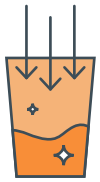


Expanding and Strengthening Your Container

We are living with increased VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). To be effective, leaders must proactively cultivate the agility to adapt and respond.

Adult development theory maintains that doing this isn't just contingent on learning new skills but on building greater capacity. As a result, it emphasizes the need for both.



HORIZONTAL DEVELOPMENT

The acquisition of new skills (e.g., adding water to your existing cup);



VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

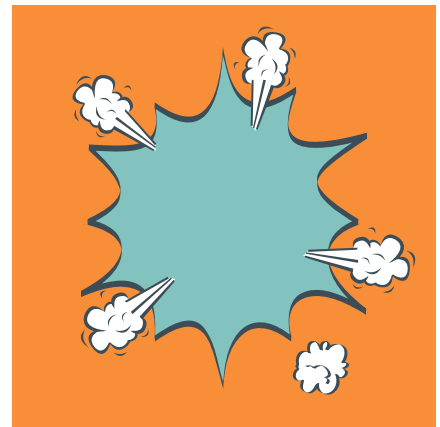
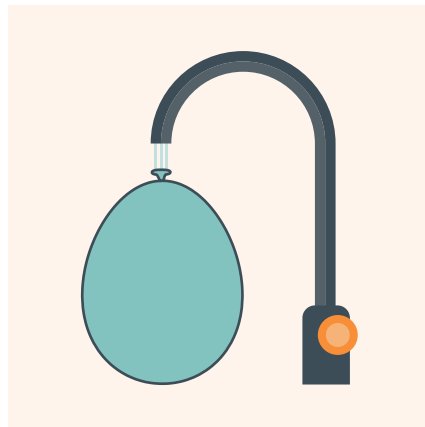
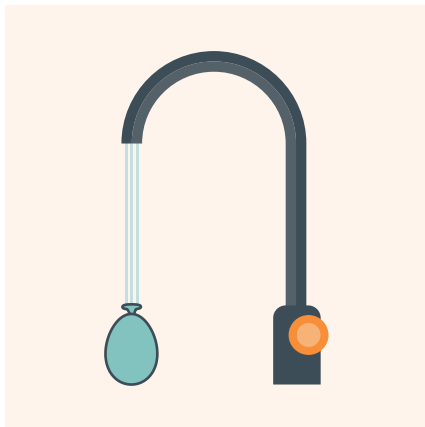
Cultivating the capacity to hold more complexity (e.g., building a bigger container).

This happens on the individual, team, and organizational levels.

What is the ultimate leadership challenge? The goal is to build a bigger and stronger container, ideally one strong enough to withstand today's VUCA.

How to Expand Capacity

Building a bigger container with greater capacity is challenging. As a result, individuals sometimes try to expand an existing container without strengthening the container. While some containers can expand to accommodate greater capacity, if you fail to also strengthen the container, it will eventually reach capacity and break open.



A useful analogy is to think about a balloon. You can greatly expand the size of the average balloon by filling it with water, but just because a container is designed to stretch doesn't mean it is designed to hold greater capacity over time. As we all know, if you put too much water in a balloon, it inevitably bursts.

How to Strengthen Boundaries to Better Leverage Available Space/Capacity

Imagine an urban city playground with busy streets on all sides. Hardwired to be safe, most kids cluster in the middle of the playground.

Install a strong fence along the perimeter of the playground and kids will expand to use the entire playground. With clear boundaries, kids explore, learn, and engage. Clear boundaries promote expansion and better resource utilization.



Similarly, in the workplace, adults crave clear expectations and boundaries to maximize their capacity. Within a bigger, clearly defined container or workspace, individuals are more compelled to explore, learn, and engage.

Magic Happens When You Both Strengthen Your Container and Expand Its Capacity

This requires bandwidth (intention and attention), getting perspective (altitude), and innovation (time and space to dream big).

Build a bigger and stronger container to increase your capacity by...



INDIVIDUAL

- Building self-awareness
- Deepening skills
- Investing in self care
- Taking ownership of one's destiny



TEAM

- Focusing on clear communication
- Clarifying expectations
- Deepening trust
- Aligning skills
- Investing in building strong relationships



ORGANIZATION

- Revisiting your culture
- Assessing your structure (e.g., does it need to be more horizontal?)
- Revising your mandate

Defining Your Container

SMALL ENOUGH

- Your container is snug enough that you feel like you have clear boundaries/expectations.
- You feel safe and have a clear line of sight on the border of your container but don't feel constrained by it.

BIG ENOUGH

- Your container is big enough to be able to think outside the box.
- It promotes exploration and the production of fresh ideas.
- It can accommodate your desire to try new things and keep growing and expanding.
- It's expansive enough to enable you to fly at any altitude.

TOO SMALL

- Your container feels constrictive.
- There is little room to innovate, iterate, and take risks.
- You are unable to express yourself, explore your edges, and step into uncertainty.

TOO BIG

- You feel lost, unclear, and/or like you're bouncing around rather than standing with two feet firmly on the ground.
- You can feel unsafe and in need of guardrails.
- It can be difficult to navigate without clear boundaries, which in turn, can negatively impact performance (e.g., leads to dropped balls).

Breakdowns Happen Due to...

Lack of awareness: Unaware you need to larger and stronger container.

Low bandwidth: Lack of time and energy to be intentional about building a larger and stronger container

Lack of altitude: Inability to see where the cracks are in your existing container.

Broken relationships: Low trust and limited capacity to collaborate will also undermine efforts to build a larger and stronger container.

Challenges Facing Leaders

Leaders have a vital role to play in creating stronger containers on an individual, team, and organizational level. However, they often overlook this work because they are either:

- Flying too high to notice the cracks forming in the foundation of their existing organizational container;
- The container they need is different than the container their team needs; or
- They have convinced themselves that one size does fits all.

It is essential for leaders to step back, reflect on their container, their team's container, and their organization's container, and to ask:

- Where are the borders of my container? Can I clearly see them?
Is my container big enough for me to keep growing and inspire creativity and expansion over time?
- Where are the borders of my team's container?
Is it big enough for them to grow and stretch?
Is it small enough for them to optimize collaboration and creativity and small enough to encourage collaboration and creativity?
- Where are the borders of my organization's container?
Is it big and strong enough to accommodate future growth, and if not, what will it take to build a bigger and stronger container?

Rightsizing Container in an Era of Remote and Hybrid Work

One of the reasons why remote work worked for some people and not others is that it enabled them to build a stronger container (e.g., offered greater flexibility and more time with family while eliminating an exhausting commute). What was a great opportunity for some people, however, was a horrific experience for others.

For this reason, flexible, hybrid work seems to offer the best of both worlds. In short, it enables workers to choose the container that helps them optimize and be at their best.

Application

Take ownership: Be engaged and involved. What you permit, you promote.

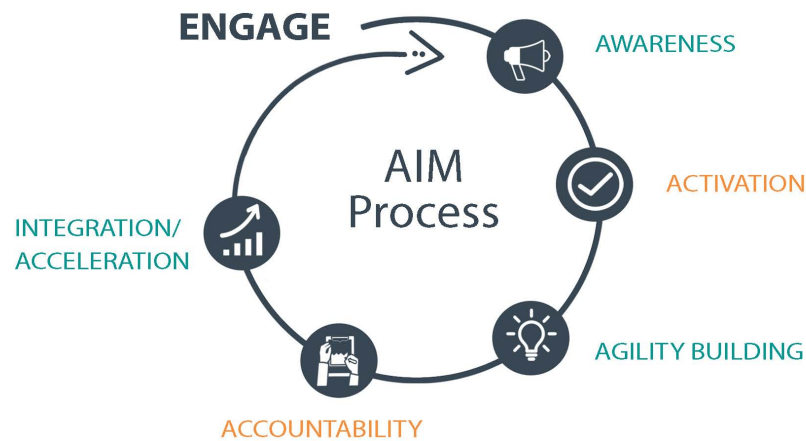
Be proactive rather than reactive, whenever possible: Build a strong container before it becomes a necessity.

Lead by example: Let your individual behavior serve as a model for your team and organization and vice versa.

One size doesn't fit all: Accept that different people need containers of different capacities and type.

Companies and leaders set the conditions: If your container feels more like a colander than a sturdy pot, ask yourself who or what is puncturing your container.

Ideas into Action



AWARENESS

Reflect on your current container

- Is it too small or too large?
- Do you feel confined, have room to grow, or feel lost (unable to trace its edges)?
- Where does it need to be strengthened?

ACTIVATION

Take steps to rightsize and strengthen your container

- Where does your container need to contract or expand?
- Where might there be cracks or leaks that need to be repaired?

AGILITY BUILDING

Rightsize and strength your team/organization container

- Apply what you've done for yourself to your team/organization.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Survey and upgrade regularly

- Regularly check in with yourself and your team/organization to assess your container(s).
- Proactively reinforce your containers to prevent cracks before they appear.

INTEGRATE/ACCELERATE

Make the most of your expanded and stronger container

- Explore what's possible when you're operating in the right size and strength container.

Discover how to build a strong container for yourself, your team, and your organization. Set up a time to talk to the AIM Leadership team.

To learn more, visit aimleadership.com

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