

3.5. Take responsibility for casualties

Adaptive change results in casualties: people in the organization who lose something they value, whether it is a familiar way of doing things, status, jobs, or in the military, their lives. If you are trying to exercise adaptive leadership, you will need to shoulder responsibility for these inevitable casualties. That means paying attention to them: spend time with them, acknowledge your role in their difficulties, and find ways to help them endure the experience or get on with their lives in another way.

3.6. Protect and engage the voices of dissent

The voices of dissent are naysayers, the skeptics, who not only question this initiative but question whatever is on the agenda for today. They are princes of darkness, often resting on the negative. But they are valuable for implementing adaptive change because they are canaries in the coal mine, early-warning systems, and because in addition to being unproductive and annoying much of the time, they have the uncanny capacity for asking the really tough key question that you have been unwilling to face up to yourself or that others have been unwilling to raise. How can you protect the voices of dissent? If you have formal authority in your organization, keep in mind that when someone expresses a contrary idea or asks a disturbing question during a meeting or conversation, everyone will observe your response to decide how they should react. Thus it is vital to demonstrate openness to seemingly subversive or revolutionary ideas. If you are not in an authority role, you can still protect dissenters by taking them seriously and listening to them, trying to find the useful insights in what they're saying without necessarily endorsing their perspective.

Worksheet: strategies for acting politically

1. Allies

Who might be your allies?	Why might they be allies?	What's their main objective? (Support you? The initiative itself? The organization?)	How can this ally best help you successfully implement your intervention?

2. Opponents

Who might be your opponents?	Why might they be opponents?	What do they stand to lose if your initiative succeeds?	How might you neutralize their opposition or get them on your side?

3. Senior authorities

Who are the senior authorities most important to your intervention's success?	Why are they important?	What signals are they giving about how the organization perceives your intervention?	What might you say or do to secure their support as your initiative is being implemented?

4. Casualties

Who will be casualties of your intervention?	What will they lose?	What new skills would help them survive the change & thrive in the new org.?	How might you help them acquire those skills?	Which casualties will need to leave the organization?	How could you help them succeed elsewhere?

5. Dissenters

Who are the dissenters in your organization – those who typically voice radical ideas or mention the unmentionable?	What ideas are they bringing forth that might be valuable for your intervention?	How might you enable their ideas to have a hearing?	How can you protect them from being marginalized or silenced?