

Tactical Management: Adapt, Adopt, Improve

By Richard A. Reda and Jean B. Lenderking

How to survive and succeed by adapting to changing conditions; adopting innovative and successful approaches and ideas; and by improving communications, interpersonal relations, and organizational effectiveness

ADAPT: High Adaptability Gives the Tactical Manager an Edge

Change is inevitable. Managers have a choice to be either ahead of the curve or to play catch up. While no one can predict the future, effective managers can be prepared, or at least be better positioned for it. One talent that can help a manager is the ability to adapt.

Most managers have the opportunity to exercise or develop this skill several times in their careers. Any time there is a change in leadership, whether it's a complete change as occurs in the Federal government when there is a change in the administration, or if it is merely the selection of a new supervisor, the incoming leadership will often change the direction of the organization, the policies or procedures followed, or the actual structure of the organization. In many instances, all three are changed.

New management, faced with what may be perceived as a dysfunctional organization, or at the very least, one that is not as productive as it could be, usually will revert to what it is familiar with—past successes. Where possible, they will bring in staff and other managers from their prior organizations.

They will impose procedures that were used in those prior organizations, and in almost every instance, will “reorganize” their new organization.

What they are actually doing is attempting to replicate their prior organization, rather than to appreciate the unique aspects of the new organization and to build on them.

Incumbent members of the organization can respond to all of this in one of two ways. They can assume the attitude of, “This, too, shall pass,” providing only lip service to the changes, waiting until the new regime moves on to other pastures, and hoping that things will eventually return to “normal.” Or they can commit to giving the new leadership their full support, doing whatever needs to be done to make the new processes work, provide options that constructively influence change and be effective.

Maintaining a high level of flexibility or adaptability gives the tactical manager an edge. Image yourself in the position of the newly arrived management team. Would you be more inclined to listen to and rely upon a team that appears to be waiting you out, or to one that is giving you honest feedback and making a sincere effort at implementing your programs?

One note of caution here, however—as a part of the organization under new leadership, you should avoid becoming what may appear as a “yes man.” You still need to provide sound advice and counsel your new management about opportunities as

Tactical Management

This is the last in a series of articles that describe the concept of **Tactical Management**, and the milestones that enable managers to focus on long term goals while addressing short term demands. This article looks at the cycle of continuous growth and next steps.

Previous articles can be downloaded from PDFs of the four previous 2004 issues of *Managing the Skies* located at www.faama.org.

well as the potential obstacles that may arise.

Regardless of whether or not you are “under new management” or just adapting to changes in resources, mission requirements, or process requirements, a good tactical manager is not confounded by change, but instead adapts to it, as a part of the business. Indeed, he or she may even play a key role in leading change.

ADOPT: Take Advantage of Different Points of View, Approaches, and Interests

Often, the concept of diversity is relegated to matters relating to traditional EEO issues. An organization is considered “diverse” when it has a balance

of women and minorities in its staff and management. Valuing diversity goes beyond this kind of limited definition, and includes valuing differing opinions, differing cultures, and differing perspectives.

If you and your supervisor think exactly the same way, and approach and solve problems in exactly the same manner, one of you is superfluous, and it's probably not going to be your supervisor.

Take advantage of the different points of view, the different approaches and the different interests each member brings to the table, and adopt those ideas and suggestions that work best for the organization as a whole. In solving problems, or in ensuring the survival or success of the organization, it is time to leave egos at the door. Collaborative leadership brings together diverse experiences and expertise to produce results that work best for the organization and produces results that reflect positively on those involved in such teamwork.

Another tool that can be used in the search for good ideas is that of benchmarking. Look to your peers, whether competitors or allies, across organization lines.

What has worked for them? Equally important—what has NOT worked for them? You can often learn more from other's failures than you can from their successes. Finding out what has not worked and why can not only save you time and resources, it can spark other ideas or modifications for consideration.

IMPROVE: Every Change Brings an Opportunity to Improve

The process of tactical management is not a one time approach. It is cyclical. Every change that confronts an organization brings with it an opportunity to improve.

An old adage is *times of change are times of opportunity*. Even when you



think things are stable, the process of re-examination, exchange of information, and evaluation of ideas can help improve current operations or may aid in preparing the organization for imminent additional changes.

While your own operation may not be anticipating any mandated changes, new approaches are being tried and implemented elsewhere, as well as changes in technology, or even just changes in ideas that may be of value to you or your organization.

Failing to continually challenge the members of your organization or failing to continually evolve, results in stagnation

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and complacency and costs more dearly later on when trying to catch up. No tool ever gets better by not being used.

The key to surviving and succeeding is to adapt to those changing conditions, adopt innovative, creative and especially successful approaches and ideas, and to improve communications, interpersonal relations, and organizational effectiveness. These approaches and the continuing, constructive participation of managers not only make the job more satisfying for each of us but also are critical to organizational effectiveness.✈

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