



Leading Change When There's No Protocol

From Decisive Action to Adaptive Leadership

Dr. Trevor Maber

Edwards School of Business (University of Saskatchewan) | [ODAlchemy.com](https://www.odalchemy.com)

PSCS 2026 Convention | May 13, 2026

Scenario A:

Patient in cardiac arrest.

You know exactly what to do. ACLS protocol. Airway.
Compressions. Defib. The protocol thinks for you.



Scenario B:

Your best paramedic walks into your office.

Fifteen years. Exemplary record. “I’m done. I’m leaving.
And so are three others on my team.”



There’s no protocol down here...!

The Saskatchewan Situation

1,132

Code NAA Events

No Ambulance Available (2023)

45%

Call Volume Growth

since 2019

300+

Drug Toxicity Deaths

2025

150+

Vacant Positions

province-wide

1 in 4

Paramedics Screen

positive for PTSD

1,850

Licensed Paramedics

serving 1.2M people

650K km²

Served By

106 ambulance services

3 models

SHA + Medavie + Private

mixed delivery system

\$460M+

Invested in Health Workforce

since 2022

Yesterday with David

The Inner Game

Who you are as a leader

Your resilience, your presence

Mental fitness and accountability



Today

The Outer Game

What you do when there's no clear answer

Navigating complexity as a leader

Expanding your leadership repertoire



Two Kinds of Challenges

Technical Problems

- Known solution exists
- Expertise finds the answer
- Authority can implement
- People are receptive

*CPR Algorithms • ePCR
Dispatch Triage*



Adaptive Challenges

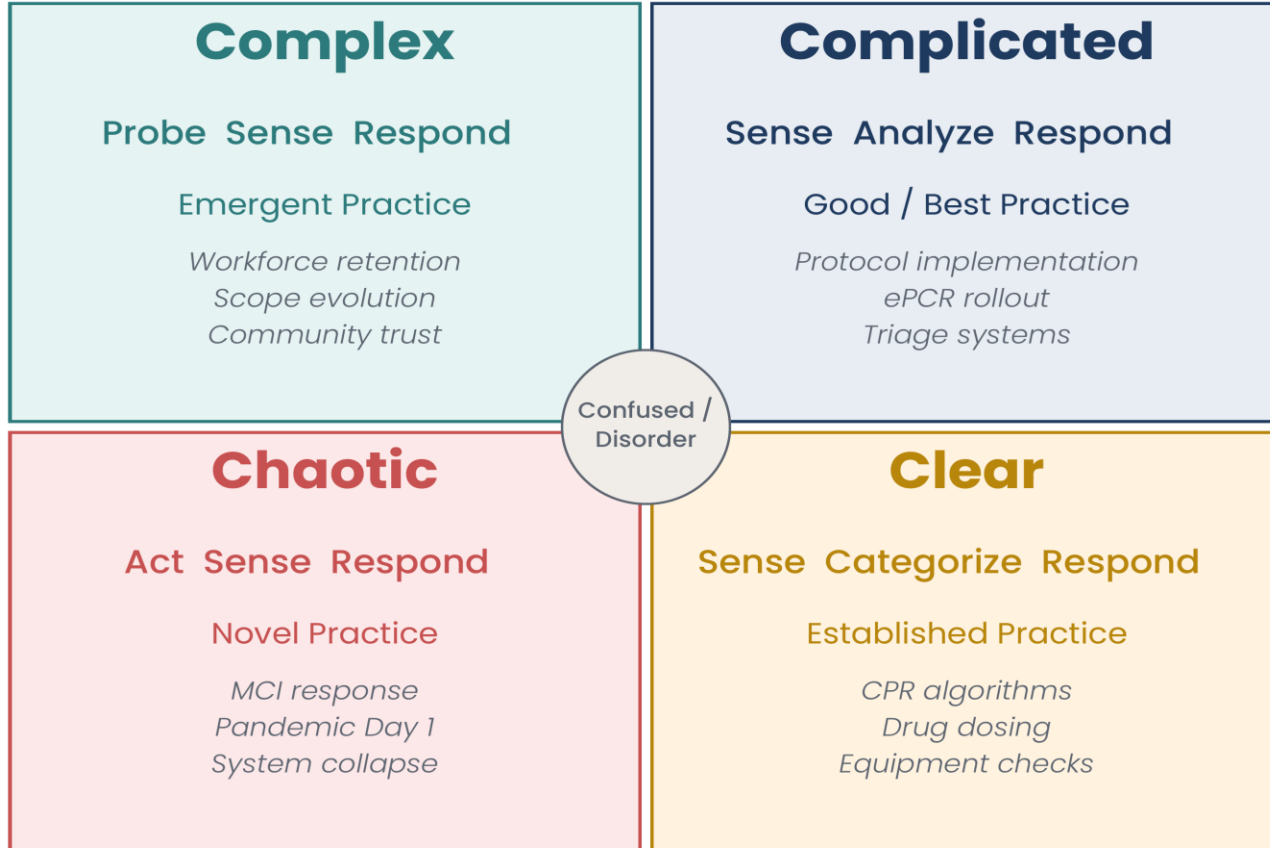
- No known solution
- People must learn new ways
- Values and identity at stake
- People own the work

*Workforce Retention
Scope Evolution • Trust*

“The single most common source of leadership failure is treating adaptive challenges like technical problems.”

— Ronald Heifetz, Harvard Kennedy School

Making Sense of Your Operating Environment



The Authority Trap



Authority (as a role)

Define the problem. Provide the answer. Protect from threat.

vs.

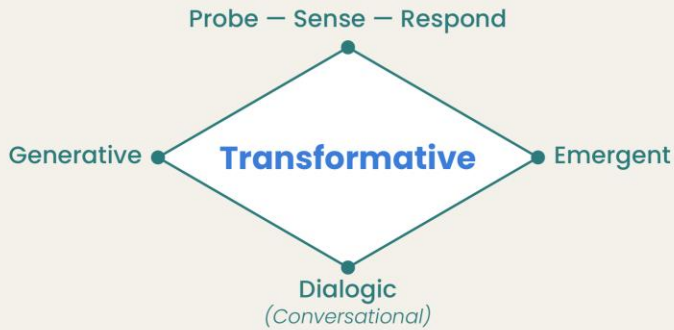
Leadership (as an activity)

Mobilize people to do the adaptive work themselves.

The hardest move: resisting the pull to solve it for them...!

Navigating Two Domains of Leadership

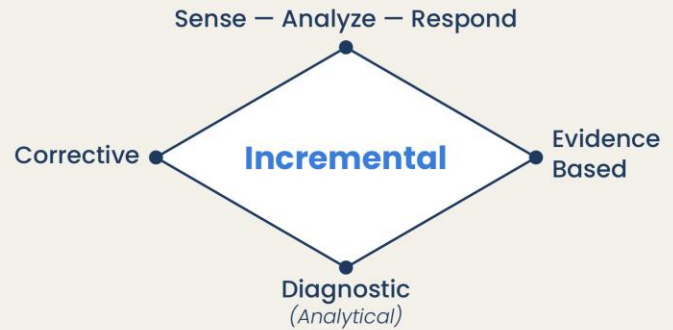
"Opportunity" **Complex**



IN YOUR WORLD

- Retaining paramedics through a workforce crisis
- Evolving scope toward community paramedicine
- Building trust with First Nations communities
- Making it safe to access mental health support

"Obligation" **Complicated**



IN YOUR WORLD

- Implementing a new CPR algorithm
- Rolling out an electronic patient care record
- Updating dispatch triage protocols
- Fleet maintenance and scheduling



BEING
Strategic

DOING
Strategic

Your Default Lens Is Your Blind Spot

Structural

Roles, rules,
policies, efficiency

Human

People,
relationships,
engagement

Political

Power, coalitions,
competing interests

Symbolic

Culture, identity,
meaning, story

Your workforce crisis is structural AND political AND symbolic...!

You can't solve a four-frame problem with one-frame thinking.

Bolman & Deal, Reframing Organizations



At Your Tables

Use your worksheet to work through this challenge:

Reducing paramedic attrition in rural and urban Saskatchewan communities...

Use the **four questions** on your worksheet (back side, left-hand column) to diagnose this challenge:

- Is it **technical** or **adaptive**?
- **Complicated** or **complex**?
- What **frame** are you defaulting to? What frame(s) also **need attention**?
- Who needs to be in the **conversation**?

↓ *Flip your handout to the Workshop Scenario side* ↓

The tension at your table IS the most important learning – unpack WHY you're seeing things as you are!

The Monday Morning Diagnostic

Four questions. Any challenge. Monday morning.

1 Is this technical or adaptive?

2 Is this complicated or complex?

3 What frame am I defaulting to? What's missing?

4 Who needs to be in the conversation?



*Leading change when there's no protocol
isn't about abandoning what got you here.*

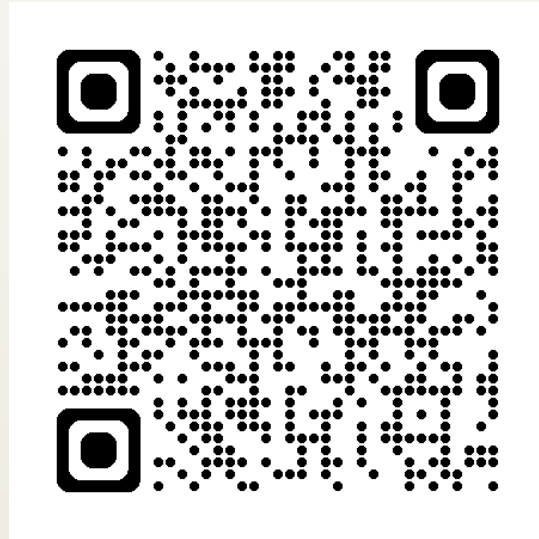
**It's about expanding
what you're capable of!**

Dr. Trevor Maber

maber@edwards.usask.ca | trevor@odalchemy.com



Download Today's Materials



Scan to download

Handout • Slides

THANK YOU!