



PROJECT MANAGEMENT  
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING  
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department



# WHAT THE HECK IS ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP ANYWAY?

*Bryan Miles and Darren Hoewel*  
*2020 Project Management Symposium*



Type in the chat...

**What kind of leader  
do you want to be?**



A leader is anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the **courage to develop that potential.**

- Brené Brown



*How do you show up?*



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# Core Values

Shaping Who We Are & How We Do Business

*Resilient*

leadership and  
operating model for  
our customers and our  
own organism

Making oneself

**vulnerable**

with the support of  
a great team and  
safe environment

*Freedom*

within guardrails to  
choose and do the  
right thing

**Personal Growth**

of our clients and employees

Diverse approaches  
and perspectives for

**adaptable**  
solutions

Embody an

*experimentation*

approach of not *why*, but  
WHY NOT innovation

And us goofballs who make it happen...



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# The Goofballs

Our Whole Imperfect Selves



*Resilient*  
adaptable  
vulnerable  
*freedom*

*experimentation*

Personal Growth



Ron Heifetz

“The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat *adaptive* challenges like *technical* problems.”

# Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges



## Technical

- Solution that's already known
- Solved by an expert/authority, tested procedures, norms, or systems



## Adaptive

- No known solution outside current knowledge
- Can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties

Most challenges involve **BOTH** technical and adaptive dimensions.




The problems  
lie **within**  
people...

The solutions  
lie **within**  
people too!



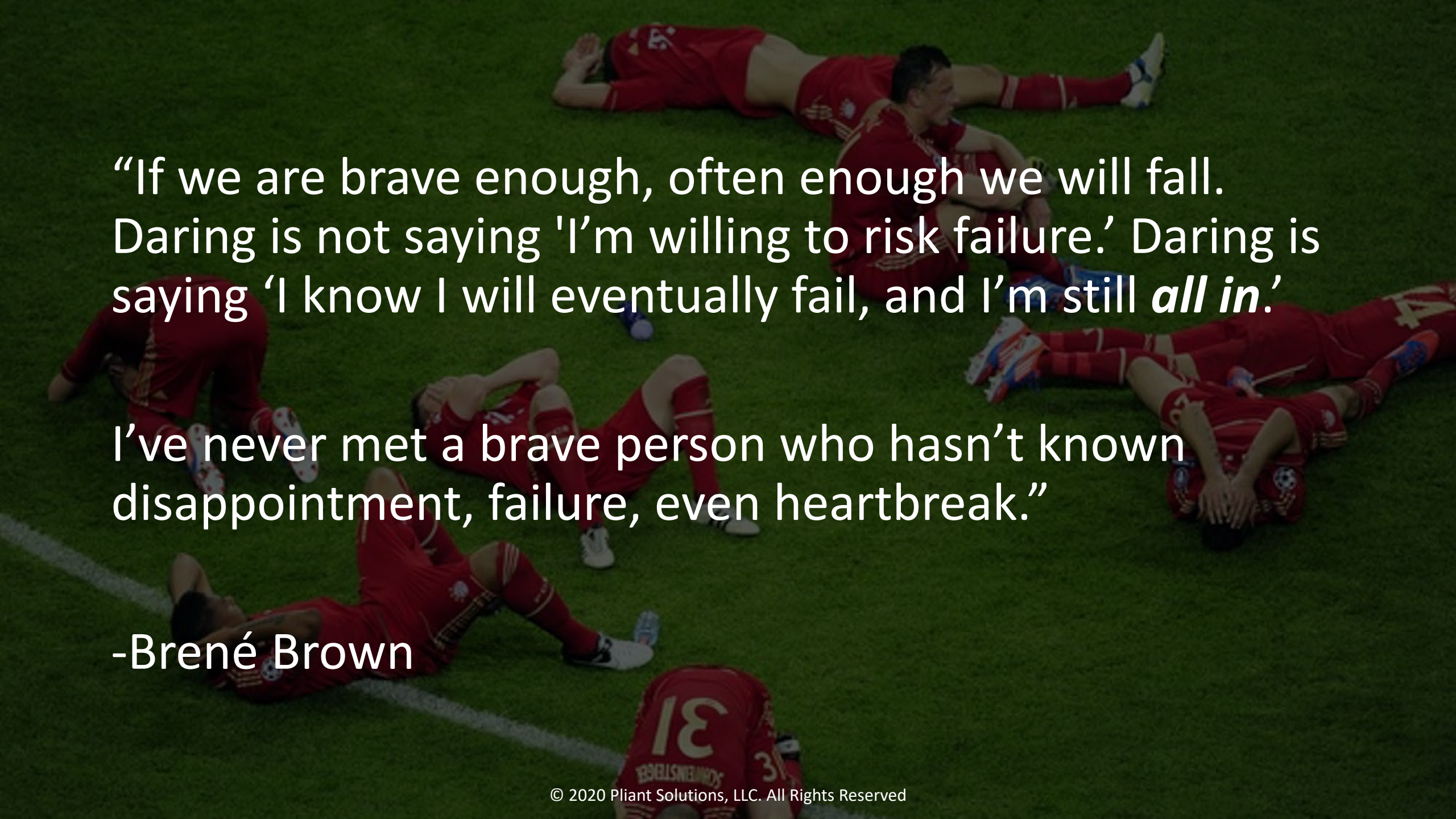
# Intervention Map

	Intervention	Focus	Success Criteria
Technical	Managing	Telling What to Do	Results Achieved
	Behavior Modification	Rewarding and Punishing	Action stops/starts
	Consulting	Problem Solving	Solutions
	Teaching	Providing Information	Information Shared
	Facilitation	Make Easier	All Voices Heard
Adaptive	Coaching	Offering New Perspectives and Actions	Long-term Excellence, Self-correcting, Self-generating
	Traditional Therapy	Addressing Emotions	Comfort with Feelings



# THE COURAGE TO DO THE DARING WORK...

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“If we are brave enough, often enough we will fall. Daring is not saying ‘I’m willing to risk failure.’ Daring is saying ‘I know I will eventually fail, and I’m still *all in*.’

I’ve never met a brave person who hasn’t known disappointment, failure, even heartbreak.”

-Brené Brown

# The Illusion of a Broken System

“There is a myth that drives many change initiatives into the ground: **that the organization needs to change because it is broken.** The reality is that any social system is that way because the people in that system **want it that way.** In that sense...the system is working fine, even though it may appear to be “dysfunctional” in some respects to some members and outside observers. **There is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization, because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets.”**



## Looking at Leadership through the lens of *Transformation* causes **PROBLEMS:**



**It encourages self-referential grandiosity. (I have a transformational vision and now I'm going to sell it to you.)**

Becomes about "me and my vision" rather than about the collective work to be done.

It skips the crucial step of listening to comprehend the gap between values, capacities, and conditions.

Begins with a solution and then views leadership as a sales problem of inspiration and persuasion.



**Transformation mindset tends to be ahistorical. It has little respect for the soil in which change ideas need to take root.**

It creates a cultural "immune reaction" that rejects and distorts the original idea.



**Emphasizing transformational change alone encourages passionate and courageous people to only seek big, systemic change.**

It causes leaders to discount the incremental and transactional day-to-day work of leadership.



People don't resist change...they resist loss.



# 3 Actions for Adaptive Challenges

- Figuring out what to keep from the past
- Figuring out what to discard from the past
- Inventing new ways to build from the best of the past



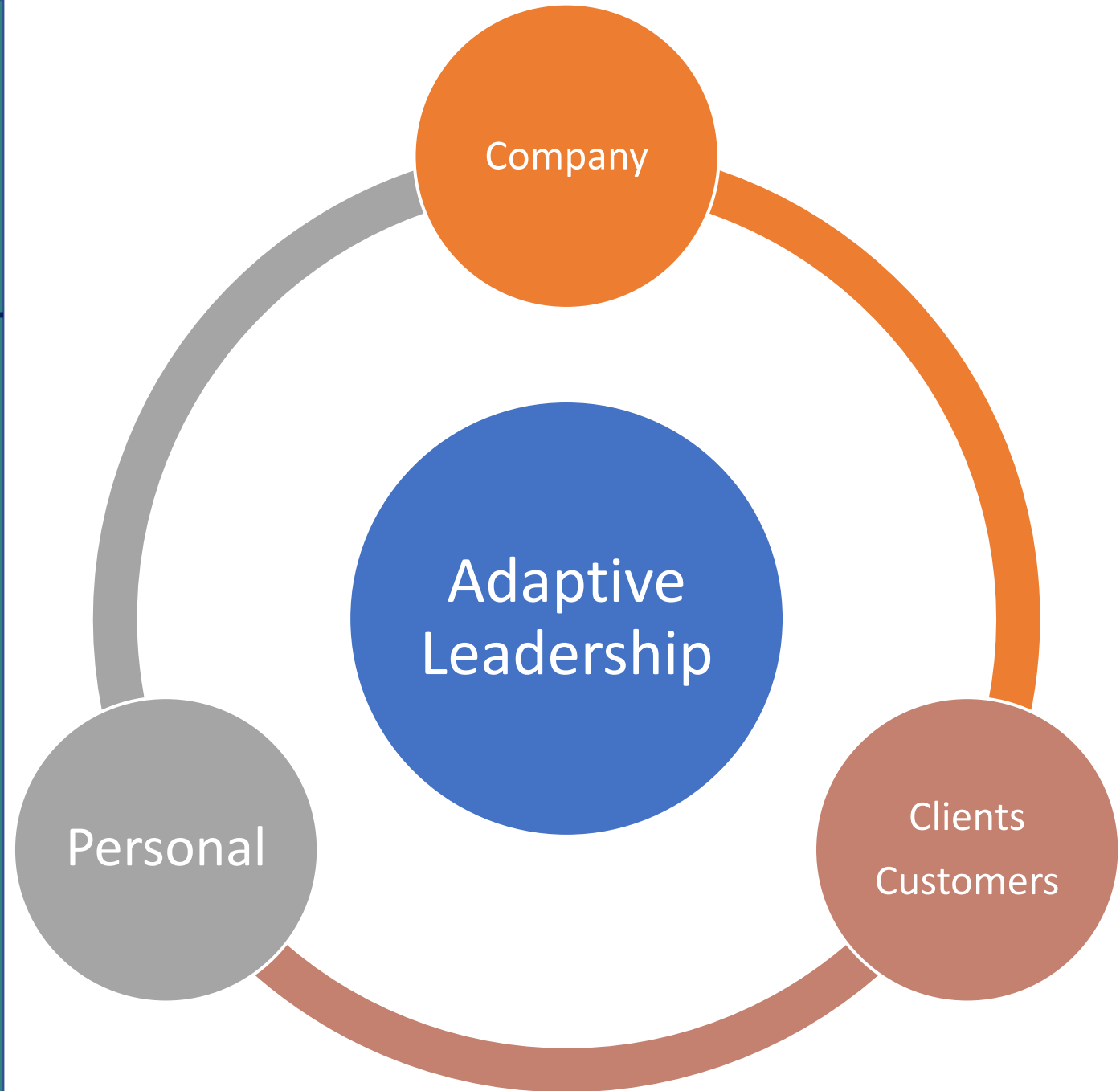


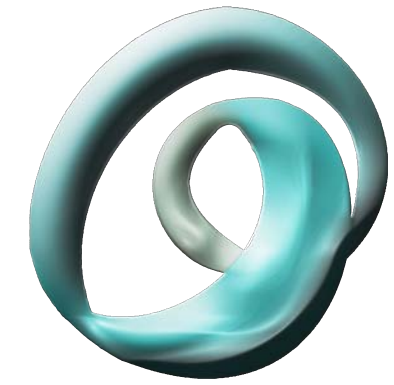


Move the needle  
a little bit each  
day.

# What does this look like for us?

Adaptive leadership is everywhere. It's not just a work thing...it's an "everything thing".





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## Our Vision

We aim to work with *purpose* and actually *give a damn—in the best possible way*. We aim to *exceed the needs of the client* by delivering *quality work* and our *best selves*. We will choose *interesting work*, and work with *interesting people*, and not grow just to grow. We will not sacrifice quality for margins. We are committed to *continuously improving* and *nurturing our whole selves*, because we, our company, and our clients benefit when each of us is *curious, balanced, personally growing*, and *feels secure within our tribe*.



Now you know.

Our  
challenge to  
you...

It's OUR responsibility  
to ask the tough  
questions and up our  
game.

If we don't do it...who  
will?



Pliant Solutions is an Agile and Lean consulting firm that closely collaborates with its clients and customers to define clear, measurable goals, integrate quality, accelerate delivery, and enable product innovation. We support and drive sustainable Agile maturity in both the public and private sectors through coaching, advisement, staffing, and training.

