Complex Adaptive Learning:
A New Paradigm for Organizational Learning

Annual Sharing Day 2011
OD Means Business

Presenters

Denise Easton

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Agenda

- Contrast two views of organizational learning and development

- Introduce the "Learning Ecosystem"

- Define "Impact Variables"

- Introduce the "Adaptive Change Cycle"

- Define a process for Complex Adaptive Learning

- Integration exercise

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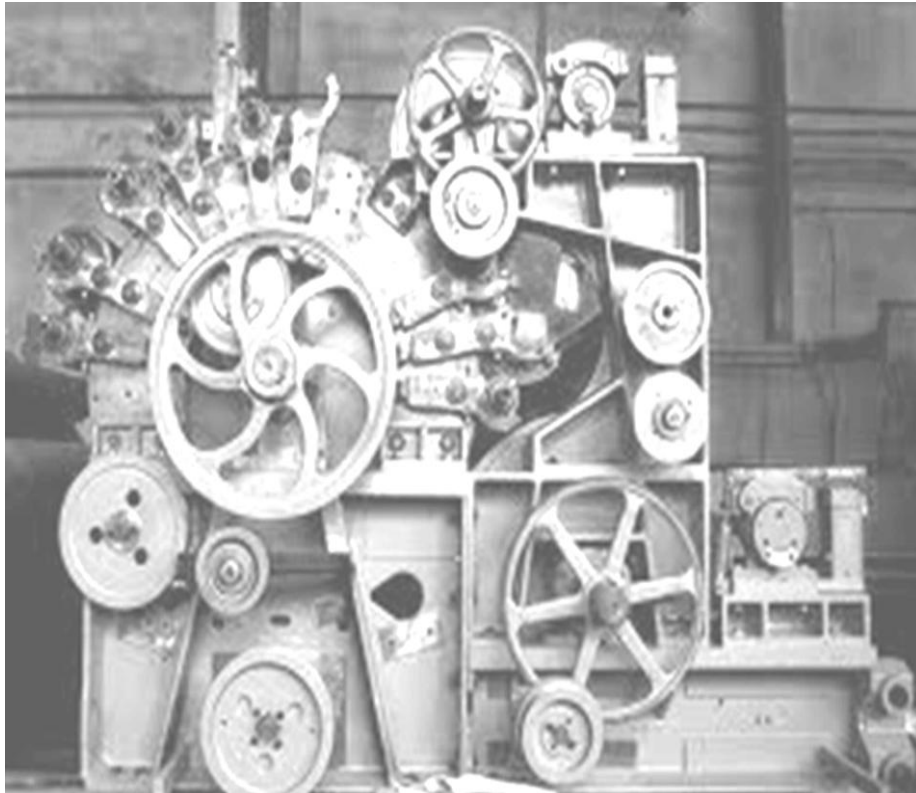LEARNING COMMUNITY

Learning and Development Challenges

People

Strategy

Processes

Products/Services

Contrasting views of organizational learning and development

Most change and improvement approaches are based on a mechanistic view

Properties of a Learning Ecosystem

Always present

Operate at multiple layers simultaneously

Not immediately visible

Not predictably influenced

Inputs/outputs not proportional

Open to external systems

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Organizations have a Learning Ecosystem

History

Strategy

Values

Identity

Culture

Engagement

Surroundings

Learning Ecosystem definitions

History

Tradition; significant historical milestones

Strategy

Our mission. What are we trying to accomplish in the short- and long term?

Values

What is most important; *how* we do what we do?

Identity

The labels we give ourselves and others

Engagement

How involved or committed are we?

Culture

"The way we do things around here"

Surroundings

The larger context in which we operate

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Accomplishing learning objectives

Impact Variables

Current State		Desired State

Organizational Ecosystem	**Impact Variables**
Always present	**Always present**
Operate at multiple layers simultaneously	**Operate at multiple layers simultaneously**
Not immediately visible	**"Levers you can pull"**
Not predictably influenced	**Can be modified directly**
Inputs /outputs not proportional	**More easily measured**
Open to external systems	**Shorter feedback cycles**

Learning and Development Impact Variables

Impact Variables

Time

Talent/Workforce

Resources (physical, financial, technology)

Knowledge

Policies and Procedures

Measures

Communication/ Feedback

Definitions of Impact Variables

Time
Proactive or reactive; short or long lead times and cycles; etc.

Talent/Workforce
#, diversity of staff; structures and roles; succession planning, etc.

Resources (physical, financial, technology):
Amount; condition; expansion capability; etc.

Knowledge
How much is present; knowledge management; best practices sharing; etc.

Policies and Procedures
Policies; procedures; company guidelines, etc.

Measures
"How we keep score"; for different stakeholders; short- and long term; etc.

Communication/ Feedback
Channels; frequency; types of messages; formal and informal; etc.

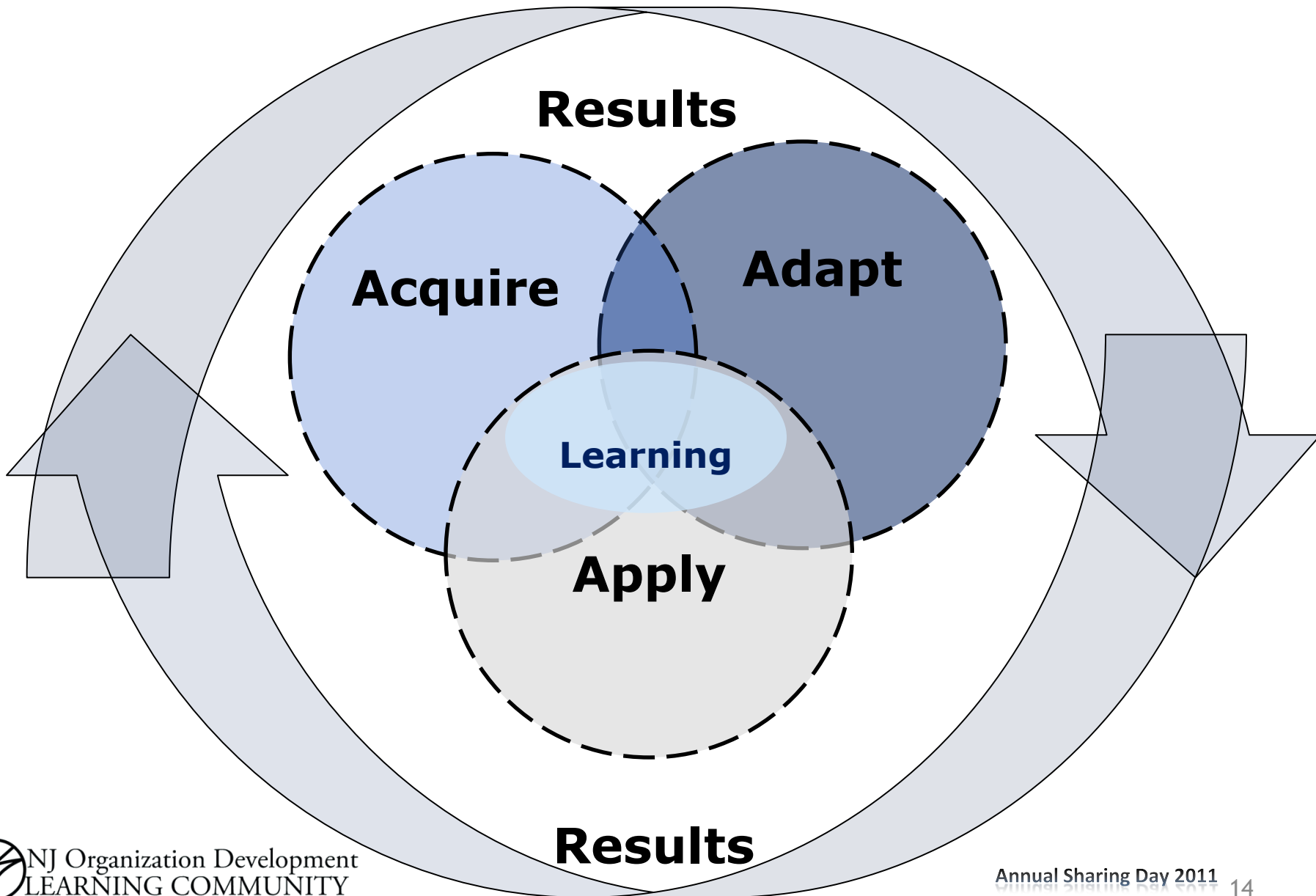NJ Organization Development LEARNING COMMUNITY

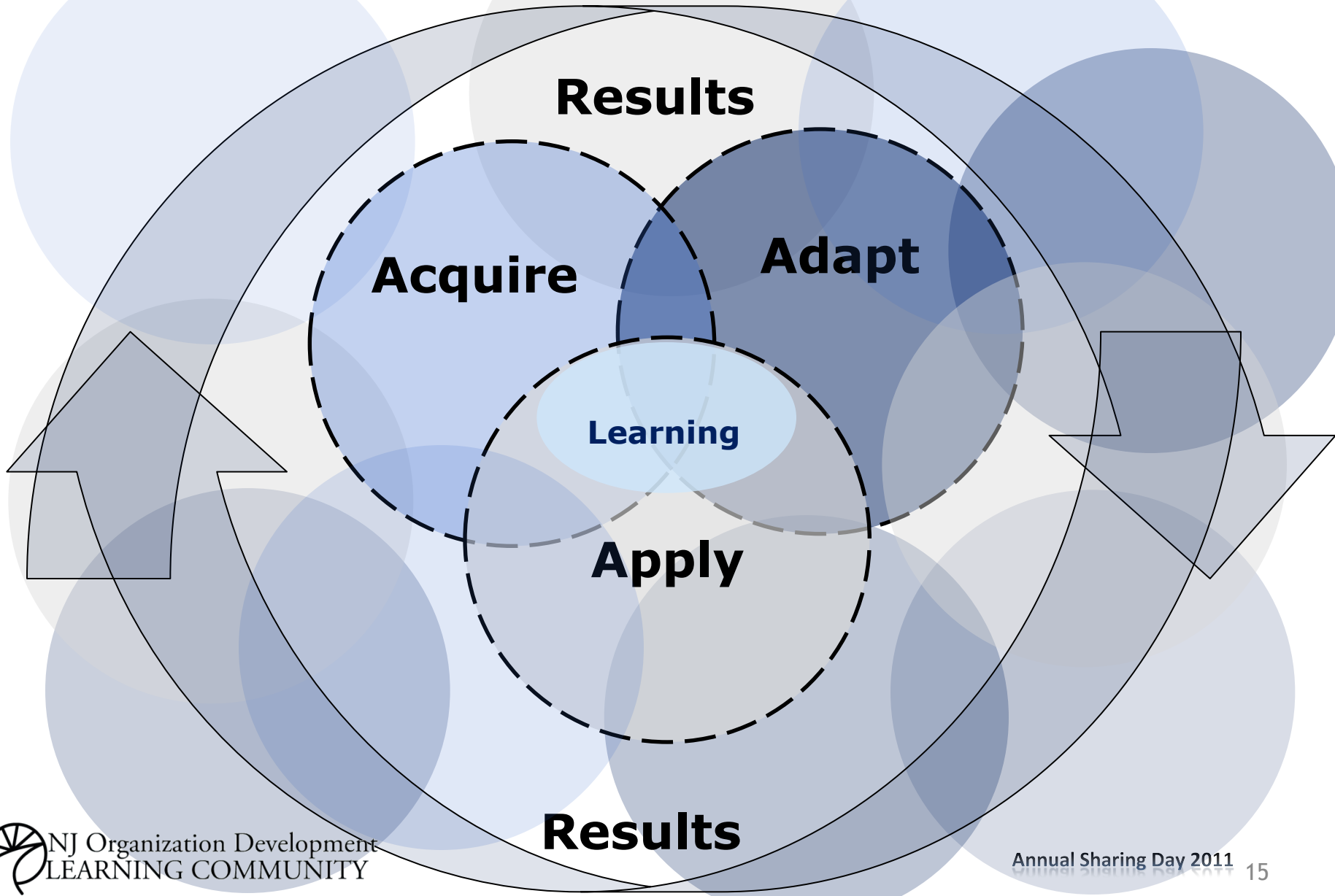# What skills are needed to operate in a complex learning environment?

- **Vision and expectations**

- **Simultaneously deal with present and future**

- **Persistent**

- **Aware of the "differences that make a difference"**

- **Adapt to changing conditions**

Adaptive Change Cycle

Results

Acquire

Adapt

Learning

Apply

Results

These cycles occur continuously

Complex Adaptive Learning
in *the Complexity Space*

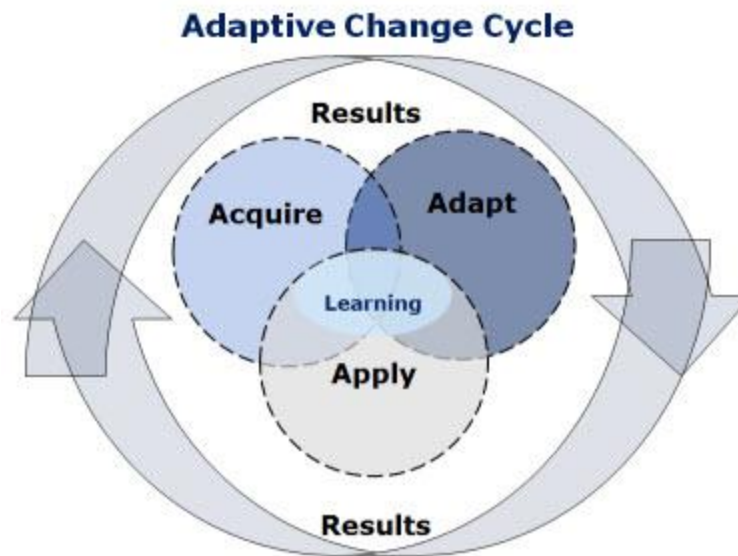**Current State** → **Desired State**
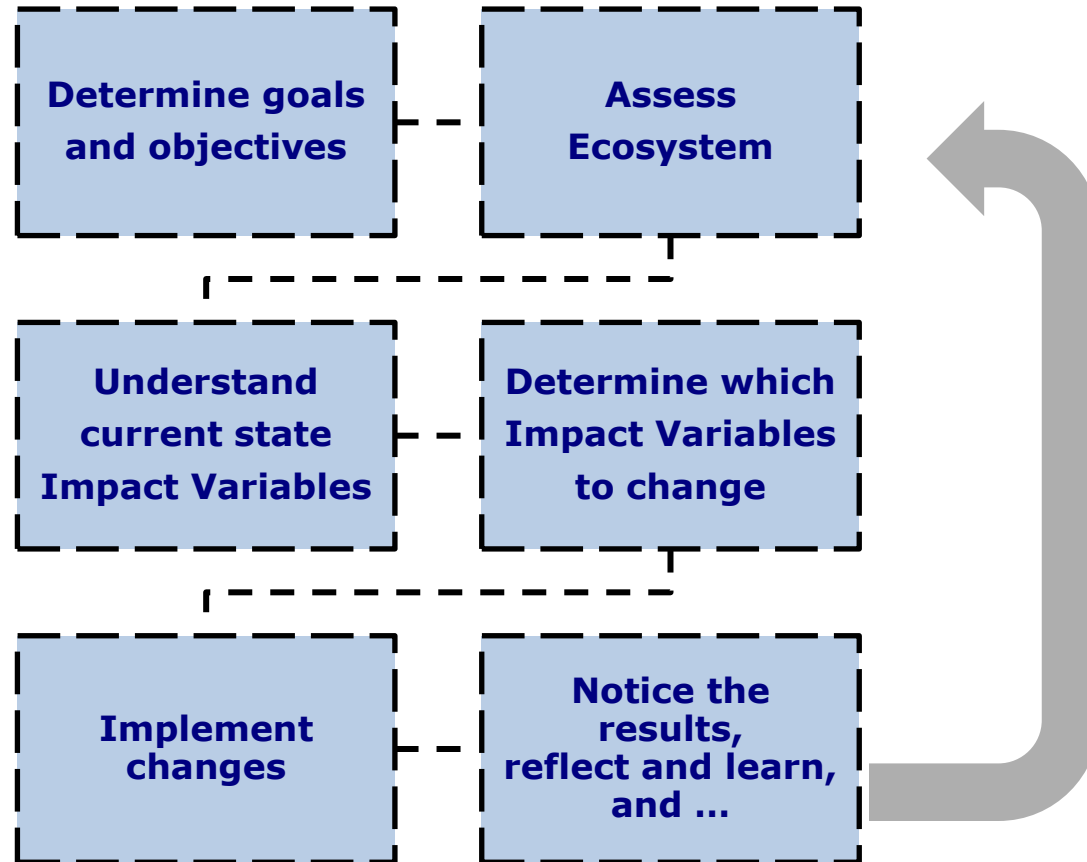
Ecosystem Dimensions

History
Strategy
Values
Identity
Culture
Engagement
Surroundings

Adaptive Change Cycle

Results

Acquire — Adapt

Learning

Apply

Results

Impact Variables

Time
Talent
Resources
Knowledge
Policies
Measures
Communication

Complex Adaptive Learning

Complex Adaptive Learning Questions and Comments

Ecosystem Dimensions	Impact Variables
History	Time
Strategy	Talent
Values	Resources
Identity	Knowledge
Culture	Policies
Engagement	Measures
Surroundings	Communication

Current State → Desired State

Adaptive Change Cycle

Results

Acquire — Adapt

Learning

Apply

Results

Determine goals and objectives	Assess Ecosystem
Understand current state Impact Variables	Determine which Impact Variables to change
Implement changes	Notice the results, reflect and learn, and ...

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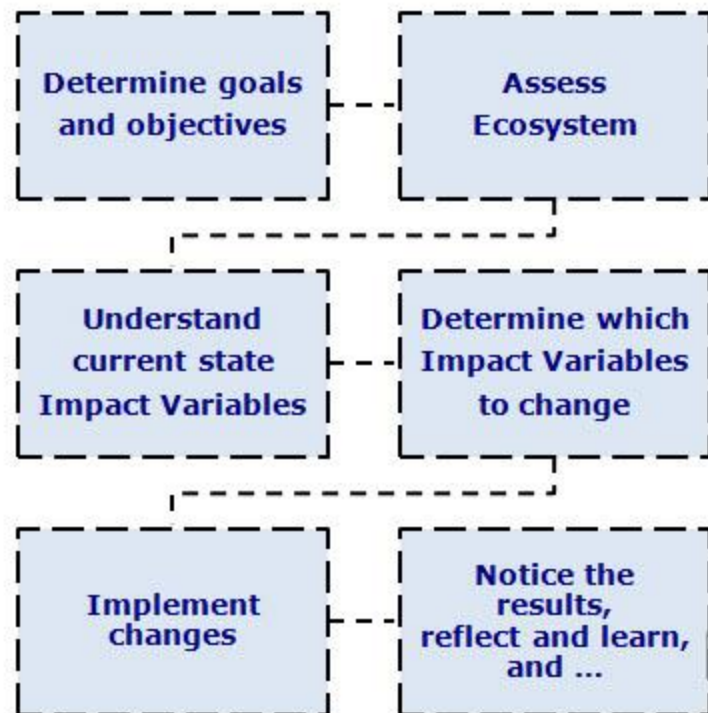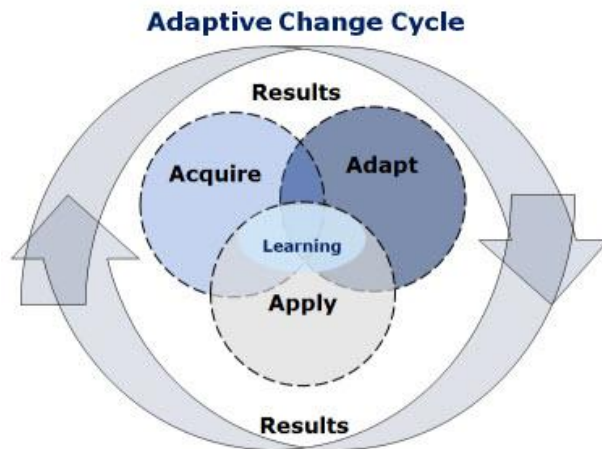
In Closing ...

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