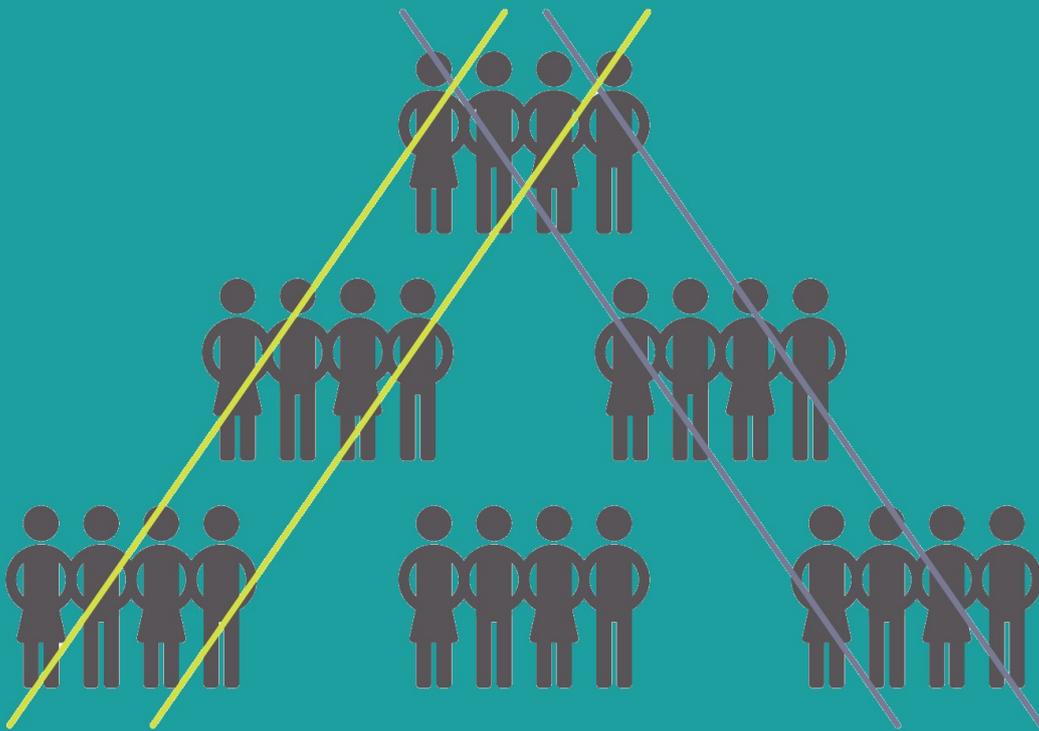




The Lasting Leadership[®] guide to

LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT GROUPS



*Leadership exists in every corner of your organisation,
waiting for the opportunity to emerge.*



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Lateral leadership

Leadership comes in many different forms, and from different directions. Lateral leadership is about more than a job title or positional authority. It recognises your people are your most precious resource.

This guide gives ideas for how to build leadership capacity across the team using the Learning & Improvement Group (LIG) approach. LIGs help organisations apply and build on the following lateral leadership principles.

Principles

1. **Leaders are everywhere.** Everyone in an organisation has knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to help an organisation achieve its goals – if they are given the opportunity.
2. **Organisational culture can create – or crush – sustainable leadership.** Traditional hierarchical control inhibits shared leadership. Shifting to an adaptive, devolved culture takes commitment to learning together.
3. **It takes trust and courage.** Leaders must trust themselves to step back – and trust their teams to step up. And teams must trust that leaders will support and recognise their efforts.
4. **It needs time and space.** Lateral leadership is a learning process. Space and time with peers and managers to reflect on new ways of working is essential.
5. **Ownership and agency.** In lateral leadership there is individual and collective responsibility for learning and leading. Allow people and teams to define what success looks like to build ownership of the work – and its impact.
6. **Value different viewpoints.** Bringing people together from across the organisation generates new insights, perspectives and ideas. It also builds an appreciation of each other's roles – and an understanding of how all the parts of the organisation, roles and processes combine to achieve organisational goals.

“Previously we were given the strategic plan and told to implement it. The lateral leadership approach, where we explored the ‘why’ for our organisation, and our team, gave ownership of the strategic plan, and our role in its implementation.”

LIG participant feedback

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 and influenced 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).

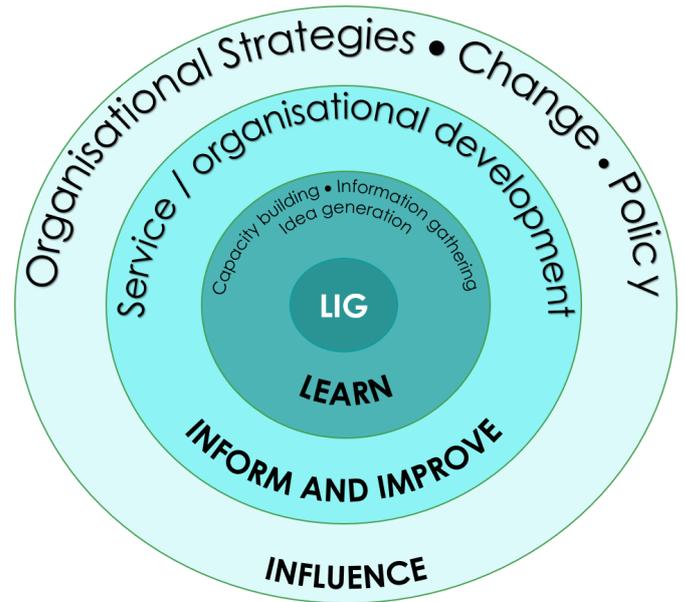


Figure 1: LIG members identify what to learn, inform, influence and improve.

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!).

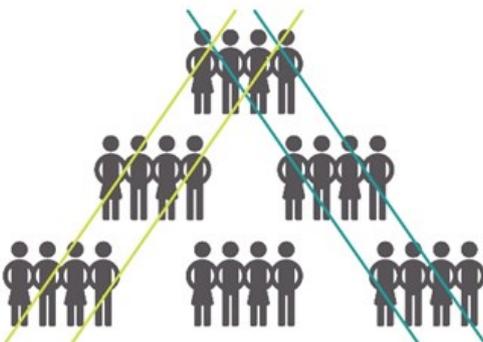


Figure 2: recruit from a diagonal cross-slice of the organisation.

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.

Key ingredients (continued)

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

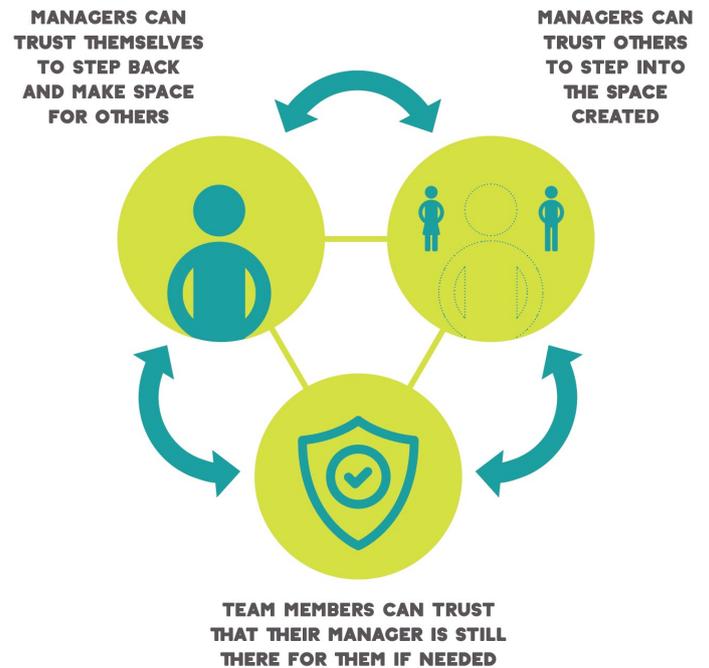


Figure 3: The triangle of trust

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, download it here.](#)

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 is necessary).

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. The midway point is a good time, 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 it help it 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. Remember, LIGs are more than just a typical working group!

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. Using 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.

Share the Lasting Leadership guide to help get things started: available from www.TheLastingDifference.com. We'd love to hear how you get on: contact us with questions and ideas: @TheLastingD or Jennifer@wrenandgreyhound.co.uk

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