

“The Perils of Adaptive Change,” quotes for Mix and Mingle

“...There are..a whole host of problems that are not amendable through authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high.”

“...adaptive challenges require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and deep-seated behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of real change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.”

“People cannot see at the beginning of the adaptive process that the new situation will be any better than the current condition. What they do see clearly is the potential for loss. When fears and passions run high, people can become desperate as they look to authorities for the answers. This dynamic renders adaptive contexts inherently dangerous.”

“When people look to authorities for easy answers to adaptive challenges, at best they get short-term order at the expense of long-term progress.”

“They expect the person in charge to know what to do, and under the weight of that pressure, those in authority frequently end up faking it or disappointing people, or they get spit out of the system in the belief that a new ‘leader’ will solve the problem.”

“In the face of adaptive pressures, people don’t want questions; they want answers. They don’t want to be told that they will have to sustain losses; rather, they want to know how you’re going to protect them from the pains of change.”

“In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations and in learning new ways, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amendable primarily to a technical remedy. You have to counteract their exaggerated dependency and nurture their courage and resourcefulness.”

“When you are in a position of authority, there are also strong internal pressures to focus on the technical aspects of problems. Most of us take pride in our ability to answer tough questions that are thrown our way. We get rewarded for bearing people’s uncertainty and want to be seen in a competent, heroic light. Yet raising questions that go to the core of people’s habits goes unrewarded, at least for a while...In fact, it may be a long time before you hear any applause—if ever.”