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## Adaptive versus technical change

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Fullan (2003, 2005) cites Heifetz and Linsky (2002) to distinguish between technical and adaptive change. Technical change involves people putting in place solutions to problems for which they know the answers. While this can be difficult, it is not as difficult as adaptive change, which involves addressing problems for which they don't yet know the solutions. Adaptive change involves changing more than routine behaviours or preferences; it involves changes in people's hearts and minds. Because the change is so profound, adaptive change can result in transformation of the system.

*Every day people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides the answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require new experiments, new discoveries and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways - changing attitudes, values and behaviors - people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in new environments. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalise the change.*

Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, cited in Fullan, 2003, page 29, emphasis added  
According to Fullan (2005), "Addressing the problem of sustainability is the ultimate adaptive challenge" (page 14).

Because it conflicts with their deepest beliefs, adaptive change is a deeply unsettling process that can threaten people's sense of identity and lead to resistance.

*Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change asks people to question and perhaps refine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent. That's a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.*

Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, cited in Fullan, 2003, page 34

INSTEP *Adaptive vs. Technical Change*, <http://instep.net.nz/Change-for-improvement/Sustainable-change/Four-views-of-change/Adaptive-versus-technical>, accessed April 13, 2013.