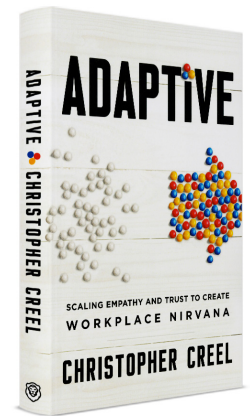


# Adaptive

Scaling Empathy and Trust to Create Workplace Nirvana

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## Contents

Unearthing An Adaptive Workplace

Page 2

The Birth Of Hierarchy

Page 2

Fixing What's Broken

Page 3

Coaching

Page 4

Common Hurdles

Page 4

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many people fear that the increasing presence of bots and automation in business is removing the human element of the work experience.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Christopher Creel's *Adaptive* shows definitively that by introducing bots effectively into our collaboration and organizational structure, then adapting that structure to be better served by them, we can free up employees to do the human tasks that they do best. This will in turn enhance your company's creativity, collaborative success, employee satisfaction, and business results in a measurable and transformative way.

The Adaptive method is all about identifying the power structures, lack of trust, and scalability issues that plague workplaces and organizations around the world to correct broken mindsets and foster business growth. It deals with the implantation of bots, but goes beyond this to identify the problems facing modern businesses and how they can truly adapt to rise above them.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to tackle ineffectual strategy execution plans.
- How to manage employees, including addressing underperforming individuals.
- How to correct tragically broken review processes.
- The impact of chatbots on how human beings interact with each other.

## Introduction

Many people fear the increased presence of collaboration technologies and smart chatbots in our lives. They fear that as bots begin to take over more tasks that have previously been handled by humans, humans will no longer have a role in the workplace or the world at large. But the truth is quite the opposite. The more robust and effective bots and robots become at handling automatic, robotic tasks, the more humans will be freed up to be, well, human. It will allow them to do human things, like help a colleague in the moment of a family crisis.

Still, many companies expect robotic executions from flawed human beings whose talents would be best used by completing “human” work. And as companies must move more and more quickly to keep up, the margin for error is much smaller.

It’s said that people are a company’s greatest resource, but the truth is that it’s the relationships between people that truly make a company great. These relationships should be constantly evolving, as static org charts are blunt instruments that attempt to describe the components of a machine while completely ignoring its most crucial element—the social network that actually gets stuff done.

Meanwhile, bots can orchestrate complex patterns of collaboration for ten to ten-thousand people or more. Bots working at this scale can facilitate collaboration among large groups of people to solve any number of problems, allowing employees, teams, and orgs to be as socially engaged and evolving as they should be.

## Unearthing An Adaptive Workplace

The Adaptive model outlined in the following sections consistently raises engagement scores within organizations where it’s implemented, as high as 40% or more. But for the principles to be effective, it must be seen as more than a one-and-done process. At the heart of the process is cultivating human beings and their relationships with one another. You must monitor the health of your teams and their relationships. You must ensure that your business thrives but also that the human beings who make it run and their relationships with each other thrive as well.

Too many companies today fail to recognize a fact that is right in front of their faces—businesses are organisms composed of individuals with gifts, passions, anxieties, challenges, and, most importantly, relationships. When we holistically address these things on an ongoing basis with

the Adaptive mindset, the results are profound.

The systems in the adaptive methodology require you to remain consistently on top of cultivating team members and relationships, but there is also an element of self-regulation and accountability—also facilitated by bots. This means that while administrative burdens will shrink dramatically, your focus on people and relationships will increase proportionally.

One major example of the power of the Adaptive model is the administering of an org chart versus coaching employees. The former is a rote task that most managers could do in their sleep, making it perfect for a bot. The latter requires creativity, focus, discipline, and mindfulness—the perfect task for a human being. The more repetitive work is offloaded to bots, the more time you’ll spend doing work that is mentally challenging but absolutely essential.

## The Birth Of Hierarchy

Why is work so often recognized as such a miserable experience? It could be argued that it’s due to the dehumanizing effect of expecting robotic performance from organic humans.

Meanwhile, hierarchical organizations result in power dynamics that draw out the worst behaviors in human nature. Rather than just treating the symptoms of such dynamics, we need to abandon these hierarchies in favor of a new model that can scale empathy and trust bolstered by dispassionate bots who target the disease itself.

In a fluid organization aided by AI and bots, value and knowledge are cultivated from the social network as a whole with organizational models that self-adjust based on sophisticated algorithms. By removing the human element from this piece of the puzzle, we remove damaging power dynamics from your organization.

Through the use of the adaptive methodology and by allowing bots to work the way they’re meant to work, we can organize our working lives in such a way that everyone wins. Employees will be more fulfilled, business leaders will be able to do a more effective job, and business results will improve in measurable and dramatic ways.

## Enter Technology

The transition away from a mechanical business philosophy is already underway. It’s just not being harnessed effectively because we didn’t fully understand the implications when it arrived.

But we're already solving big problems one micro-thin slice at a time, forming ephemeral teams and collapsing them within hours or days after tasks are completed, productive socializing that deepens bonds, and collaboration with smart chatbots as though they were coworkers.

Meanwhile, workplace demographics are changing at a breathtaking pace. As workforces continue to shift away from repetitive tasks (now handled by bots) and more towards positions requiring independent thought and creativity, the minds that excel in these roles will not thrive at the hands of hierarchical management. Business results will suffer as a result.

But for companies to adapt, bots need to speak with humans in a way that facilitates positive responses. This will require psychologists and speech therapists, who have already made bot dialogue much more beneficial than in its early days. Because bots now know how to deploy powerful dialogue in the exact moment that it's needed, entire companies can now begin moving towards workplace nirvana.

But to do that, these companies must first put in the effort to correct the things that are halting their progress and keeping them from enacting real change in their organizations.

## Fixing What's Broken

Adaptive organizations use self-determination for employees augmented by bots working in a robust collaboration platform to move fast and beat the competition. Companies like these can quickly crowdsource new collaborative patterns to achieve continuous, sustainable, and strategic change in order to solve massive challenges.

But there are things organizations must do to get ready for this kind of fluidity, or you won't be able to reap the full benefit—and could even end up being counterproductive in your efforts.

First, you need to change your behavioral defaults. You must learn (and teach your employees) to default to trust, rather than distrust. This also means that integrity should be an integral and celebrated trait at your company, as should transparency.

You also need to begin facilitating discussions, rather than ruling by edict. When a challenge or problem arises, don't simply dictate to your employees how you expect it to be solved. Begin a discussion. Encourage thoughtful feedback. Get people involved. Stop making work assignments and start observing, asking open-ended questions first and leading

questions second, and doing everything in your power to help employees become more autonomous and less tethered to that stake that tells them they are powerless underlings fulfilling the wishes of someone higher up the totem pole.

## The Golden Straitjacket

In his book, *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman argues that economic prosperity will come to countries that implement practices that force them to give up a certain level of sovereignty. He refers to this as the "Golden Straitjacket."

Similarly, staying competitive in the modern age of business requires that you implement certain practices that cause you to relinquish positional power, which is effectively sovereignty over your piece of the corporate landscape.

As you introduce collaboration platforms and augment your teams with bots, they will evolve from the mechanical business philosophy to an Adaptive one naturally, and without any additional help. Some organizations will do this in what seems like an instant, while the nature of others will mean that the process will take significantly longer.

But there are things you can do to move this process effectively and efficiently. First, document your culture. Be conscious of the culture of your organization and how it affects your process. Next, it's time to introduce a collaboration messaging platform. There are too many of these to weigh the pros and cons of each one, but find one that suits your organization and the culture you've just documented.

You will then need to establish ways that employees can manage their own time and tasks effectively, rather than requiring a great deal of oversight. Tools like Jira and GitHub are excellent for this.

You'll also need to find ways to 'flatten' your organization, meaning changing from a focus on control and territories to a focus on contribution to the overall strategy. How can each individual contribute to the team's effort to drive output? Conversations that would have been clashes can now become negotiations or collaboration.

## Data Analysis

While great leadership is somewhat of an art, there is a science to obtaining the information required to get a handle on what's really happening in your company to help you better lead and implement the Adaptive model. You need to gather important data that will help you optimally organize your network and grow individuals in ways that will serve both them and the company.

First, an organizational network analysis will obtain feedback on who the real power brokers are in your company. With this in hand, you'll be able to understand what your team really looks like—and how individuals function within it.

You can warm up to this analysis by building trust through quantitative analysis. Ask questions of your employees like:

- Whom do you work with to get stuff done?
- How often do you work with them?
- What is the priority of the relationship relative to your work?

These questions will allow you to rapidly map out how work gets done, independent of the org chart. Data analysis in general will help you look past hierarchy to understand what really is helping and hindering your organization's progress.

## Coaching

In business, 'coaching' is a word with lots of connotations. But it is really just a word for ensuring that your employees and team members are constantly learning. This doesn't always strictly mean learning about business concepts in general—it also means learning about their own performance, behaviors, relationships, and how they affect the people and processes around them. The heart of coaching is the belief that people are trying their best, and any failure is simply a failure to understand how to do that effectively.

Coaching resolves network connection blips that show up in your organization network analysis, and it provides a channel through which employees can grow outside of the traditional corporate ladder. But that channel must always

be built on trust—your employees should know that you'll follow through on coaching no matter what.

## Common Hurdles

Common roadblocks to adopting the Adaptive mindset include the silo mindset, which isolates teams from each other and resists the breaking up of hierarchy. Dissatisfied employees and internal competition can also lead to less-than-ideal Adaptive implementation. Companies that exist within traditionally hierarchical industries sometimes find this hurdle too difficult to overcome. The medical industry is a notable example of this.

Overcoming these hurdles requires experimentation. While the principles are universal, the tactics you take to implement those principles should be based on your own unique business, organizational structure, industry, and goals.

## Conclusion

We all know that business as usual is no longer working. A new model of business is essential, and the Adaptive model alleviates many problems by offloading administrative work to bots so that we can go back to being human with one another. It allows employees to feel their contribution matters; it makes work a more fulfilling, human experience; and it provides companies with a real edge over their competition.

Who would have thought that a bunch of quirky bots could help us all feel human again?



Christopher Creel has helped clients create leading research and development teams since 1995 for major companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Perot Systems, and CSC. In 2013 he launched a bold, 6-year experiment based on 8 years of research and development to answer one question - can collaboration technologies deliver a dramatically new level of adaptability through crowdsourced organizational designs? The results of the Adaptive experiment improved business results, increased employee productivity, and engagement, promoted collective and individual growth, and raised the general level of happiness in the workplace.

*Adaptive: Scaling Empathy and Trust to Create Workplace Nirvana* by Christopher Creel  
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