

# Leading From The Middle

A leadership development resource book

Dr Sally Watson; Maggie Shannon



SALLY WATSON AND MAGGIE SHANNON

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# **LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE**

A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT  
RESOURCE BOOK

Leading From The Middle: A leadership development resource book

1<sup>st</sup> edition

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# LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE

*'Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people based on trust, obligation, commitment, and a shared vision of the good'*

*(Cuilla 2004, page 14)*

This workbook is for middle managers and mid level professionals who want to develop their leadership and grow their influence. Whether you have been a manager for some time, or are new to the job, the ability to influence other people is an essential skill for anyone in a leadership role. This workbook will help you to think about the ways in which you influence other people, the tactics you employ and the importance of being effective. The material will enable you to challenge your assumptions about leadership, recognise your unique style and create a personal development strategy. This workbook will guide your development as a mid level leader and prepare you for opportunities to advance your career. The workbook is structured into the following sections:

- Individual leadership and learning
- Life in the Middle
- New landscapes
- New forms of leadership
- Strategic opportunities for the middle
- How to ensure your voice is heard

The workbook can be used as a stand-alone learning aid or as resource material for coaches, facilitators and trainers. As you work through this workbook you will encounter a number of features designed to support your learning and development. These features are represented by the symbols shown below.



**Information** – this is used to indicate research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.



**Exercises** – these include practical activities, questionnaires and reflective questions which are designed to be thought-provokers.



**Practical tips** – these represent a selection of good practices and case study examples, which you may find useful.

# INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Evidence from both theory and practice indicates that those who operate in mid level roles lead the 'work' of an organisation. The people who make a business successful are frequently working hard in the middle of the organisation. On a daily basis they can be found dealing with complex challenges, managing performance and leading teams.

The most effective way of improving your ability to lead others starts with yourself and the skills and experience you possess.

Here are four key personal development questions and below are some exercises to help you to reflect:

- Who am I?
- Where am I now?
- Where am I going?
- Why am I going there?



## **Exercise: Reflections on strengths and growth areas**

Take your time. Be thoughtful. The questions are designed to be thought provoking, so do not rush through them. Read all the questions first and begin the exercise by answering the ones that come easiest. Consider starting a journal to record your thoughts and feelings as you respond to the questions.

1. Imagine yourself observing a great friend talking about you with admiration and respect. What would your friend be saying?
2. When you are full of energy and inspired, what particular personality traits or strengths are expressed by you?
3. Now reflect on the way you see the world:
  - What do you believe about yourself?
  - What do you believe about other people?
  - What do you believe about life?
  - What do you believe about leadership?

4. When in your life have you felt most completely yourself?
5. What combination of life experiences, life challenges and innate character traits have uniquely prepared you?
6. Reflect on situations, which inhibit you from achieving your leadership potential. What is preventing you? What negative beliefs are you carrying about yourself?
7. Now reflect on your negative beliefs:
  - What does this belief give me?
  - What does this belief cost me?
  - What are the new possibilities if I silence these beliefs?



### **Exercise: The 'Blind Spot' of leadership**

How well do we know ourselves? Many of us are accomplished fugitives from ourselves. We take on a range of distractions and activities to fill the quiet space in our minds and fool ourselves that we are effective.

We blame our job role, pace of change and shrinking resources for our working patterns and rarely look inside ourselves for an answer. We close down the reflective space that allows us to become aware of our values and gifts. Ironically, this is the place where deep wisdom about leadership resides and where we can start to become an authentic person. This exercise is designed to help you to understand how you learned to lead and to map the events and people who have had an impact on your leadership. A leadership timeline can take between one and three hours if you are working alone. If you decide to work with a partner, then allocate time for individual preparation and quality conversations.

#### **Step 1: Write down your personal definition of leadership**

It is important that you identify a statement that encapsulates what you believe is important and that it matches your values. Please avoid writing a perfect statement drawn from a book, motivational speech or leadership course you have attended.

Focus on yourself and allow your intuition to provide the words that are meaningful to you. Now write this personal definition in the top right hand corner of your piece of paper. You will be returning to this definition later in the exercise.

**Step 2: Draw your leadership timeline**

Take a large sheet of paper and draw a line that represents a period of time that is important to you. This could be 5, 10, 20 years and the choice is yours. You could identify a short specific period of time and reflect on this in detail or a longer time period to reveal patterns in the way you have learned about leadership. Again, it is important to use your intuition and stay reflective and curious in this step of the exercise.

**Step 3: Identify key moments**

Reflect on key events, people or experiences that come to mind now and note them on your timeline. Again, your intuitive response to this instruction will give you a richer experience of the activity.

These events need to represent a powerful point in your life, which influenced you at the time. Typical examples are parents, teachers, managers, colleagues or powerful experiences where you learned something important. The experiences that you note on the timeline may be positive or negative, as both will have value for your learning.

**Step 4: Look for patterns**

The purpose of this step is for you to make sense of the information in the timeline. This step can be completed alone or with a colleague, coach or friend. If you are working as a pair or a small group ensure that each person is heard and that the time is shared equally. It is important, in this step, to avoid judging your timeline. This process will help you to stay reflective and appreciate the patterns of learning and experience, which have contributed to your current thinking about leadership. Work with the themes of the timeline rather than the detail of the experiences.

**Step 5: Return to your initial statement about leadership**

Compare the themes you have seen from the timeline with your personal leadership statement and use the following prompts to deepen your understanding of the timeline:

- What are the patterns emerging from the timeline?
- What do you notice of your personal definition about leadership?
- And the timeline patterns?
- What has surprised you about the exercise?
- What were the influences that shaped you and your beliefs about leadership?
- How did you learn to lead?
- What has this exercise taught about your leadership style?
- How effective is this style now?
- What have you learned that will help you to develop in the future?



## LIFE IN THE MIDDLE

*'When it comes to envisioning and implementing change, middle managers stand in a unique organisational position'.*

*(Huy 2001, page 74)*

Balogun & Johnson (2004) made a significant contribution to the theme of middle managers and change. Their work indicated that people operating in the middle have a capacity for sense making that is independent of their leaders. This ability to understand and interpret is manifested in the intended and unintended outcomes of change. Rather than blindly following orders or faithfully passing messages in the relay system, they are capable of an intelligent assessment of strategic issues. The result is a greater emphasis on the contribution of middle managers to an understanding of the resources required to implement strategy.

Several writers on leadership advocate that for innovations to be implemented, middle managers need to be confident, capable and motivated to see their ideas through (Markan & Marken 2012; Warhurst 2012; Huy 2011; Fornier 2011; Ren & Guo 2011). The contribution of middle managers to challenging the status quo is very important to organisational performance. In organisations where there is a history of traditional leadership, challenge from the middle is seen as resistance. The influence of middle managers needs to be channeled upwards and based on evidence rather than opinion.

There are now strong arguments for middle managers to have a greater role in the development of strategy (Rouleau & Balogun 2011; Balogun 2006; Balogun 2004; Balogun & Johnson 2004). Middle managers have been described as champions, synthesisers, facilitators and implementers (Wooldridge, Schmidt & Floyd 2008; Floyd & Wooldridge 1994).

Balogun (2003) introduced the term 'change intermediary' to explain a key role during implementation of strategy. This work is key to understanding the voices of middle managers and their ability to understand complex issues, despite their apparent 'lesser' status. Balogun made a key contribution to the field of strategic change by concluding that middle managers are essential to managing change. A major flaw in top down models of management is that so little is known about how restructures are implemented by middle managers. The voices from the middle are not heard or understood.

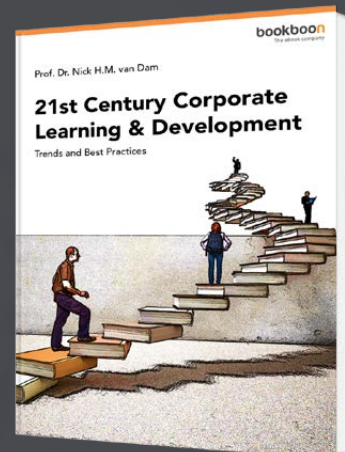
The impact of middle managers on culture is crucial (Huy 2011). A top down perspective to implementing change may overlook the cultural response to a new change. The result is invariably positive and negative social and emotional behaviours, which may derail or covertly dismiss the new initiative. Middle managers understand the cultural implications of top-level decisions and are, therefore, a crucial part of strategic change. The actions and behaviour of senior managers have a significant impact on the emotional responses of staff to change. Decades of re-engineering, downsizing, cost cutting exercises, mergers, acquisitions, alliances have impacted senior leaders and their view about middle managers. Both parties carry assumptions about the role, contribution and performance of each other. The development of middle managers into confident mid level leaders is contingent on the quality of support from senior leaders.

Below, there is a questionnaire, which will help you to map your current forms of influence in your organisation. It is a practical tool that can be used as an individual or with a team. The format is adapted from Floyd & Wooldridge (1994) and Wooldridge, et al. (2008).

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## A SELF-TEST OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIC INVOLVEMENT

*Instructions:* In your experience as a manager, how frequently have you performed the following activities? Circle a number for each item.

### 1. Monitor and assess the impact of changes in the organisation's external environment.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 2. Implement action plans designed to meet strategic objectives.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 3. Integrate information from a variety of sources to communicate its strategic significance.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 4. Evaluate the merits of new proposals.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 5. Evaluate the merits of proposals generated in my team, encouraging some, discouraging others.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 6. Translate organisational goals into objectives for individuals.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

### 7. Provide a safe pair of hands for experimental programmes.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

**8. Assess and communicate the business-level implications of new information to senior managers.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**9. Search for new opportunities and bring them to the attention of senior managers.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**10. Communicate and sell senior management initiatives to my team.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**11. Define and justify the role of new ideas or processes to senior managers.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**12. Encourage multi-disciplinary problem-solving teams.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**13. Proactively seek information about your business from customers, suppliers, other organisations, business publications, etc.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**14. Monitor and communicate to senior managers the activities of other hospices / housing orgs, suppliers, and other outside organisations.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**15. Justify to senior managers programs that have already been established.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

**16. Provide resources and develop objectives/strategies for unofficial projects.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

**17. Translate organisational goals into departmental action plans.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

**18. Relax regulations and procedures in order to get new projects started.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

**19. Propose new ideas or projects to senior managers.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

**20. Monitor activities within your team to ensure that they support senior management objectives.**

<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Frequently</i>
1	2	3	4	5

<b>Scoring Key – insert your scores for each question in the columns below</b>							
	A		B		C		D
4		5		1		2	
9		7		3		6	
11		12		8		10	
15		16		13		17	
19		18		14		20	
<b>Total</b>							

A – Championing

B – Facilitating

C – Generating

D – Implementing

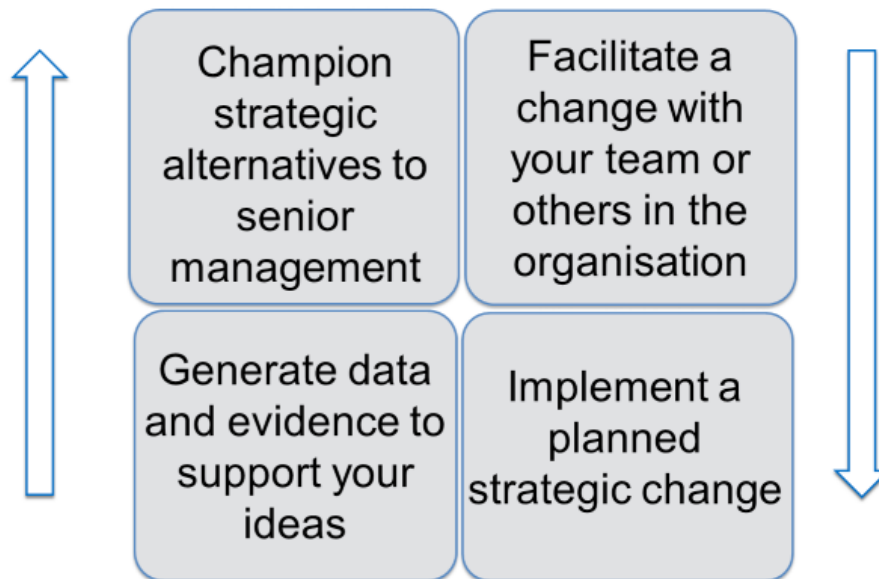
Less than 10: You almost never perform this role.

10 to 15: You rarely or occasionally perform this role.

16 to 20: You regularly or at least occasionally perform this role.

Over 20: You regularly perform this role.

## Middle Managers: Key Forms of Influence



S.W.Floyd and B Woolridge, (1994) "Dinosaurs or Dynamics?  
Recognising Middle Management's Role, Academy of  
Management, Vol 8, No. 4



## **Planning my influence strategy**

Now, consider a situation that you face at work where you could practice:

### **Desired outcomes:**

- What is the situation and context?
- Who is involved?
- What is it you want to achieve?
- What will you and they are doing/saying/ feeling when it's been a success?

### **Planning:**

- What is the current situation/relevant history?
- What are the other person's needs or concerns likely to be/how can you address them?
- Which combination of influencing behaviours (push/pull) will be key? Review your influencing styles profile and consider how to maximise your strengths. Be aware of your least preferred influencing style as you plan your strategy,
- What will the final influencing strategy mean for the way you 'manage yourself'?
- Where and when is the best time for this?

### **Practical actions:**

- How will you behave to ensure that your influencing strategy gets off to a good start?
- Which key behaviours will you use initially?
- How will you manage possible reactions – what behaviours will be appropriate?
- How will you bring this to conclusion? What behaviours will you use?



# A NEW LANDSCAPE FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS

*'The solutions put forward in the past may no longer be effective for the future, in fact they are likely to lead to under performance'.*

*(Thornhill 2013, page 71)*

In changing circumstances, the leadership capability of middle managers is both a crucial advantage and untapped asset. When an operating environment changes, it is essential that middle managers learn to be more pro-active in strategic planning, change management and service development.

In service cultures, a vicious cycle develops when commercial pressures impact social purpose and service ethos (Anheir 2014; Porter & Kramer 1999). There is a hidden danger in the assumption that a more commercial approach to service provision will solve the problem. With a focus on financial performance, the assessment of organisational value becomes one-dimensional and fails to showcase intellectual, social and public impact (Moore 2000; Krug & Weinburg 2004). The blunt edge of cost reduction exercises risk the loss of service quality, organisational capability and responsiveness to service users.

This situation is compounded when attempts to address the financial performance of the organisation brings private sector approaches to leadership, management and performance. The impact of adopting private sector values and practices is unlikely to have sustainable outcomes because of the longer-term damage to the credibility of the organisation (Moore 2000).

The new landscape for middle managers will be primarily focussed on financial issues and delivering economic value. The social value and service ethos will continue to shape their organisational cultures and values, but increasingly, a commercial agenda will be a major challenge for leadership and governance. Middle managers will continue to face the complexity of delivering social value through quality services, and at the same time, manage funding cuts to their service. Leadership capability, at all levels, is crucial to this new landscape.



### Exercise: Where is my organisation now?

Use the following table to establish the current role (s) of your organisation.

<b>Functions of public sector and not for profit organisations</b>	
<p><b>Service provider (Operational role):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support delivery of services,</li> <li>- Provide specific services for minority needs,</li> <li>- Supplement services where provision is inadequate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vanguard (Innovation role):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pioneer new processes and approaches,</li> <li>- Serve as change agents and innovators,</li> <li>- Collaborate with other providers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Value guardian (Political role):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote social purpose to government,</li> <li>- Promote democracy and pluralism,</li> <li>- Operate as guardians of sector values.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Advocacy (Representational role):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Represent the voice of minority or under represented groups,</li> <li>- Critics and watch dogs of social policy,</li> <li>- Anticipate and articulate emerging needs within society.</li> </ul>

(Adapted from Anheir 2014, page 293–295)

Now use the following questions to reflect on the opportunities for mid level professionals and middle managers to influence both strategy and service development:

- How effective is your organisation in each of the four roles- operational, innovation, and political, representational?
- What are the opportunities to develop the influence of your organisation?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are the opportunities to influence a key aspect of your organisation?

**Now return to the previous section and use the planning format to create a personal influencing strategy, which helps to change an aspect of your organisation.**



### The advantages of collaboration

A new, more integrated, landscape of service provision appears a practical way of delivering economic value. However, the interactions of multiple stakeholders will bring layers of complexity to service delivery and bring a further challenge to leadership and governance. The unintended consequence of new collaborative relationships may be professional competition especially when funding is linked to financial performance.

Collaborative working is a very important driver, which impacts both senior and middle managers. Large-scale cooperation across organisations, with a historical ownership of a specific service, will require a radically different view of leadership. The status power of senior managers will have less impact when a service is delivered through a collaborative arrangement with other providers. Their work will become more externally focussed and their capabilities more politically orientated. Middle managers are well placed to collaborate both across their organisations and other managers in partner organisations. Their ability to understand both the complexity and practicality of delivering services will bring both social and economic value to new collaborative models of service provision. The benefits of collaborative working include:

- Economies of scale and scope for cost savings,
- Leverages political, intellectual and social value,
- Reduces the power of intermediaries e.g. sub contractors,
- Development of a positive and high performing culture,
- Improvement in communication across the organisation,
- Improves leadership capability at all levels,
- Brings greater autonomy from political interference.



### **Collaborating across diverse organisations**

#### **A few practical tips include:**

- Consider the actual costs of creating and securing cooperation,
- Calculate the opportunity costs of not cooperating,
- Conduct a financial and reputational risk assessment of an unsuccessful venture,
- Appreciate the changes to organisational autonomy and culture as a result of cooperation,
- Consult external and internal stakeholders,
- Check the compatibility of values and culture between the collaborating organisations,
- Ensure excellent communications throughout the process.



### Exercise Reds and Greens

**An experiential learning activity to develop appreciation of the difference between collaboration and competition.**

This exercise can be run with a minimum of 6 and maximum of 20. In a larger group, the teams will also include “observers” who do not take part in the game itself.

You will need space for the two teams to be separate and not see each other – two rooms are ideal. It is also helpful to have a neutral area where the two representatives can meet after round 2.

*The exercise will take between 30–45 minutes.*

This exercise is a bidding game between two teams who are part of one organisation. There are five rounds and the highest scores can be gained when both teams decide to collaborate to achieve a ‘win-win’ (**green-green**). After rounds 2 and 5, the scores are doubled and this creates a challenge for the teams, when the pressure to compete is very high.

If the teams believe that they are in competition, then bids of **red/green** or **green/red** will be made. Occasionally, two teams will move to a ‘lose-lose’ position and vote **red/red**. This is rare and usually the result of intense competition in earlier rounds. **Red-red** indicates a desire for retribution and the worse case scenario for both teams.

After round three, the teams have the opportunity to meet. A representative needs to be elected by each team. The two representatives meet to agree a plan for the rest of the game. This agreement may not be kept when the representatives return to their teams. The pressure to conform to the existing team dynamics may be in conflict with an agreement made by the two-team representatives. This is a ‘real world’ situation and can be discussed in the whole group review, post exercise.

If you have observers with the teams, the meeting may be observed.

There is likely to be a conflict of values as the exercise progresses. Some team members may realise that a ‘green/green’ scenario is the best outcome. This position is frequently unpopular because competition is the norm and fun. Collaboration is a difficult position to achieve and not quite so exciting. A team may resort to voting to agree a bid to resolve this dilemma. Voting is a tactic to mask differences of opinion in the team.

**Facilitator role (during the exercise)**

- Divide the group into two teams and make sure that they are in separate rooms or at either end of a large room,
- Ask the teams to select a leader,
- Distribute the instructions to the two teams,
- Explain that both teams have the same instruction,
- Allow five minutes for the teams to read the instructions,
- Start the exercise,
- Set up a flipchart stand at a mid point between the two teams so that they can see the scores for each round,
- After round 2 ensure that the team representatives have a separate area to hold their meeting,
- Try and avoid facial expressions or body language that reveal your opinion of their decisions.



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**Observer role (during the exercise)**

- Ideally members of the group take an observation role,
- This is not a feedback role and comments relating to individuals should be avoided,
- The focus is how the teams worked through the task,
- Observations on language are very helpful especially when supported by verbatim quotes,
- Observers should sit well back from the teams and not distract them,
- If possible, an observer can listen in to the discussions between the 2-team representatives.

**Facilitator role (after the exercise)**

- Distribute flipchart paper to both teams
- Ask team members to create a timeline of critical moments during the exercise
- Instruct the team leader to record feelings and discourage the team from discussing scores and exercise rules
- Brief the observers to collate their notes and agree how to present their observations

**Facilitator role (during the whole group reflection)**

- Create a full circle of chairs to review the exercise. This is important for group cohesion,
- Teams sit together with their observers,
- Each team shares their timeline and explains their experience of the exercise,
- It is essential that the other team and their observer listens respectfully,
- Challenge interruptions and explain that each team will have the opportunity to share their timeline,
- Once a team has finished, invite their observer(s) to share their notes,
- Ask team members for questions of clarification (which is collaborative behaviour) not questions which judge (which is competitive behaviour),
- When all questions have been asked, insights gained and issues aired, encourage the whole group to apply their learning to a their own organisational context,
- Some suggested questions are below.

**Group review questions**

This stage is key to translating the experiential learning into the organisational context for the participants. Here is a sample of questions to help you to optimise, individual, team and organisational learning:

- What are collaborative behaviours and how are they different to competitive behaviours?
- What assumptions were made during the exercise?
- What does this exercise demonstrate for organisational cultures?
- What is the role of a leader in promoting collaboration across a hospice?
- What are the benefits to customers, staff and managers of greater collaboration?
- How might increased collaboration impact the external relationships the organisation has?
- What are the scenarios when competition would be appropriate?
- What styles of leadership are needed to ensure collaborative cultures?
- What are the first practical steps towards a more collaborative ethos in a team or organisation?
- What prevents people from behaving collaboratively? How can this be changed? What are the benefits to performance?

The instructions and scoring for this exercise can be found in Appendix A on page 39.



# INFLUENCING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

*'Stakeholders are people or organisations that have a real, assumed or imagined stake in the organisation, its performance and sustainability'.*

*(Anheir 2014, page 409)*

Collaborative working brings complex stakeholders relationships and require new forms of both individual and organisational influence. The collaborating organisations have different interests, needs and challenges. In a challenging economic scenario, this diversity can present more of a threat than an opportunity e.g.

- The core mission is subject to different interpretations,
- A dual governance and management structure may present a conflict of interests,
- The impact of values and deeply held convictions on the day to day operations,
- The operational complexity of interplay between altruistic behaviour and commercial requirements,
- The culture of complex operating environments with a high degrees of uncertainty,
- The different expectations and motivations held by different stakeholders,
- The divergent interests and needs of clients and service users.

The diverse interests of multiple stakeholders can have a negative effect and take attention away from the external service to an emphasis on internal politics (Perrott 1996). Over time, this further complicates the leadership challenges facing both senior and middle managers. The presence of multiple stakeholders can be a challenge to middle managers. Day to day service delivery is largely the responsibility of middle managers and yet they are subject to political and economic pressures, which can prevent them from being effective in role.

Studies of middle managers over twenty years have been largely based on the perceptions of other stakeholders. While there is a wealth of conclusions about middle managers' behaviour, there is little understanding of how they make their voices heard. Assumptions crafted and reinforced over twenty years continue to impact the development of people in mid level roles. Assumptions from other stakeholders drown out the voices and influence from the middle

In an environment of continuous change, middle managers have a crucial leadership role to play in balancing the wider organisational system. The pivot is the relationship between strategic decisions and operational reality. The influence of middle managers is a core organisational capability and business asset.

# FORMS OF LEADERSHIP



## Exercise: Forms of leadership

Reflect on your own organisation or one that you are keen to study. Use the model below and assess which forms of leadership are prevalent across the organisation. You could compare different teams and departments within your organisation. You could assess an organisation external to your own. The purpose of this exercise is to challenge your thinking about different forms of leadership and how consider how appropriate they are the situation.

Forms of leadership	Traditional	Modern	Relational
Leadership	Command and control	Winning hearts and minds	Making sense together
Leaders	Senior leaders operate as managers and set the mission, vision and strategy	Managers operate as leaders and create enthusiasm within their teams for the mission	Senior leaders create the conditions for leadership at all levels. The development of mission, vision and strategy is shared.
Operating environment	Simple, stable and predictable	Changing but relatively predictable	Complex, turbulent with multiple stakeholders
Metaphor	A machine runs like clockwork	An organism that reacts to external conditions	Fast paced networks and proactive flexible responses
Formulation of organisational purpose	Located at the top of the hierarchy	Located at the top but with 'buy-in' from others	Multiple stakeholders bring diverse views and contribute to purpose
Distribution of power	Higher status has more power	Strategic power at the top but employees are empowered to make operational improvements	Power is distributed throughout the organisation.
Distribution of risk	In theory seniors carry the risk but people lower in the hierarchy feel vulnerable	People have more say over how they do things and feel more in control	'We are all in this together'

*Adapted from Boydell, 2001.*

## Forms of leadership (Learning and reflections)

Now use the following questions to reflect on the exercise above:

- Are these forms of leadership appropriate to the organisational values and culture?
- Are the current forms of leadership aligned to the mission, vision and strategy of the organisation?
- How do the current forms of leadership impact the effectiveness of middle managers?
- What forms of leadership achieve high levels of individual and team performance?
- What would advise senior leaders to do, to get the best out of their middle managers?



### New forms of leadership

*The heroic style of leadership is no longer applicable but commercialism may bring a second wave of heroic leaders'.*

*(CEO UK Housing Association 2015)*

New models of leadership are needed to sustain organisational values and culture. A rapidly changing environment cannot sustain a traditional 'top down' view of leadership. New and more complex and collaborative service models will require a more facilitative style of leadership which encourages others to take responsibility for operational decisions.

A heroic model of leadership has a long legacy, which is popular but deeply flawed. Heroes and heroines save their people from disaster. As individuals, heroic leaders are gifted with this image by their followers who then quietly park their responsibilities. Consider the words of Sheldon Kopp (1990),

*'If you have a hero, look again, you have demeaned yourself.'*

### Distributed leadership

A distribution of leadership authority can be a major change for senior managers and affects their role and influence with frontline staff and middle managers. In the future, the role of middle managers will need to be more strategically focussed to ensure that their knowledge and skills are leveraged as social, intellectual and political values. Frontline staff will need to develop adaptive and collaborative behaviours to enable them to respond effectively to service users and communities.

*'Distributed leadership is not something 'done' by an individual to others. It is a group activity that works through relationships rather than individual action.'*

*(Bennett, et al 2003)*

A distributed leadership approach does not negate the requirement for leadership at the top. The focus of distributed leadership is on the wider leadership capability to ensure that service quality and organisational performance are sustained. The transition from a 'top down' leadership approach to a distributed model provides the space for middle managers to grow and flourish as mid level leaders.

### **Collective leadership**

*'Where there is a culture of collective leadership, all staff members are likely to intervene to solve problems, to ensure quality of care and to promote responsible, safe innovation.'*

*(West, et al 2014, page 1)*

Traditional leadership styles and behaviour, which reflect a command and control approach, will not produce the level of adaptability needed service is delivered through multiple stakeholders. Collaborative learning and working practices are needed to ensure the development of quality relationships across diverse service providers.

External drivers of collaboration will bring a significant challenge to traditional attitudes towards leadership. Collaborative working across potential partners and alliances will require styles of leadership that share power and encourage more junior people to challenge practices and behaviours that damage collaborative relationships. In addition, collaborative forms of leadership at both senior and middle levels are more likely to promote shared values and cultural norms (Malby & Fischer 2006).



# STRATEGIC TOOLS FOR LEADERS IN THE MIDDLE

## Tools for strategic planning

Below are three tools, which can be used to influence senior leaders and strengthen the voice of managers and mid level professionals working in the middle of their organisations. These tools are:

- An environmental scanning tool (PESTLE)
- A strategic analysis tool (SWOT)
- A cultural analysis tool (CULTURAL MAPPING)

These tools are more effective if you collaborate with colleagues and use the collective knowledge, experience and insights to produce a quality strategic analysis. Your ability to complete these exercises is not based on your seniority in the organisation. Mid level professionals have significant capability to contribute to the development of organisational strategy. These tools will help you to analyse and interpret both external and internal aspects of the organisation. These tools can be used separately or together, and are usually employed at the early stages of the strategic planning process.

## Instructions:

- Invite a few colleagues to a strategic conversation. They could be your peers or people you manage. Explain that the process is creative and a way of learning how to collaborate in the development of strategy,
- Organise a room and some method of collating the outputs of the conversations. Flipcharts and coloured pens or a white board are ideal. Post-it notes also work well,
- The key to a quality outcome is to ensure that your session has a clear purpose and structure with clear guidelines on timings and how the material will be used,
- The major priority of a strategic conversation is to ensure that all participants are listened to and their views are respected. Your chairing/facilitating skills are very important,
- The outcomes can be used to influence senior leaders about key operational priorities. This will enrich the development of organisational strategy and create a greater awareness of organisational culture.

### Strategy tool one: PESTLE Analysis

The PESTLE analysis enables you to examine the internal and external environment of your organisation and search for relevant political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors:

**Political** factors include, not only, aspects of the wider policy and regulatory environment in which the organisation operates, but also the key role of stakeholders:

- How stable is the overall political environment?
- Are budget policies shifting, and if so, to what effect?
- What is on the political agenda for other stakeholders?

**Economic** factors refer to the long-term prospects for the economy as a whole and in the field where the organisation operates, and include a host of issues such as interest rates, unemployment, income levels as well as supply and demand aspects from changing needs for services to the degree of competition and cost developments.

**Social and cultural** factors include social or demographic changes such as population growth and migration patterns, gender and diversity issues as well as value and attitudinal changes that might affect the organisation

**Technological** factors refer to technological developments and innovations in the broad sense and how technology could affect your organisation by creating new needs, changing its mode of operation and channels of communication.

**Legal** factors – Are new laws proposed that will influence how the organisation operates (e.g. welfare reform, charity law)?

**Environmental** factors – Are there requirements to meet environmental regulations, consider the recycling or disposal of waste; use natural resources responsibly?

### **Strategy tool two: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)**

A SWOT analysis is a way of identifying the strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats an organisation faces. Using this tool will help you to focus your operational activity where the greatest opportunities exist. The SWOT tool analyses the strengths and weaknesses (SW), which are usually internal factors that you have the power to influence. Opportunities and threats (OT) are external factors over which you have less influence. The learning from the OT part of the tool will help you to formulate strategies to maximise opportunities and minimise risk.

A SWOT analysis involves a series of questions, which should be directed at a specific issue or problem. Here are a few questions to guide you:

#### **Strengths:**

- What are the advantages of the organisation relative to others in the field?
- What is it that the organisation does well, better than others? What projects and activities?
- What relevant resources are in place and can be relied on?
- What is the organisation known for?
- What aspects of organisational structure, governance, and accountability work well?
- What are the strengths of our employees and leaders?
- Who are the stakeholders? Are they likely to become more complex?

#### **Weaknesses:**

- What are the disadvantages of the organisation relative to others in the same field?
- What is it that the organisation does badly, worse than others?
- What resources are volatile and cannot be relied on?
- What aspects of organisational structure, governance, and accountability need attention?
- What are the weaknesses of employees and leaders?
- What policies, patterns, etc. should be avoided?

**Opportunities:**

- Where are the good opportunities for the organisation (geographically, reputation, expertise, influence)?
- What are some of the trends that could become, or open up opportunities (changes in technology, demand, supply, etc.)?
- Are there changes in government policies expected?
- Are there changes in social patterns, value changes, population profiles etc.?
- Are there events that could open up opportunities?

**Threats:**

- What are the obstacles that are most likely to emerge?
- Are there old and new competitors that could pose a threat?
- Are supply and demand changes taking place that could threaten the organisation?
- What technological changes could pose a threat?
- Are there debt or cash flow problems?
- Could changes in policy affect the organisation negatively?

**Strategy tool three: Cultural mapping****Organisational culture**

The culture of your organisation will have an important impact on the way strategy is developed and implemented. The cultural compatibility with planned strategic change is key to achieving strategic goals and priorities. A major indicator of successful organisational change is the way that everyone involved understands cultural norms. Mid level professionals and managers have a crucial role in cultural mapping and analysis. Their experiences of leading staff and teams gives them a practical view of culture and the feasibility of strategic plans.

This tool is a powerful way for you communicate strategically to senior managers and influence change.



**Step one (Data collection)**

Use the six outer circles of the model above to collect information about organisational culture. You could choose your own organisation or ask permission to work, with people, in an external organisation e.g. a provider, a partner or key contact.

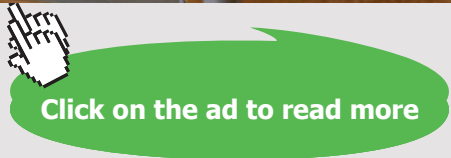
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You could set up some focus groups or conduct one to one interviews with a range of stakeholders. The questions below are provided as a prompt during your step one and you may need to customise them to your specific context.

It is important to establish a relaxed atmosphere when collecting cultural data. People tend to be very responsive and keen to talk about their organisation. The stories and anecdotes are a rich source of information about culture. The six circles will help you collect both objective (factual) information and subjective (human experience) information. You may find that your findings sit in more than one circle and that ideas appear to link across several circles.

**Try to avoid judging the information that you collect – your judgement is coming from your cultural norms and beliefs!**

*Top tip – this exercise works better when you work as a small team*

### **Cultural mapping questions**

#### **Stories:**

- What are the stories told across the organisation?
- Do the stories relate to strengths, weaknesses, successes or failures?
- Who are the heroes and villains?
- Are there stories about mavericks?
- What are the core beliefs that these stories represent?
- How do the stories sustain organisational culture?

#### **Symbols:**

- What forms of language are used across the organisation?
- Look for jargon and specialised language. Is this language internal?
- How accessible is this language to people outside the organisation?
- What are the symbols of the organisation? Look for logos, uniforms, status symbols, websites, vehicles, offices, parking, perks,
- What is communicated about the organisation? Strategic direction, financial concerns, customer experience, staff news, innovation, good news or bad news.

**Power structures:**

- How is power distributed in the organisation?
- Which stakeholders appear more powerful?
- How does the use of power sustain cultural norms?
- How does the use of power impact organisational change?
- How do people speak about powerful people in the organisation?

**Organisational structure:**

- How flat/hierarchical is the structure?
- How formal/informal is structure of the organisation?
- Does the structure encourage collaboration or competition?
- How do the different parts of the structure interact?
- Is the organisation structured to deliver the strategic plan?
- Is there any evidence of structures that are based in individual power?
- Is the structure aligned to organisational values and culture?

**Control systems:**

- What is measured by the organisation?
- What do external stakeholders measure?
- How well are control systems and measurements related to strategy?
- Are there control systems that are related to history and largely unchallenged?
- How do the control systems and measurements impact organisational culture?
- How do control systems impact human behaviour?

**Rituals and routines:**

- What are the key organisational rituals?
- What values and beliefs do they reveal?
- What behaviours do these rituals encourage or discourage?
- How do routines reinforce the cultural norms of the organisation?
- What would look odd if a ritual or routine was changed?
- How easy are ritual and routines easy to change

**Step two (Data Analysis)**

You will now have a substantial amount of information about the culture of the organisation but it may appear a confusing mass of detail. Here are a few practical steps to help you conduct your analysis:

- Choose a visual method for displaying your finding e.g. flipchart, white board. Post it notes,
- Take each circle in turn and summarise the detail into themes,
- Now look for patterns across the six circles,
- Summarise these patterns
- Create a statement that reflects the current organisational culture
- This statement encapsulates all aspects of the culture and is displayed in the centre circle

**Now arrange a strategic conversation with some senior managers and share this invaluable knowledge. Your findings and analysis is key to the quality and impact of your influence.**



## HOW TO ENSURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD

In the middle of organisations are highly qualified professionals with a well-developed sense of service and the social value it brings. The speed and complexity of social and economic change mean that traditional models of leadership are not appropriate in the future. The role and contribution of middle managers and mid level professionals needs to change to be more strategic, empowered and political. The centre of gravity for managing change is no longer at the top.

People operating in the middle of organisations have a unique view of organisational change and culture. During change, they have insights and observations about culture that are crucial to the viability of strategic plans. In contrast, senior managers, with their focus on the future, may be removed from the day-to-day operational activity. This makes senior managers less able to appreciate the impact of culture on their strategic plans or the operational knowledge required for change.

The voices of middle managers are assumed to be a form of resistance to change. For senior managers under intense external and political pressure, the voices from the middle may appear to come from the past. This dynamic needs to change.

There is an opportunity for middle managers to improve their role and image by delivering evidence of their capability. The scale of economic and social change is a major opportunity for mid level managers and professionals. Innovative and cost effective responses to change can be promoted and facilitated in the operational relationship between the middle and the frontline. With increasing cooperation across different services and providers, it is now very important that more collaborative forms of leadership are taken seriously. This cannot work unless there is a radical rethink of what leadership means to all levels in the organisation.

Vital to organisational readiness for change is a high quality cycle of knowledge production and transfer. This means a speedy iteration of learning between different parts of the organisation. A new, more dynamic circulation of power will be deeply challenging, both for those who occupy a senior role and for those who expect the boss to do all the thinking.

Leadership is a social process that ensures a diverse group of people accomplish a shared purpose and this can happen at all levels. Middle managers and mid level professionals have the potential to be the new centre of gravity in their organisations.



### **Exercise: Personal Development Plan**

You are now invited to think about your future personal development. Information, exercises and practical tips will have stimulated your thoughts about your own leadership. The following prompt questions are to help you to think more deeply about your leadership and check the assumptions that may inhibit your self-belief and confidence.

#### **Reflect using these questions and listen to your inner voice:**

- What are the three most important challenges that your life (work or non-work) currently presents?
- Write down three important facts about yourself. What are the important achievements and capabilities?
- What are your three most important aspirations?
- What aspect of your current life frustrates you most?
- What are your vital sources of energy? What do you love doing?
- What do you notice about your current leadership style?

#### **What is holding you back?**

Reflect on a recent situation and check which of the following negative voices are impacting your leadership style:

- Voice of judgement which shuts down an open mind,
- Voice of cynicism which shuts down your intuition,
- Voice of fear, which keeps you trapped in the past experience.

#### **What are your plans?**

Try noticing your behaviours, attitudes and assumptions over the next few weeks:

- What are your future visions and intentions?
- What are the essential elements of your future aspirations?
- What will you need from others to achieve your dreams?
- What will you need to develop your leadership style?
- Who might help you make your future possibilities a reality?
- What are the first practical steps you will take?

# APPENDIX A. REDS AND GREENS (INSTRUCTIONS)

## Objectives:

The purpose of this exercise is for you to get the best return from the exercise.

## Procedure:

You can bid one of two colours at each time, red or green. Five minutes after you are given this brief, a facilitator will ask you what your bid is. After both groups have bid, a facilitator will announce the results. The scoring is as follows:

Your Selection	Their Selection	Your Score	They Score
GREENS	GREENS	+ 15	+ 15
GREENS	REDS	- 30	+ 30
REDS	REDS	- 15	- 15
REDS	GREENS	+ 30	- 30

There will be 5 rounds. Between each bid, you will have 2 minutes to consider your next bid.

After the second round, you will be asked if you want to meet the other group. If both groups say yes, then the meeting will happen. It will last for 5 minutes. You will have two minutes after the meeting to consider your next bid.

Rounds three and five score double points.

	Your Bid	Their Bid	Your Score	Their Score	Your Total	Their Total	
Round 1							
Round 2							
Round 3							Double Score
Round 4							
Round 5							Double Score



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