

## Adaptive Skills: Choosing your path to Learning & Leadership Excellence

PCI Briefing on keys to 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership and performance  
by Tell Muenzing

In this brief we provide an introduction to the importance of using transformation skills to adapt, grow and perform when encountering leadership challenges of the 21st century. Underlying it is a shift in learning and development that is required to achieve both learning & leadership excellence – reviewing assumptions and habits, and making a clear choice for the approach to how an individual and an organisation grows and develops.

This has implications for both leaders and executives in all areas including those specialising in development such as OD, L&D, Human Resources, and Corporate Sustainability, and the consultants and coaches who work with them.



### Two Trajectories of Learning - One Trajectory of Development

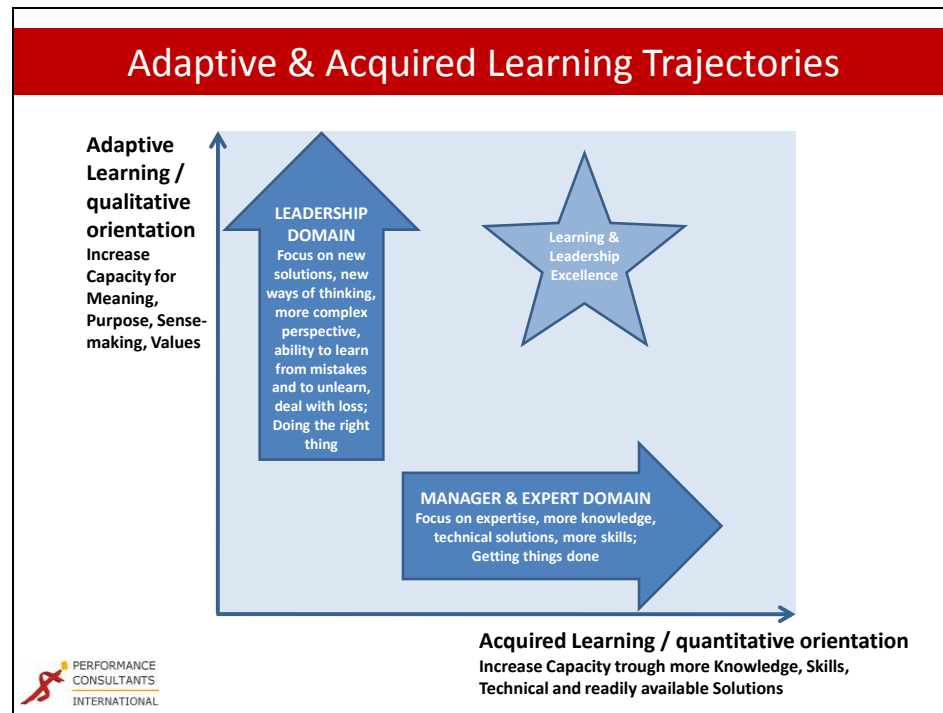
There are two fundamentally different approaches to developing ability through *acquired learning* and *adaptive learning*.

Most people are very familiar with the *acquired learning* style that we experience from school onwards. It imparts new knowledge and skills like learning the grammar and vocabulary of a new language, thereby expanding one's capability to speak with different people. In the same way sports or sales training improves your skills and provides new techniques to perform a new task more efficiently.

The *adaptive learning* opens the door to understanding and making sense of new situations and perspectives such as the values of other people and cultures; or enabled top professionals like Tiger Woods to reach the next level of their game of golf by unlearning an already successful golf swing and building-up a new one. In business, game changers like Apple create new value propositions, and build new business models and products like the i-pod and a new

sales channel for the music industry. In those instances, the learning encompasses and engages the whole system for new and more effective solutions.

The below depicts the two different learning trajectories and the desired trajectory of development that leads to Learning & Leadership Excellence:



Every one of us can define his or her natural learning and trajectory of development along those two trajectories of learning. Ultimately, personal benefits and strategic advantage derives from exploring and choosing a path towards 'Learning & Leadership Excellence', a mixture of the two different types of skills

Everyday experience makes clear that we need both kinds of learning. Yet when looking at the approach that schools and businesses choose, the acquired learning and training approach is clearly dominating.

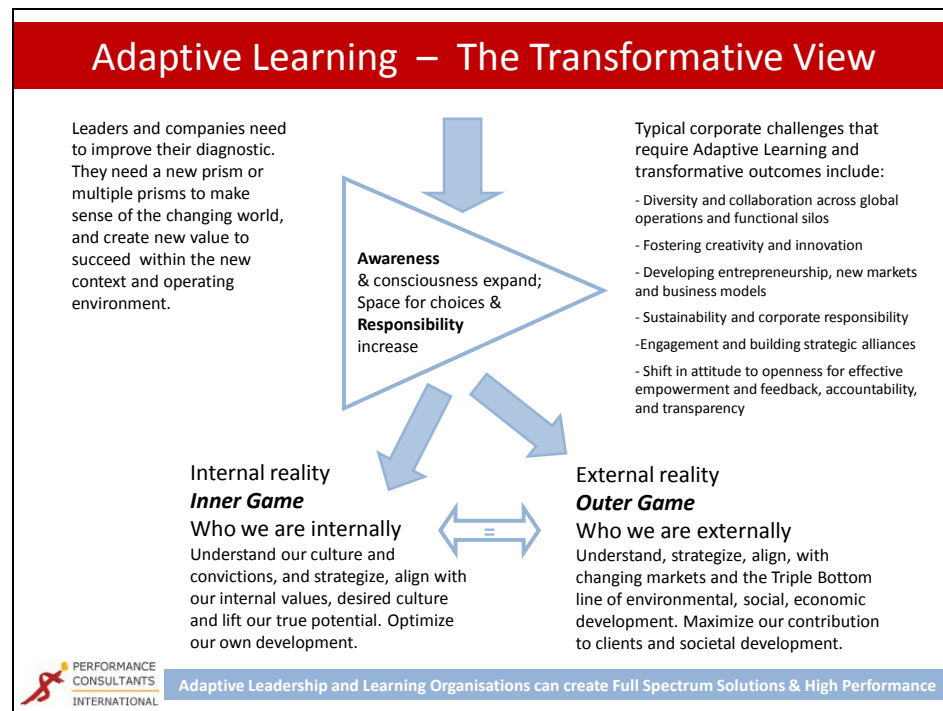
However, today's executives need to navigate through a mix of strategic, personal and cultural pressures, ever advancing technology, and a modern life that is rapidly changing our businesses and the ways in which they have to operate to be successful. In the face of lacking solutions and many unknowns Ronald Heifetz, from Harvard Business School, describes the leadership domain and calls for adaptive learning and leadership for transformative outcomes:

"Leadership is an activity. Leadership is what individuals do in mobilizing other people, in organizations or communities, to do what I call "adaptive work."...  
 When you have a problem or a challenge for which there is no technical remedy, a problem for which it won't help to look to an authority for answers - the answers aren't there - that problem calls for adaptive work."

*Ronald Heifetz*

So when mapping this dominance of acquired learning onto the actual challenges that business and individuals face, we get a picture that most of the challenges that leaders face in their roles are adaptive challenges. This points to the need for conscious decision-making around the type of required learning and the need to create a deliberate learning strategy for leadership and OD that mixes both skills.

## Adaptive Skills: The Keys to an Outstanding Future in Leadership



Through leaders acquiring adaptive skills as well as acquired skills, the organisation can become an Adaptive Learning Organisation. One that knows itself inside and out and thus be able to deliver on the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as achieving collaboration across global operations, fostering innovation, and creating true engagement both internally and externally.

## How to Acquire Adaptive Skills

### [Adaptive Skills for Leaders in the 21st Century](#)

A favourite with leaders, this 3 day training programme is an opportunity to work with Gita Bellin, the global pioneer of organisational transformation to take your leadership to a whole new level.

*“The transformation work completely changed the way the people interacted with each other and reacted towards the company . . . The work put us in a position as a company that we don’t think other companies had . . . we as a company thought that the nature of it was really ground breaking.”* Tom Boardman, Chief Executive, Nedbank Group Ltd (2003-2010)

Championed the world over by CEOs, managers and change agents, the programme develops excellence and maximum performance. A major focus is that of 'conscious leadership' through interaction tools, techniques and skills, and the experience and understanding of the concepts which empower leaders to transform the quality of life. As leaders transform so do organizations. Application of these concepts and skills to real-life situations including current personal and professional challenges prepares leaders for a further shift from 'command and control' to co-creative leadership that empowers the organisation to fulfil its potential.

<http://www.performanceconsultants.com/transformation-for-leaders-and-coaches>

### [Adaptive Skills for Coaches](#)

Transformational coaching creates adaptive skills in leaders and coaches wanting to develop to this level will benefit from this 3-day training programme. Coaches will be shown techniques to alter the root perspective from which we experience and respond to our thoughts and actions and the situations in which we find ourselves. The focus is on the mastering of the mind, the development of emotional and social intelligence, the power of acknowledgement and deepening the core coaching skills. By establishing trust, intimacy, accountability and high levels of empathy, presence and awareness, participants will be given the opportunity to take skills of coaching and mentoring to the next level, thus enabling individuals and organizations to move to a place of sustained excellence and maximum performance .

<http://www.performanceconsultants.com/transformation-for-leaders-and-coaches>

### [Adaptive Skills for Sustainability Professionals and CSR Consultants](#)

In the face of the size of the sustainability challenges and the complexity of its agenda, Sustainability Professionals and CSR Consultants need effective approaches for their stakeholders and clients, and more potent tools that can align the generation of high performance with the deep personal, organizational and societal transformation. This profound shift is available through transformation approaches and adaptive leadership but few people have a deep understanding of what transformation is or how to go about creating. In the above mentioned leadership programme you can seize the opportunity to study with the pioneer of transformation in the workplace and learn what transformation really is in a cross-fertilising group comprised of leaders and coaches.

<http://www.performanceconsultants.com/transformation-for-leaders-and-coaches>