cultural responsiveness.

- Value each other's point of view (Adaptive)
- Demonstrate acceptance of diverse cultural beliefs (Adaptive)
- Translate brochures and other materials (Technical)
- Make interpreters available at all times (Technical)

Questions for Looking Through an Adaptive Lens

1. Whose values, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors have to change in order for progress to take place?
2. In what ways might those changes be difficult or painful to those involved?
3. What shifts in priorities, resources, and power are necessary?
4. What sacrifices need to be made, and by whom?
5. What adaptive work must take place to lay the foundation for reaching a shared vision (e.g., learning a common language of change, building trust, creating an environment for open sharing, etc.)?

Reference

Based upon: Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

