

LASTING LEADERSHIP

GUIDE TO...

LATERAL LEADERSHIP



Sustainable leadership in
non-profit organisations

Copyright

Lasting Leadership and The Lasting Difference are registered trademarks of Wren and Greyhound Limited.

© Wren and Greyhound Limited, trading as The Lasting Difference. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution, Non- Commercial, No Derivatives 4.0 International Licence.

To view a copy of this licence visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

In simple terms this entitles you to copy and share the tools with others for non-commercial purposes on the following terms:

Attribution

You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the licence, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests Wren and Greyhound endorses you or your use.

Non-Commercial

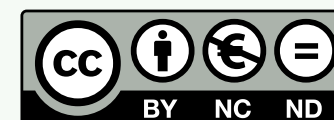
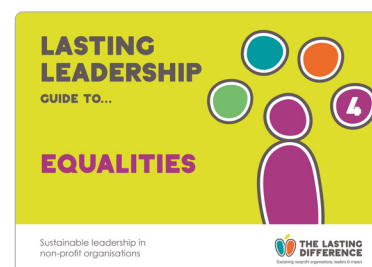
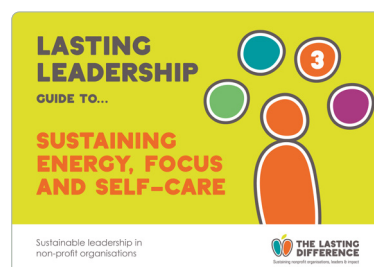
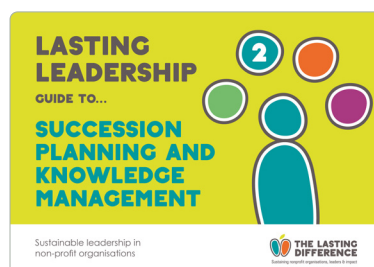
You may not use the material for commercial purposes. Consultants may not use the material in their work and should contact us to arrange a commercial licence.

No Derivatives

If you change or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

OTHER GUIDES IN THIS SERIES:

There are four key capabilities of sustainable leadership. Each has its own Lasting Leadership guide.



We practise what we preach! This is a free resource shared using a creative commons licence. Please help us improve future editions by sharing your feedback, questions, comments and suggestions.

Email: jen@thelastingdifference.com

VISIT [THELASTINGDIFFERENCE.COM](https://thelastingdifference.com)
FOR MORE IDEAS, EXAMPLES AND FREE RESOURCES

CONTENTS

Foreword and acknowledgements	4
-------------------------------	---

PART ONE: BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES 5

Background	6
Challenges and paradoxes	7

PART TWO: LATERAL LEADERSHIP 8

The challenge and capability	9
Principles	10
Practices: Ideas for action	15
Self assessment	20
Action plan	22
Recommendations	23
Notes and reflections	24

PART THREE: APPENDICES 25

Appendix One: Delegation and devolved leadership	26
Appendix Two: Learning & Improvement Groups	27
Appendix Three: Commissioning template	31
Selected references and reading	34
About the Lasting Difference	35
About the authors	36

FIVE WORD STRESSECUATIVE SUMMARY:

Share power and build capacity.

50 WORD EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Lateral leadership recognises that leadership exists in every corner of organisations. It involves people taking ownership and accountability for the organisation's vision and outcomes. Leaders need to be willing let go because leadership capacity needs to be nurtured, with room to grow. Lateral leadership requires trust, courage, diversity and support.

FOREWORD

There is no organisational sustainability without sustainable leadership.

During 2019 we undertook research to better understand sustainable leadership. This included a global literature review; focus groups with over 70 non-profit leaders; learning sets; workshops; and conference inputs.

We launched the Lasting Leadership guide in 2020. This new, updated suite of guides builds on recent learning to help organisational leaders explore, assess and prioritise sustainable leadership. We hope this guide contributes to further conversations about this vital but little-understood topic.



**LEADERSHIP
SUSTAINABILITY IS
THE NUMBER ONE
CHALLENGE FACING
NON-PROFIT
ORGANISATIONS
AND THE SECTOR**



Jen Curran, Director of Leadership,
The Lasting Difference

THANK YOU

To everyone who has commissioned or contributed to our focus groups, workshops, e-learning and action learning programmes since 2019.

With particular thanks to:

- **Debbie Bayne**
- **Frances Simpson**
- **Julie Watson**, Women's Aid East and Midlothian
- **Kate Wallace**, Victim Support Scotland
- **Kirsteen Campbell**, Scottish SPCA
- **Kirsten Smith** and **Ashleigh Hamlyn**, ACOSVO
- **Mhairi Crawford**, LGBT Youth Scotland
- **Scott Lafferty**, Carers Trust.

PART ONE:

BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

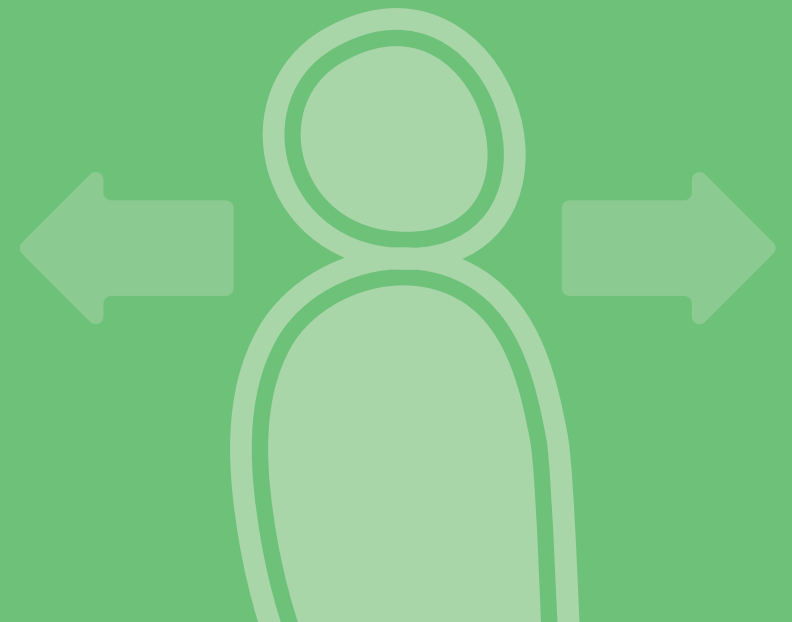
BACKGROUND

6

CHALLENGES AND PARADOXES

7

If you have already read one of the other Lasting Leadership guides, **skip to page 8.**



BACKGROUND

There is a wealth of information on leadership styles, models and approaches – but far less exists on the topic of leadership *sustainability*.

Sustainable leadership, like organisational sustainability, is challenging and complex. It requires organisations and their leaders to respond to the technical and adaptive¹ challenges of complex, evolving environments. Complexity requires leaders to be comfortable with uncertainty, open to challenging the status quo and facilitating leadership across their organisations. These ideas are easy to grasp but at an organisational level they are harder to translate. And at an individual level, they are extremely challenging. They contradict the ways we have been brought up to think about organisation, control and influence – assumptions that run very deep in our society and organisational systems. This can be anxiety-provoking for everyone involved: it takes trust to promote ownership, participation, agency and self-direction.

Our approach to sustainable leadership is therefore rooted in systems thinking. It is informed by complexity theory, design thinking and sustainability principles from *The Lasting Difference* toolkit, which defines sustainability as *the capacity to make a lasting difference*.²

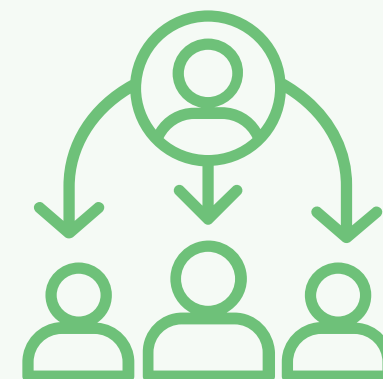
Sustainable leadership requires:

- **PROVIDING COORDINATION, NOT CONTROL**
- **GIVING INFORMATION, NOT INSTRUCTION**
- **OFFERING CHALLENGES, NOT CERTAINTY**
- **SEEKING COMMITMENT, NOT CONFORMITY**

DEFINITION:

We define sustainable leadership as:

**DEVELOPING CAPACITY
TO ENABLE LEADERS
TO EMERGE, EVOLVE
AND EXCEL**



¹ The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Ronald Heifetz

² The Lasting Difference: tools for organisational sustainability, www.thelastingdifference.com

CHALLENGES AND PARADOXES

Our *Lasting Difference* research and consultancy with hundreds of organisations since 2013 reveals common sustainable leadership challenges, paradoxes and principles.

THE TIME CHALLENGE

Time is our most precious resource, but we don't protect or use it well

THE LEADERSHIP MYTH

The exhilarating side of leadership gets fetishised – the exhausting reality gets ignored

THE CARE PARADOX

Organisations that care for people, society and the environment don't always care for themselves

THE CONTROL PARADOX

The more that managers try to control, the more resistance they encounter

THE TRUST PARADOX

Delegation requires trust, but without delegation, trust won't exist

THE EQUALITY PARADOX

Organisations that promote social justice and equality don't always embody those values in their approach to leadership

Our Lasting Leadership elearning course is an excellent way to explore these ideas in more detail. 93% of previous participants said it changed their leadership practice.

Visit TheLastingDifference.com for more details.

PRINCIPLES

Sustainable leadership:

1. Requires time and space for development, planning, sharing knowledge and learning.
2. Connects with vision and purpose: focusing on why, not what or how.
3. Prioritises self-care as an essential part of the job – not a perk or a luxury.
4. Devolves authority and shares power. Sustainable leaders trust themselves to let go.
5. Builds capacity. Sustainable teams trust that leaders support their efforts and decisions.
6. Requires equality and diversity, committing to inclusion. It reflects our society and challenges stereotypes of what a good leader looks like.

IN THIS GUIDE:

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP:

REQUIRES TIME



CONNECTS WITH VISION AND PURPOSE



PRIORITISES SELF-CARE



DEVOLVES AUTHORITY AND SHARES POWER



BUILDS CAPACITY



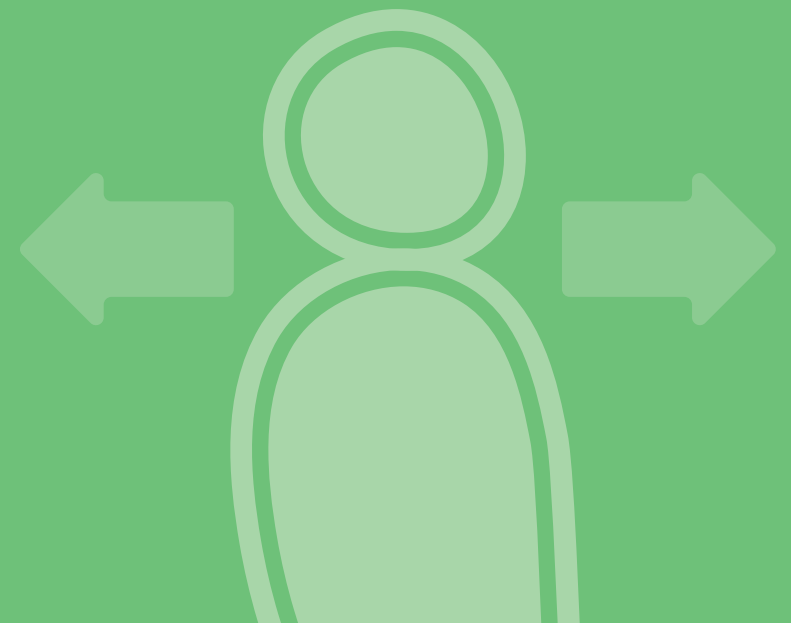
REQUIRES EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY



PART TWO:

LATERAL LEADERSHIP

THE CHALLENGE AND CAPABILITY	9
PRINCIPLES	10
PRACTICES – IDEAS FOR ACTION	15
SELF ASSESSMENT	20
ACTION PLAN	22
RECOMMENDATIONS	23
FINAL REFLECTIONS	24



THE CHALLENGE AND CAPABILITY

THE CHALLENGE

To build sustainable leadership, organisations must avoid over-reliance on one leader. One person alone cannot deliver an organisation's strategic plan. Likewise, top-down approaches are not well suited for complex, changing environments. Yet strategies are often seen as 'belonging' to senior managers.

THE CAPABILITY

Lateral leadership is made up of several elements:

- **EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND BUILDING CAPACITY**
- **PEOPLE TAKING OWNERSHIP, AUTONOMY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY REGARDLESS OF THEIR ROLE OR PLACE IN THE HIERARCHY**
- **VALUING DIVERSITY**
- **DELEGATION AND DEVOLVED AUTHORITY – A TRIANGLE OF TRUST**
- **LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTATION**

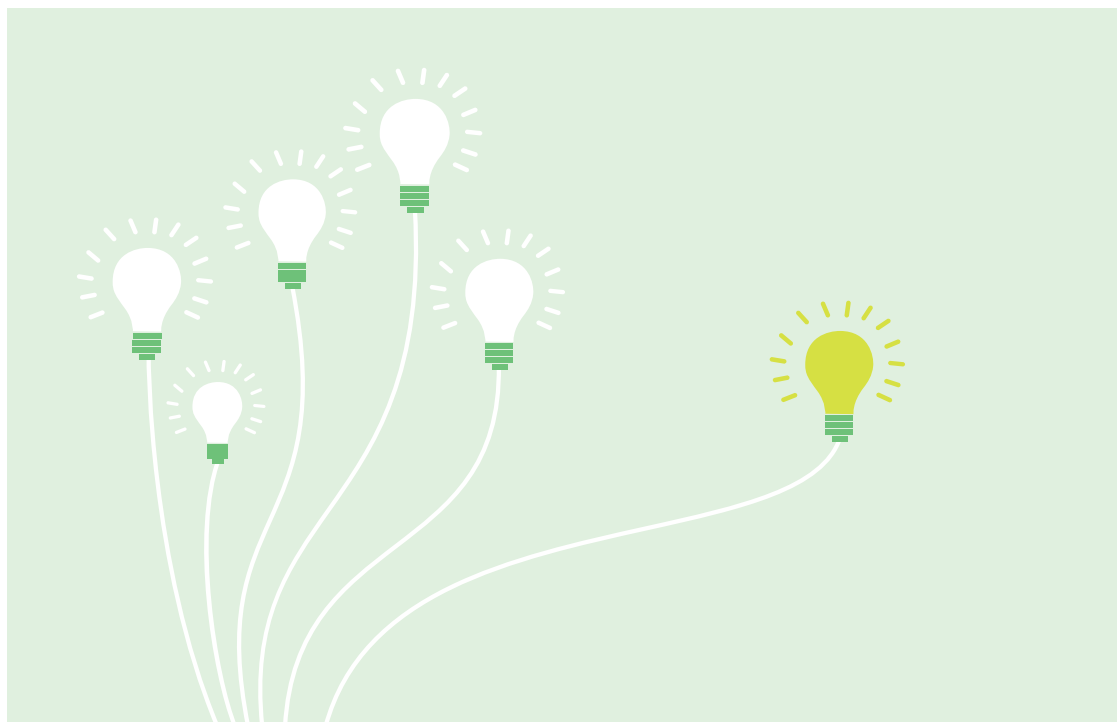
The principles behind these elements are explored in more detail below. They sound straightforward in theory, but are much harder to consistently put into practice. **There is no one-size-fits-all.** Every organisation is different. This guide sets out ideas, grounded in real life practice learned from hundreds of organisations, that can bring Lateral Leadership and its many benefits to life.



**THIS GUIDE SETS OUT
IDEAS THAT CAN BRING
LATERAL LEADERSHIP
AND ITS MANY
BENEFITS TO LIFE**

PRINCIPLES

EMPOWERMENT: LEADERS ARE EVERYWHERE



Leadership is not about creating followers. It is about equipping others to exercise their initiative and agency. At its core lateral leadership recognises that everyone is or can be a leader. With the right support, tools and information, the best people to make decisions are the ones closest to where the work is delivered – and where the effects will be felt. Lateral leadership requires a commitment from all levels of the organisation to create a culture in which everyone’s capacity for leadership develops.

“Giving the organisational outcomes back to the team to check they were fit for purpose, helped them realise they are the experts! And we got better outcomes and indicators in our evaluation plan as a result.”

OWNERSHIP, AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: DOING YOUR BEST, EVEN WHEN NO-ONE IS LOOKING

Leadership is more than a job title or positional authority – it's the ability to spot need, identify opportunities and take responsibility. In lateral leadership, people are accountable to themselves and to each other, their peers as well as their managers. This takes courage: to question and be questioned, to hold others to account and to be held to account.

"This is what I think a leader should be, so I'll be it."

VALUING DIVERSITY

Equality and diversity don't mean treating everyone the same. Sometimes people need different kinds of support to feel confident and comfortable. Not everyone wants or feels ready to step in or step up. Lateral leadership nourishes people and nurtures diversity.

Bringing diverse people together from different roles and levels across the organisation generates new insights, perspectives, ideas, and challenges. This is hugely valuable – it leads to fresh ways of approaching things and gives people an appreciation of others' roles. The organisation is more than the sum of its parts – bringing people together builds an understanding of how all the parts, and roles, combine to achieve organisational goals.

"I found that working with people from other areas led to thinking differently about some of the issues – seeing things from different perspectives."



PROVOCATION:

THERE IS LEADERSHIP IN EVERY CORNER OF YOUR ORGANISATION, WAITING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO EMERGE.

WHOSE PERMISSION DO PEOPLE NEED TO DO THE RIGHT THING?

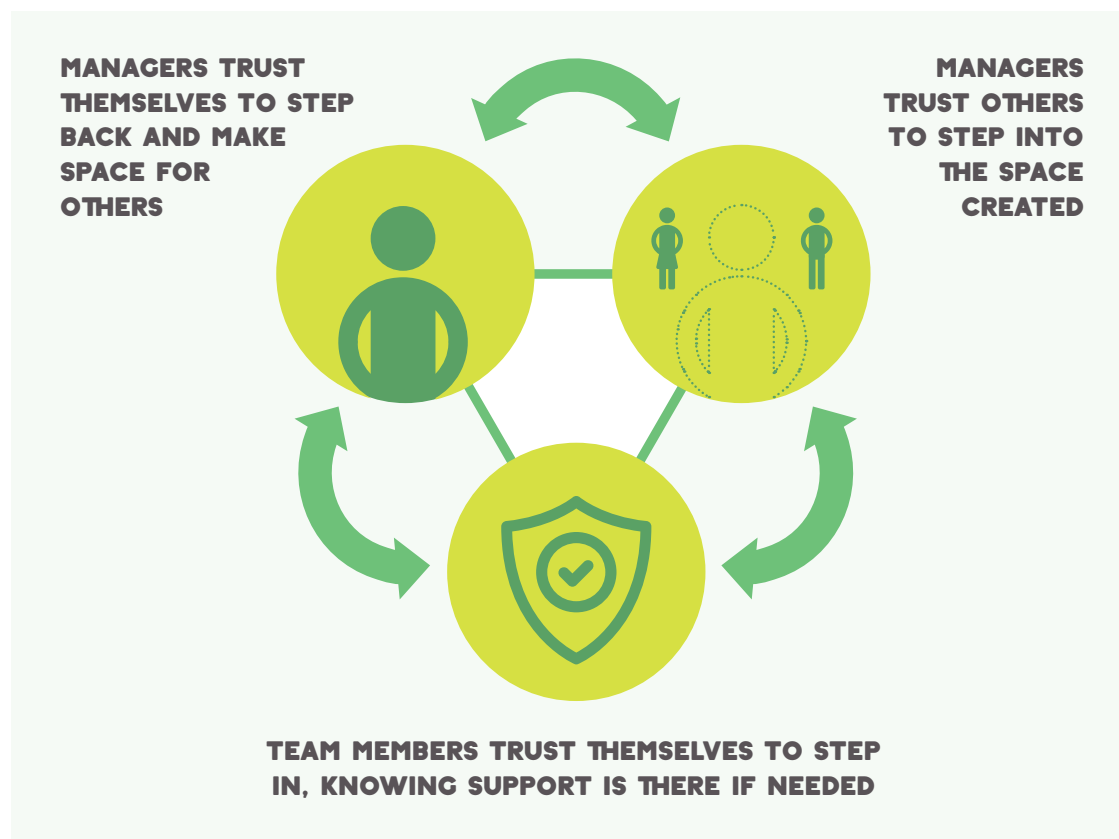
"The best thing about the lateral leadership approach was that everyone had a chance to have their say in an understanding environment... this allowed people to flourish and enhance their skill sets – which are sometimes underutilised in the organisation."

DELEGATION AND DEVOLVED AUTHORITY – THE TRIANGLE OF TRUST

Leaders must trust themselves to step back and trust their teams to step in. Teams must also trust that leaders will encourage and recognise their efforts – not crush or ignore them. Managers therefore need to let go of an element of certainty and control. This can make them feel their identity or competence are being challenged – if they share their authority, what is their role? Effective delegation requires defining what success looks like to individuals, to their teams and to the organisation. This helps build ownership of not only the work but the results and their impact.

“An open-door policy can make it feel that you don’t trust people to get on with their job or make decisions – sometimes we need to be less present, not more.”

The triangle of trust



PROVOCATION:

**SHARING LEADERSHIP
REQUIRES THREE-
WAY TRUST – AND A
WILLINGNESS TO LET GO.**

LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTATION

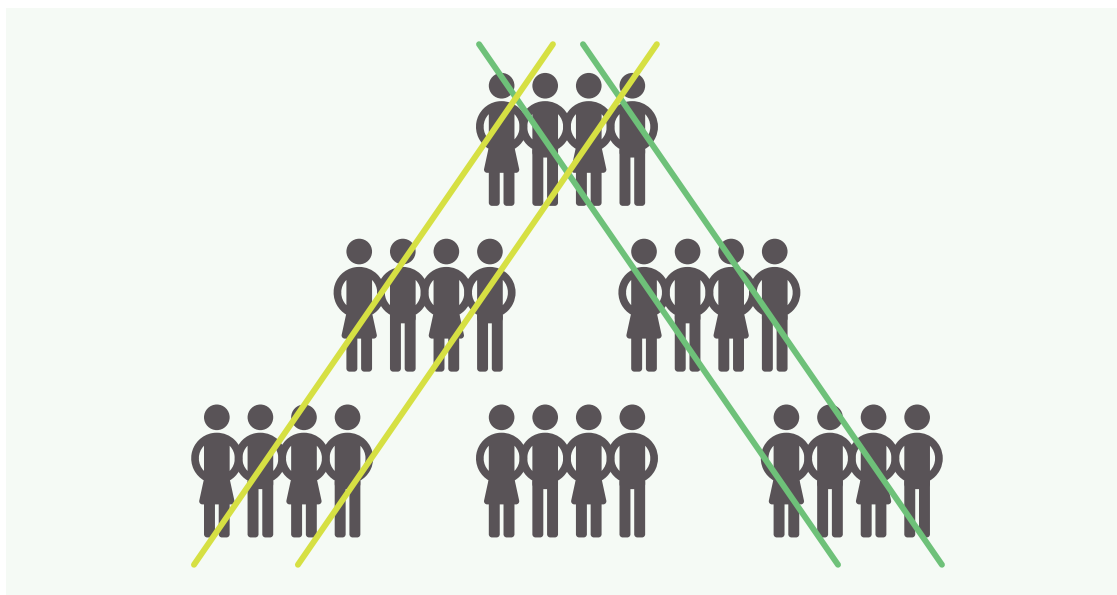
Lateral leadership is a learning process. It is about trying out new ways of working, enabling and supporting people to take ownership of key aspects of the organisation's development and delivery. This can initially feel daunting to all those involved. People can feel unsure if they're 'doing it right', so space and time to reflect with peers and managers is vital. With experience, anxiety will reduce, and confidence will grow. In this way of working, mistakes are seen as valuable learning opportunities.

"My gut instinct is always right. How do I support my team to develop that compass?"

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE CAN CREATE SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP – OR CRUSH IT

Traditional hierarchical control inhibits the development of shared leadership and authority. Organisational structures and processes need to evolve as agency and accountability develop. Shifting to a culture of devolved authority requires a commitment to learning and adapting together. This will often be messy at first as new ways of communicating and working emerge. It is vital to develop the willingness to be comfortable with – and confronted by – uncertainty as new processes evolve.

"Succession is easy to do when you lead with a devolved leadership style – it's harder in a command-and-control style."

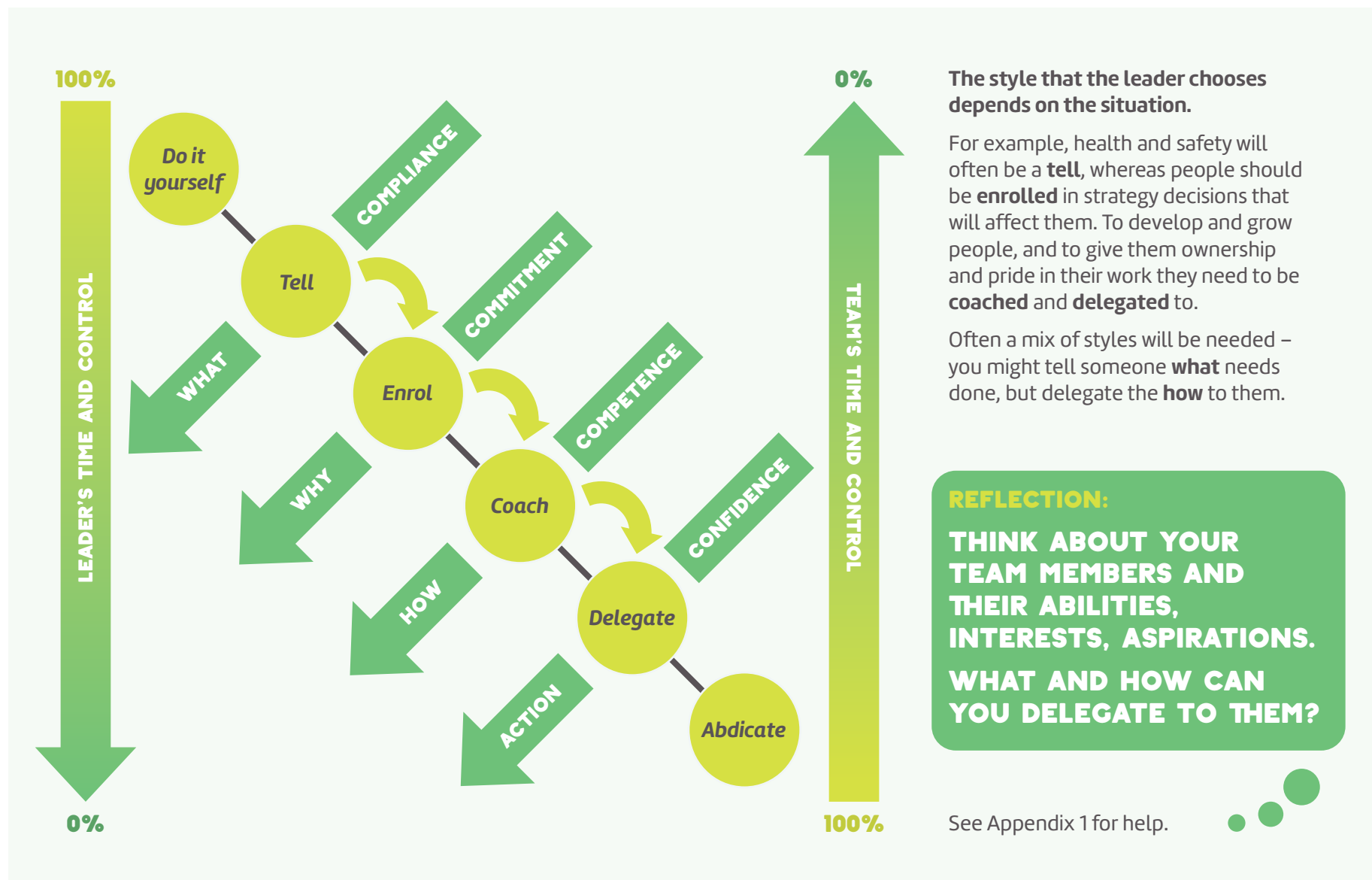


PROVOCATION:

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER FROM ACROSS THE ORGANISATION WILL GENERATE NEW INSIGHTS, PERSPECTIVES AND IDEAS.

LEADERSHIP DELEGATION CHOICES

Image credit: created by and © Debbie Bayne



"There's a time for the open, coaching leadership approach – and a time when rapid decisions and 'top down' are needed. It's not about 'good' or 'bad' but having a toolkit to choose from. The context we're in also changes how people will respond."

PRACTICES: IDEAS FOR ACTION

The ideas in this section all come from real life practice. Specific examples are then shared on pages 18–19.

CREATE OWNERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONAL VISION AND OUTCOMES

- Share ownership of organisational vision and purpose by starting with the ‘why’ – generate agreement about the outcomes the organisation wants to achieve.
- Involve people in defining what success looks like and holding themselves to account.
- Let go control of every small detail. Agree clear outcomes, then get out of people’s way. Step in only to remove anything else that gets in their way.
- To help people build skills and confidence, develop processes and tools that help guide decision-making. For example, organisational values and outcomes give good parameters within which decisions can be safely made.

“Previously we were given a strategic plan and told to implement it. The lateral leadership approach, where we explored the ‘why’ for our organisation, our teams and ourselves, gave ownership of the strategic plan and demonstrated how each person has a role to play in its implementation.”

DEVELOP LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

- Promotion and vertical progression opportunities are limited, so consider job enrichment. Are there opportunities to shadow, attend events or join networks to develop knowledge, relationships and skills?
- Remove tasks or provide backfill when creating development opportunities – additional responsibilities should increase capacity and job satisfaction, not stress.
- Remember some people will step in more readily while others will need more help and support. Tailor capacity building approaches to help people feel more confident in stepping in.
- Review leadership and progression opportunities to ensure they are inclusive, equitable and accessible to all.

AGREE WHAT DEVOLVED AUTHORITY LOOKS LIKE

- Have open and honest conversations about ‘top–down’ and ‘bottom–up’ engagement and empowerment. (Listen out for words that reinforce ideas about vertical hierarchies, and remember actions speak loudest – are your practices congruent with your messages?)
- Explore what distributed leadership really means in your organisation. Ask whether your current structures and processes enable it or inhibit it. Develop new systems of planning, communication and accountability to support authority to be devolved.
- Explore different organisational structures and cultures to generate ideas for new ways of working. Make a commitment to learning and adapting as things evolve.
- Be willing to be comfortable with uncertainty.
- Live your values. For example, if you value empowerment and diversity, how can you use these values to support lateral leadership? Deepen shared understanding of what it looks like to live your values.

DEVOLVE AUTHORITY

- Set up working groups or Learning and Improvement Groups with delegated authority to explore and progress key strategic areas of work. [See Appendix Two for our Guide to Learning and Improvement Groups]
- Take a non–hierarchical approach to these and other opportunities. Leave job titles at the door to give equal value to all perspectives.
- Share ownership of organisational and strategic developments, encouraging people to take the lead and come up with solutions.
- Create separate space for testing out new ideas outside of the usual operational rules and hierarchy.
- Working in this way can feel challenging at first, so developing shared ground–rules and expectations helps to build trusting openness and respect.

“Having members from across the organisation, without rank, ensured people felt their ideas and viewpoints were valued. It is important for every staff member to remember that they are part of the organisation, no one person is more important than the other.”

PROVIDE CLEAR COMMISSIONING AND OVERSIGHT

- Use a commissioning process when delegating to groups. Set clear expectations, timescales, oversight and lines of communication. See Appendix Two for our guide to Learning and Improvement Groups and Appendix Three for our commissioning guide.
- The same process used for commissioning external consultancy can apply to devolved working and decision-making internally. Outline the scope and scale of the work, arrange regular check-ins, and, importantly, give a degree of latitude for the delivery of the end result.

PROTECT THE SPACE AND TRUST THE PROCESS

- Commit regular time and space to review new ways of working and share learning to enable adaption and evolution.
- Accept that you won't get it right first time, the process is iterative.
- Make a commitment to learning and adapting as things evolve.



PROVOCATION:

**'NONE OF US
IS AS CLEVER
AS ALL OF US'**



EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

SHARE OWNERSHIP OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Some organisations have involved their whole team in developing their strategic plan. Others have delegated implementation to working groups, giving them leadership of particular strategic priorities.

“This led to some great ideas that the board and management team wouldn’t have thought of. And the team were delighted to see that what was suggested was included in our new strategic plan.”

EXPLORE DIFFERENT STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

There are many alternative models and structures that can support leadership development. Examples include cooperatives, self-managing teams and community empowerment models. Charles Handy’s⁴ famous organisational culture models can help teams explore different structures that support lateral leadership.

BUILDING CAPACITY REQUIRES AN INITIAL INVESTMENT OF TIME – AND UNLEARNING

Whilst it might be quicker (or feel more natural) just to fix things, in the long term this is more time consuming and self-defeating, perpetuating the Control Paradox. Members of our Action Learning programmes find it useful to use coaching styles with colleagues, practising asking rather than telling or problem solving.

“It’s not always easy but letting go gets easier with practice!”

COORDINATE AND CONDUCT

When people are busy or stressed they often revert to type by solving people’s problems or taking the lead on key pieces of work. Support lateral leadership by viewing your role as a coordinator rather than a doer.

“I want to conduct the orchestra, not play all the instruments myself.”

KEEP LEARNING

Our Lasting Leadership elearning course is an excellent way to explore these ideas in more detail.

93% OF PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS SAID IT CHANGED THEIR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Visit [TheLastingDifference.com](https://www.thelastingdifference.com) for more details

⁴ Understanding Organizations, Handy, C. Penguin, 1997

PLAY TO PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS

In some organisations delegating leadership to working groups has helped build on people's strengths and allowed them to shine. Others have encouraged natural leadership to evolve by having 'aces in their places', saving time and reducing stress by assigning tasks based on people's skills, interests or development goals.

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS BEHIND RESISTANCE

New ways of working can feel challenging. Using the Four 'C's can help to understand resistance to lateral leadership:

- 1. CAPACITY: ARE PEOPLE OVERLOADED AND NEED PROTECTED TIME TO TAKE PART IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS?**
- 2. CAPABILITY: DO PEOPLE NEED TO DEVELOP NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE?**
- 3. CONFIDENCE: ARE PEOPLE CONFIDENT TO STEP OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONES?**
- 4. CLARITY: DOES EVERYONE UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT THE NEW WAYS OF WORKING? ARE MESSAGES ABOUT THE NEW APPROACH CLEAR AND CONSISTENT?**



SELF-ASSESSMENT: LATERAL LEADERSHIP (INDIVIDUAL)

This section encourages you to reflect on the themes above and start planning to do something about them as an individual (though you may benefit from involving others). You can assign a score to each indicator, using this suggested scoring guide:

2 = I have good consistent evidence | 1 = My evidence is mixed or patchy | 0 = I cannot evidence this

There is also space for you to make notes and comments, which can help you discuss things with colleagues or review progress over time. These notes will usually be more meaningful than just a score.

	LATERAL LEADERSHIP: INDIVIDUAL	SCORE	YOUR NOTES
1	I trust other people to step in – and trust myself to step back.		
2	I am present in the right ways, to the right extent, at the right times.		
3	Having developed clear outcomes and expectations for pieces of delegated work, I get out the way.		
4	I am comfortable with uncertainty and help my team to be too.		
5	My role or identity would be at risk if I shared my power and responsibilities.		
6	I aim to be valuable, not precious. I can let things go, confident in other people sharing power and decision-making.		



SELF-ASSESSMENT: LATERAL LEADERSHIP (ORGANISATIONAL)

This section encourages you to reflect on the themes above and start planning to do something about them together. You can assign a score to each indicator, using this suggested scoring guide:

2 = We have good consistent evidence | 1 = Our evidence is mixed or patchy | 0 = We cannot evidence this

There is also space for you to make notes and comments, which can help you discuss things with colleagues or review progress over time. These notes will usually be more meaningful than just a score.

	LATERAL LEADERSHIP: ORGANISATIONAL	SCORE	YOUR NOTES
1	We encourage shared ownership of organisational strategy, vision and outcomes.		
2	We develop leadership capacity across the whole organisation.		
3	We identify what lateral leadership looks like.		
4	We provide clear oversight and parameters, then devolve leadership appropriately and give space for it to flourish.		
5	We invest in and show confidence in people's leadership.		
6	We explore different structures and approaches that support leadership development.		



SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY Or areas of development:	ORGANISATIONAL ACTION What does the organisation need to do?	INDIVIDUAL ACTION What do I need to do?	TIMESCALES When will it be done?	REVIEW When and how will progress be reviewed?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **THE BEST TIME TO START IS NOW**

Planning for sustainable leadership is best done before a crisis happens.

- **PRIORITISE ACTION**

The self-assessment will help identify where things are going well and where action is required.

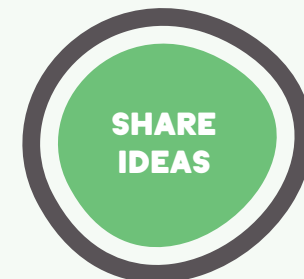
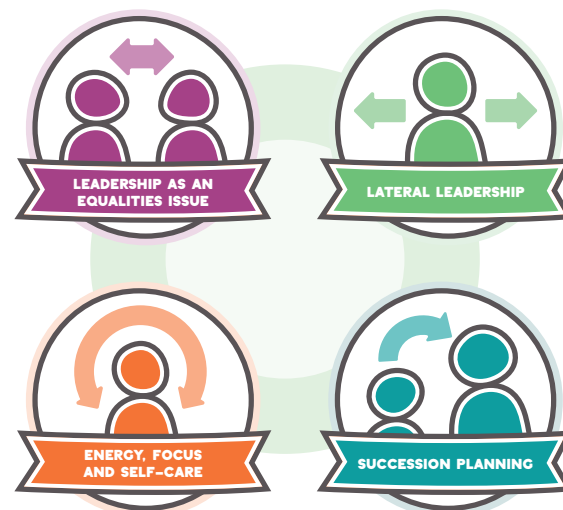
- **SHARE THE IDEAS ACROSS YOUR TEAM**

The approaches and actions required to improve leadership sustainability are adaptive – they need discussion, sharing ideas and exploring challenges and solutions together. We strongly encourage you to share the ideas in this guide across your team to develop collective responses and build ownership of the process.

- **TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

The four Lasting Leadership guides support the development of sustainable leadership. Action in one area will undoubtedly have an impact on the others. Taking a holistic approach will bring benefits across each of the capabilities:

- **LEADERSHIP AS AN EQUALITIES ISSUE**
- **LATERAL LEADERSHIP**
- **SUCCESSION PLANNING**
- **ENERGY, FOCUS AND SELF-CARE**



FINAL REFLECTIONS

Developing emergency responses during the pandemic helped some leaders demonstrate confidence in their teams, asking more from them. Many organisations found that leadership emerged overnight, as people took responsibility for what needed to be done, regardless of role. This is lateral leadership in action!

People report finding some simple messages the most powerful:

- **'I TRUST YOU'**
- **'YOU KNOW THE BEST SOLUTION TO THIS'**
- **'IT'S BETTER TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS, THAN PERMISSION'**

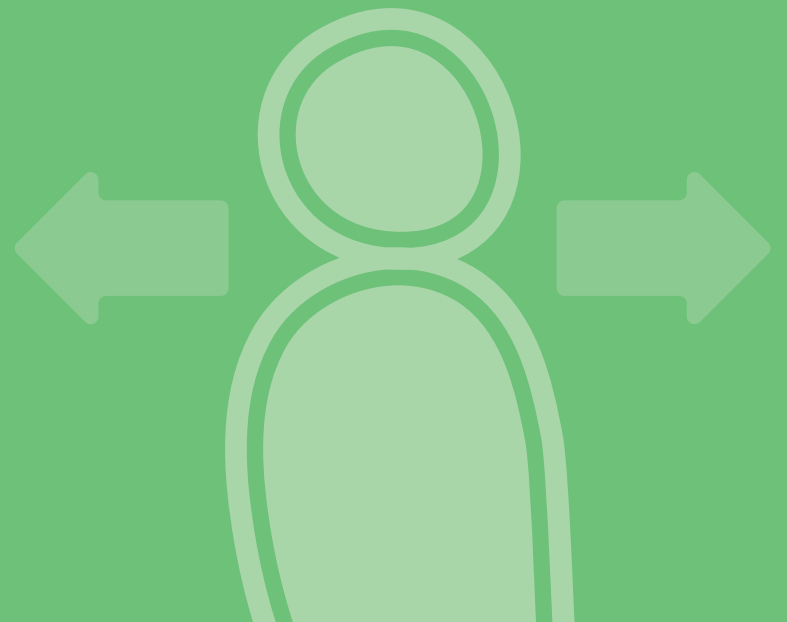


The paradox of control

PART THREE:

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: DELEGATION AND DEVOLVED LEADERSHIP	26
APPENDIX 2: LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT GROUPS	27
APPENDIX 3: COMMISSIONING TEMPLATE	31



APPENDIX ONE: DELEGATION AND DEVOLVED LEADERSHIP

This template helps you to assess opportunities for devolving leadership, and consider the risks involved. Some of your responsibilities may benefit from harnessing other people's knowledge, skills and enthusiasm more than others. The important thing to remember is that you cannot deliver the organisation's strategy alone.

STRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITIES e.g service development / stakeholder engagement	OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	RISKS INVOLVED IN DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	RISKS INVOLVED IN NOT DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS e.g how could this be done / who should be involved
OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES e.g quality, team development, monitoring & evaluation	OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	RISKS INVOLVED IN DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	RISKS INVOLVED IN NOT DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP	REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS e.g how could this be done / who should be involved

APPENDIX TWO: USING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT GROUPS

Learning and Improvement Groups (LIGs) are one of the best ways to build leadership capacity across an organisation. This guide provides information and advice on using the approach in your organisation.

WHAT DOES THE LIG APPROACH AIM TO DO?

LIGs are not just another working group! They are a powerful methodology (a set of tools and principles) that transforms organisations by:

- Harnessing the knowledge, skills and commitment of the whole team to develop strategically and organisationally important areas of work.
- Generating fresh perspectives, ideas and ways of working.
- Supporting an organisation-wide approach to leadership capacity building.

HOW ARE LIGS STRUCTURED?

LIGs focus on topics that are informed by the brief they are given or develop at the planning stage. They then usually begin with group members identifying in more detail what they need to learn, inform, improve and influence, see Figure 1.

In our experience, inviting applications to be involved in a LIG is more productive than cherry picking people. However, selecting the group to ensure a representative range of roles works best (we recommend a diagonal cross-slice, uniting people from different levels and functions within the organisation. See Figure 2).

KEY INGREDIENTS: HOW TO CREATE LIGS OF YOUR OWN

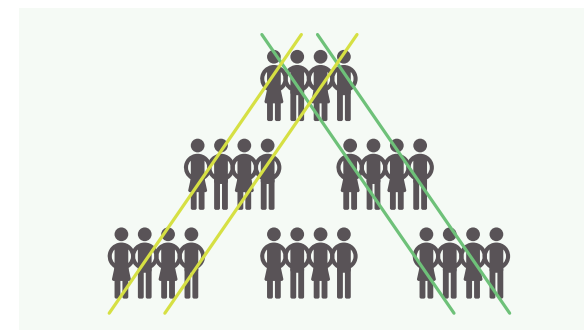
GET BUY-IN THE FROM WHOLE ORGANISATION

The process will only work if everyone in the organisation understands and values it. Have a conversation about what distributed leadership looks like in your organisation before the process begins. Explore the 'why' of the LIG approach – the benefits to the organisation, its future work, and the capacity of individuals and teams – to help everyone have a better understanding. It's also useful to explore the likely challenges to working in this way and how you will respond to these (if the LIG doesn't create challenges, it's not working!).

Figure 1: LIG members identify what to learn, inform and improve



Figure 2: recruit from a diagonal cross-slice of the organisation



BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER FROM ACROSS THE TEAM

Involve people from a cross-section of your organisation in the LIG. This could be bringing people who deliver services together with those who have responsibility for income generation. Or those who have responsibility for communications with those who focus on business planning. Trustees and volunteers can also be involved.

CREATE A TRIANGLE OF TRUST

Devolving leadership sounds fantastic in theory but it is much harder in practice! It is important to explore and develop the levels of trust needed to help devolved leadership flourish.

The triangle of trust (see Figure 3) requires leaders to trust themselves to step back, and to trust their teams to step in.

Teams need to trust that their ideas and effort will be valued, not ignored. Without this triangle, devolved leadership will not happen.

TAKE A NON-HIERARCHICAL APPROACH

The LIG approach embeds the principle that everyone's voice matters. It recognises that everyone has skills, knowledge and ideas. It values and respects diversity: of people, opinions and perspectives. Leave your job titles at the door and tackle the work as equal colleagues with an equal stake in the outcome of the work.

SET CLEAR AIMS AND OUTCOMES

Clear aims, outcomes and timescales for the work the LIG will undertake are essential. These help everyone understand the parameters of the work and support LIG members to have ownership of it. Use a commissioning process to help set these parameters. Our commissioning guide could help, see Appendix Three.

GIVE PEOPLE TIME AND SPACE

People need time not only to meet in their LIG, but also to do the work between meetings. It won't happen by magic! Make sure those involved have protected time to undertake the work (consider reducing their other responsibilities or providing backfill if necessary).

Figure 3: Triangle of trust



RETAIN COMMISSIONING OVERSIGHT

It's not uncommon for LIGs to move faster than other parts of the organisation. Ongoing oversight helps to manage the pace of change. The initial commissioning process is important, but regular communication is vital. It helps LIG members check their thinking as the work develops, and gives commissioners comfort that the work is progressing. Build in time for regular check-ins between the LIG and the commissioner of the work. These should be often enough to provide updates on progress, check parameters and clarify permissions, but not so frequent that it feels like interference. A good time for this is after problems have been defined and explored but before solutions have been made concrete.

WHAT DOES A LIG LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Here are some more tips to consider when setting up a LIG:

SET GROUND-RULES TO BUILD TRUST, OPENNESS AND RESPECT

This is likely to be a new way of working for many people. It involves a cross-section of the organisation, who might not be used to working together (or even know each other well). To help people settle in, spend some time at the start of the process setting collective ground-rules and principles for working together. These could include: 'there are no silly ideas'; 'listen to and respect to each other's views'; 'challenge ideas constructively'.

START WITH THE 'WHY'

In the first meeting, have discussions about the 'why' for the piece of work that has been commissioned. Why is it important to the organisation? How will the LIG help the organisation achieve its goals? What would success look like when this area of work is developed? This helps people feel ownership of the work – and passionate about the importance of taking it forward.

REVIEW THE AIMS AND OUTCOMES

Review the commissioning document to make sure everyone is clear on the outcomes set. Make sure timescales for reporting and finalising the work are clear and achievable.

USE THE LIG MODEL TO GENERATE IDEAS AND INSIGHTS

What do you want to learn about this area of work? Is some research required? What is it that needs to be informed and improved? What else will this work influence?

AGREE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Think through who is best to take on key aspects of the work, including responsibility for coordinating LIG meetings, reporting back to the commissioner and so on.

KEEP IN TOUCH BETWEEN MEETINGS

As the work gets underway it's important for LIG members to check in with each other between meetings. Digital platforms such as Teams to share documents and ideas are a good way to keep in touch.

COMMUNICATE

LIGs can create a ripple effect through members sharing their work across the organisation. Use existing team communications such as newsletters and team meetings to keep colleagues informed of the work going on – and get their ideas and input.

Finally, each organisation is different – some will have small teams, others will be large; some will be more hierarchical, some will be more collaborative:

INVOLVE APPROPRIATE MEMBERS OF THE TEAM IN DEVELOPING AND ADAPTING THIS APPROACH TO LATERAL LEADERSHIP TO ENSURE IT WORKS BEST FOR YOU.

APPENDIX THREE: COMMISSIONING TEMPLATE

The template on the following page is for commissioning pieces of work from a Learning & Improvement Group (LIG).

Use it alongside Appendix Two above. It could be adapted to commissioning other pieces of work e.g. delegating major projects to a team or for colleagues working together on shorter-term tasks.

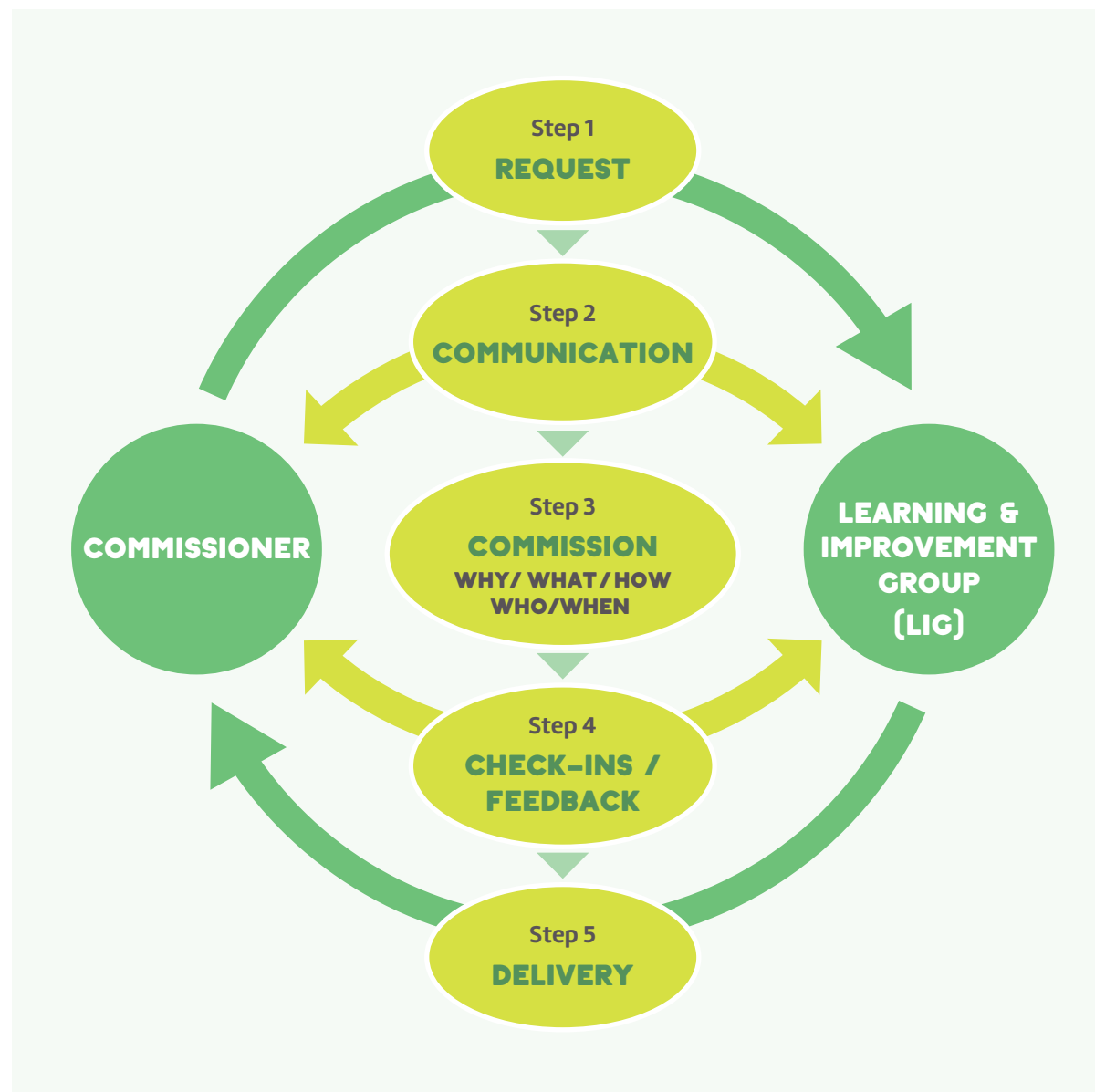
People often think that the commissioning process consists only of steps 1 and 5 – the commissioner identifies a piece of work to be undertaken and requests the supplier (in this case a LIG) fulfil this. However, to work at its best, the process should include all five steps shown in Figure 4 opposite.

Using all five steps results in:

- **The right thing being delivered, in the right way, at the right time.**
- **Better understanding of the priorities and needs of others.**
- **More involvement and ownership of the process and the work.**
- **Better relationships and trust between commissioners and suppliers.**
- **The ability to maintain relationships even when things go off track.**

Figure 4: Commissioning process in five steps

Image credit: created by and © Debbie Bayne



COMMISSIONING TEMPLATE (GUIDE)

PARAMETERS	DESCRIPTION
Start with the... WHY?	Link your work to the Strategic Plan and high-level outcomes. Why is this work important to the organisation? Why work together in this way i.e. involving a group of representatives from across the organisation to share experience, knowledge and skills and generate ideas to tackle the work together?
WHAT?	Identify the priorities for this area of work – what are the key things you need the LIG to achieve?
HOW?	The way the LIG will work together e.g. inception meeting; ground rules; non-hierarchical (working as equals). Agree the best process of working together to deliver the piece of work e.g. intensive days to work together / time away from day job to complete the work / using Teams to share ideas / undertaking work between meetings.
WHO?	Who is going to be involved in the LIG? Is the group representative? Should other colleagues be invited to join? Agree group roles e.g. coordination role to organise meetings; who will liaise with the commissioner?
WHEN	The timeframe for the work – including deadline and key milestones along the way identified by commissioner (check these are achievable and realistic). Agree dates for reporting and check-ins e.g. at the half way point.
Other	Any other information or requests to commissioners for additional scope e.g. links to other work underway in the organisation.
Any feedback / amendments to the commission	
Commissioned by:	
	Date work commissioned:
Date commissioning template agreed:	Reporting/ check-in dates:
	Deadline for commission:

COMMISSIONING TEMPLATE

PARAMETERS	DESCRIPTION			
WHY?				
WHAT?				
HOW?				
WHO?				
WHEN?				
Other				
Any feedback / amendments to the commission				
Commissioned by:				Date work commissioned:
Date commissioning template agreed:		Reporting/ check-in dates:		Deadline for commission:

SELECTED REFERENCES AND READING

PUBLICATIONS

The Lasting Difference: tools for organisational sustainability

(5th Edn), Wren & Greyhound, 2020

Other free guides to sustainable leadership, capacity and impact from: www.thelastingdifference.com/resources

RECOMMENDED READING

Community Tool Box: Chapter 13, Orienting ideas in leadership,

Centre for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, 2019

Diversity management that works: an evidence-based view,

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development 2019

Gender, Leadership and Organization, Painter-Morland, M. in Values and

Ethics for the 21st Century, OpenMind BBVA, 2012

Path to Impact: Final Report, ACOSVO and CO³, 2018

Positioning, Understanding and Challenging Leadership in the Voluntary

Sector: Briefing papers 1–3, Terry, V., Jacklin-Jarvis, C. and Rees, J. Open University Business School: Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership, 2018

The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world, Heifetz, R. Harvard Business Review Press, 2009

Prevent discrimination: Support equality, ACAS, 2018

7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Covey, S.R. Simon & Shuster, 2004

Start with Why: how great leaders inspire everyone to take action,

Sinek, S. Penguin 2011

Understanding Organizations, Handy, C. Penguin, 1997

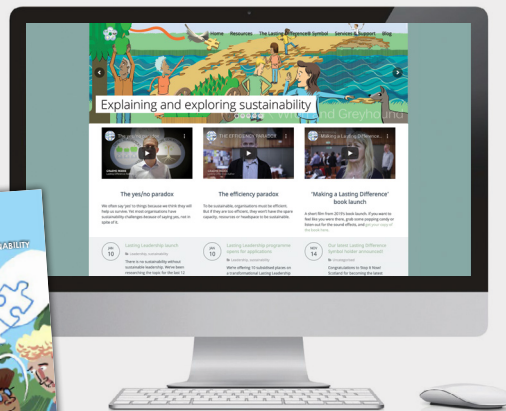
ABOUT THE LASTING DIFFERENCE

We are the creative management consultancy behind the popular suite of Lasting Difference and Lasting Leadership resources. We provide a range of services to charities and other non-profit organisations, including:

The Lasting Difference

Workshops, elearning, conferences and consultancy, sustaining organisations with effective strategies for:

- Involvement
- Income generation
- Impact measurement
- Innovation and improvement.



The Lasting Difference Toolkit® is available as a free download from TheLastingDifference.com



Advance Retreats®

Calm, engaging facilitation and away days for boards, leaders and teams.



The Lasting Difference Symbol

Awarded to organisations working towards Lasting Difference principles.



Making a Lasting Difference book

We wrote the book on charity sustainability.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jen Curran
Director of Leadership,
The Lasting Difference

Jen has first-hand experience of the issues addressed here, as a deputy, then interim charity CEO and from her 20+ years' experience of non-profit leadership.

Graeme Reekie
Director,
The Lasting Difference

Graeme is the author of Making a Lasting Difference: sustaining nonprofit organisations and their impact.

MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

For more information or support please contact:

E jen@thelastingdifference.com

T 01506 23 95 95

M 07712 660 996

TheLastingDifference.com

wrenandgreyhound.co.uk



Wren and Greyhound
Create it • Plan it • Measure it • Sustain it

© Wren and Greyhound Limited, trading as The Lasting Difference.
Registered in Scotland SC462842, VAT Registration 213 6000.

NOTES

