

Managing Change: Six Principles for Creating Adaptive Organizations

Assuming your student organization either needs or desires changes in direction, goals, or values, the following list suggests key leadership tactics during uncertain times.

Gain a New Perspective:

- Take a seat on the balcony instead of the playing field.
- Think globally about your organization, its direction, and the students you lead.
- Try not to get caught up only in day-to-day business.

Identify Challenges:

- Listen carefully to those inside and outside the organization: what are key beliefs, values, and concerns?
- What are the major conflicts within the group? What are your personal conflicts?
- How do the leaders in the group embody the challenges faced by the organization? Do you live up to the emerging ideals?

Regulate Distress:

- The ‘Pressure Cooker’ concept: let your members use creativity to begin change in the group and let them feel external pressures within a range they can stand.
- Gradually orient members to new roles, values, and processes.
- Stay cool. Tolerate the frustrations and uncertainties gracefully.

Maintain Disciplined Attention:

- Encourage members to listen carefully to one another. Appreciate differences.
- Avoid personal attacks, scapegoating, denial, or work avoidance.
- Focus on the big questions. “Disciplined attention is the currency of leadership.”

Give the Work Back to People:

- Let all members take part in defining and solving emerging problems.
- Build confidence. Support members during successes AND failures.
- Grow and build upon experiences.

Protect Voices of Leadership from Below:

- Allow members in non-leadership positions to speak out.
- Try not to feel threatened if ideas come from even the least experienced group member. Let everyone take part in the process of change.

Adaptive Challenges: “Changes in societies, markets, customers, competition, and technology around the globe are forcing organizations to clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating.”