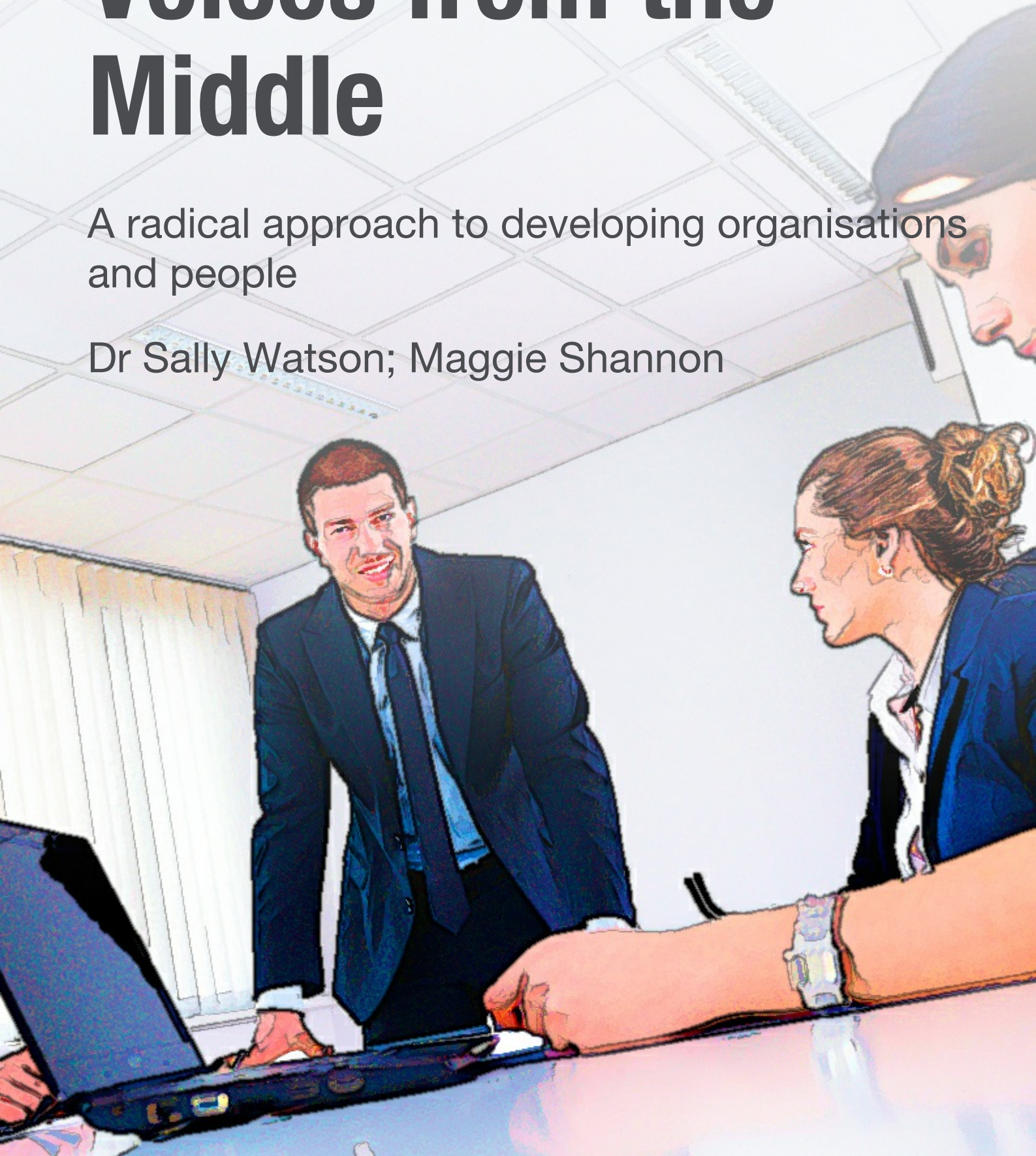


# Voices from the Middle

A radical approach to developing organisations and people

Dr Sally Watson; Maggie Shannon



Dr Sally Watson & Maggie Shannon

# **Voices from the Middle**

A radical approach to developing organisations and people



Voices from the Middle: A radical approach to developing organisations and people  
1<sup>st</sup> edition

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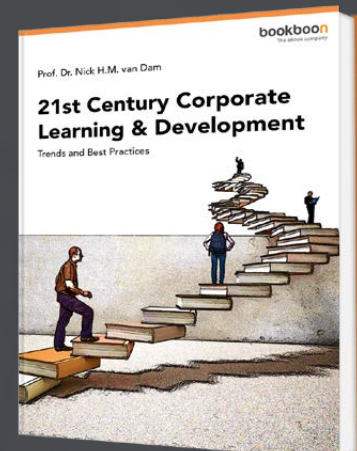
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# Dedication:

For Dr Andy Bailey 1965–2015

A gifted academic and compassionate colleague



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Chief Executive

Great Places Housing Group (**Chapter Five**)

# Abstract

A practical book which draws on case study evidence and leadership theory to illustrate a proven approach to developing middle managers. 'Voices from the Middle' brings a robust challenge to prevailing assumptions about the contribution of middle managers to organisational performance. It offers a model of organisational and people development that starts with middle managers.

The result is a study guide for leaders and is relevant to practicing managers, consultants, academics and postgraduate students. The book contains practical advice for developing mid level leadership capability and a range of tools, which are appropriate for both senior and middle managers.

Evaluation data collated from an innovative development approach called '**Leading from the Middle**' provides evidence that mid level managers and professionals are key to developing organisational strategy and managing change. Traditional middle manager programmes are frequently directed from the top. The case study findings indicate that this is a flawed approach.

In practice, middle managers have the ability to operate as organisational strategists, change agents and innovators. In their unique position, they are closer to the values and culture of their organisations. Their collective knowledge translates into social, intellectual and political value and makes their role vital to sustaining services. A focus on the development of mid level leaders brings challenges for senior managers and their attitudes towards leadership. Clearly, an assumption that leadership is the responsibility of one person is not feasible in a fast paced, operating environment.

# Preface

**Our paths crossed in 2003.** An opportunity to collaborate in a leadership development initiative radically changed our thinking about the contribution of middle managers to organisational performance. In 2006, we converted thinking into action and created our first 'Leading from the Middle' programme.

Our partnership has grown over the years and we now feel ready to share our story with you in the form of a practical leadership guide. As individuals we have experienced very different careers and experiences. We are confident that our research findings will be relevant whether you are an established manager, trainer, facilitator or interested in academic study. We have extensive experience in both the practice of leadership and the delivery of leadership development programmes. We hope that our collaboration brings you insights, questions and above all, practical ideas that you can apply to your work and study.

Our evidence for this book is drawn from case studies and relevant leadership theory to substantiate a practical and proven approach to developing middle managers. We believe our systematic approach to learning and development will challenge your assumptions about the contribution of middle managers to organisational performance. We have drawn a distinction between middle managers and mid level professionals and you will see both terms used throughout the book. 'Middle managers' is a historical term which has arisen over time and which features in literature from 1990 to the present day. You will see the terms 'mid level managers and mid level professionals, later in the book, to represent the diverse and varied roles that exist today. We will also present some ideas on developing leadership capability at all levels.

We have collated qualitative evaluation from organisations who have used our approach to bring you practical insights into the challenges faced by leaders at all levels. Our impact evidence demonstrates the important role that middle managers can play as intermediaries in ensuring clear alignment between strategic formulation, organisational culture and service provision.

Our design and delivery methods challenge cultural norms, power structures and provide opportunities for middle managers to influence both the strategic direction of their organisations and the operational alignment of strategic decisions. We have continued to develop our approach to developing leaders with a diverse range of people and organisations. Some of their experiences and successes are reported in the case studies.

We hope you will find the rest of this book a rewarding and inspiring experience.

**Maggie Shannon and Sally Watson**

**United Kingdom, 2015**

# Introduction

*'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.'*

*(Ciulla 2004, page 14)*

This purpose of this book is to present evidence that people, 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 monitoring staff morale.

Evidence will be drawn from both theoretical perspectives on leadership and practical examples of successful change. Case study evidence, drawn from three not for profit organisations, points to a serious paradox between espoused leadership styles and the 'day to day' human experiences. Although much is written on collaborative models of leadership, the practical reality for many middle managers is 'top down'.

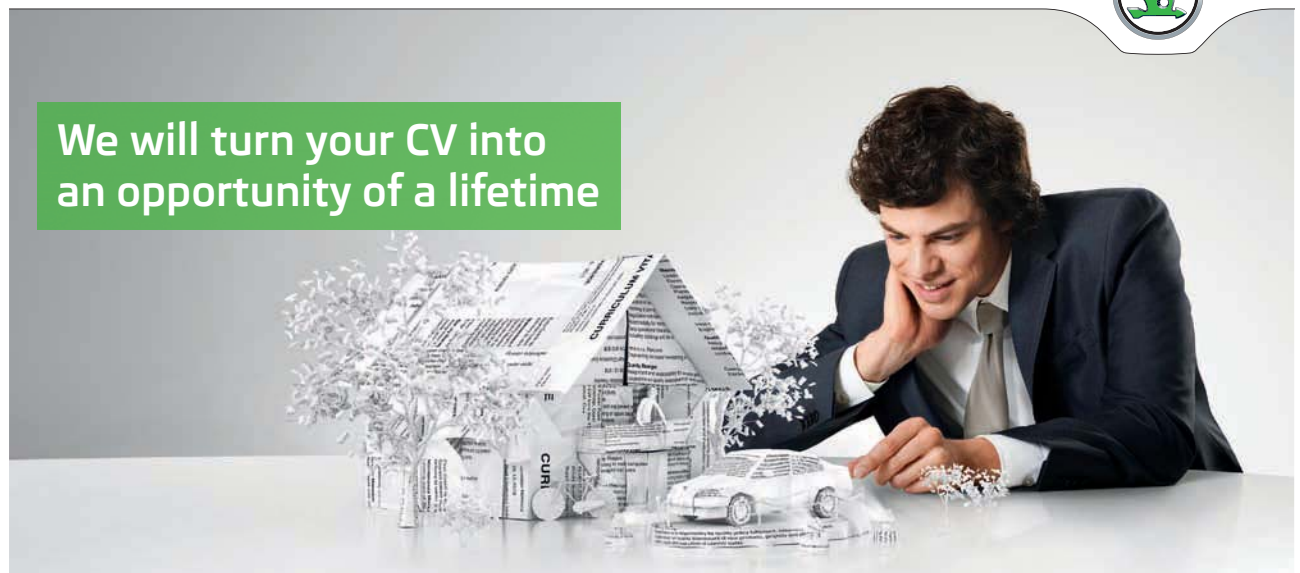
Evidence from the literature indicates that the challenge of developing middle managers is not a recent phenomenon but an enduring fault line in organisational life. The pressing issue in the UK not for profit and charitable sector is how to manage the impact of further budget cuts on the quality of service and address any further descent in morale and wellbeing at all levels of leadership.

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The practical response to this dilemma lies with the creativity and capability of people in mid level roles. Traditionally, senior managers have taken the responsibility for developing strategy and policy and then passed a plan, down the hierarchy, to be implemented. This process is flawed, time consuming and does not engage the people who have operational experience.

At the close of each chapter is a recommended learning activity that can be undertaken as an individual or team. The learning activities have been tested by mid level managers and professionals. At this stage, a learning journal is highly recommended to ensure that reflections are recorded.

## Structure of the book

Each book chapter will help the reader to reflect on their current views and assumptions about the contributions of mid level managers and professionals to organisational performance. The importance of developing mid level leadership capability is a core theme throughout all chapters. At the close of each chapter, there are practical exercises for the reader to use for reflection and learning. The first activity is called the 'Blind spot of leadership' and is an opportunity to reflect on how leadership is learned.

### **Chapter One: The 'wake up call'**

This chapter will start the process of challenge by posing questions and introduce a first case study of mid level leadership development.

*Learning activity: The Blind spot of leadership*

### **Chapter Two: A new landscape for middle managers**

A brief guide to the challenges and opportunities facing not for profit organisations in the UK. This chapter provides a strategic context for later case studies and draws attention to the leadership potential of mid level managers and professionals.

*Learning Activity: Survey on leadership and governance*

### **Chapter Three: 'Voices from the middle'**

An exploration of the discourse on middle managers to understand the impact that flawed thinking has on service quality, organisational culture, individual motivation and well-being.

The future role and contribution of mid level professionals is highlighted in preparation for the case study chapters.

*Learning Activity: Middle managers influence questionnaire*

**Chapter Four: Developing the middle: best practice**

A unique approach to design, delivery and evaluation of mid level leadership development for middle managers is presented. This chapter includes practical guidance on setting up a 'Leading from the Middle' programme.

*Learning Activity: Preparing for a case study*

**Chapter Five: Case study: What happened to the Midland 23?**

The story of the Great Places Housing Group picks up in 2010 and 2014. Impact evidence indicates that senior managers have a crucial and proactive role in the development of mid level managers and professionals.

*Learning Activity: Coaching skills evaluation*

**Chapter Six: Case study: 'Leading the Way'**

This story is set in a second Housing Association and focuses on individual, team and organisational development. Practical team business projects demonstrated the leadership capability of the middle.

*Learning Activity: Planning Action research*

**Chapter Seven: Case study: 'When horses run together'**

This story involves collaborative learning and mid level managers and professionals in a UK hospice organisation. The organisation was facing radical social and economic challenges. The future leadership capability, at all levels, was crucial to sustainable service provision.

*Learning Activity: Strategic models for middle managers*

**Chapter Eight: Voices from the Middle: a new centre of gravity**

Evidence from literature findings and the case study outcomes is presented. The conclusions indicate that the mid level leadership capability is crucial to not for profit organisations.

*Learning Activity: Personal Development exercise*

# 1 The wake up call

## 1.1 The wake up call

The book is about the development of middle managers into mid level leaders. The growth of leadership capability, at all levels, is critical to organisational performance. The development of an organisation can be facilitated by people who occupy mid level roles. The following story is about a development approach that challenges assumptions about leadership. The story starts with a 'wake up call'.

## 1.2 Chapter learning objectives:

- To intrigue the reader enough to want to carry on reading the book,
- To present a clear agenda which is focussed on the development of middle managers,
- To introduce the first case study,
- To signpost the book structure and how the chapters work together,
- To introduce the purpose and format of the chapter learning activity.



The advertisement features a central image of a smiling teacher leaning over a laptop to assist two young students, a boy and a girl. To the right, there are two smaller circular images: one showing three children looking at a book together, and another showing children working at computers in a classroom. The background is a vibrant yellow and orange swirl design. In the top left corner, there is a logo for 'e-learning for kids' consisting of a grid of colorful squares. In the bottom right corner, a green oval contains a list of achievements.

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### 1.3 Reflection and learning

- To appreciate the purpose of the book,
- To understand the history behind 'Voices from the middle',
- To understand the relevance of developing middle managers,
- To appreciate the behavioural and attitudinal change required by senior and middle managers to lead the organisation.

### 1.4 The power of reflective questions

*'The power of good questions is that they can expand the well worn territories and reveal new possibilities for thought and action.'*

*(Ladkin 2010, page 189)*

This chapter will start the process of challenge by posing questions and introduce a first case study of mid level leadership development. Reflective questions are designed to challenge a range of assumptions about people, leadership and organisational culture. Reflective questions are used throughout the book to help the reader challenge their current thinking and stimulate curiosity.

**The following questions are designed to challenge your assumptions before you start reading the book:**

- Who is responsible for the leadership of your organisation?
- What is the relevance of 'heroic leadership' to current challenges facing organisations?
- Why are collaborative and distributed models of leadership becoming popular?
- What are the challenges of distributed leadership for senior managers?
- What form could senior leadership take in the future?
- How could executive and non-executive leadership roles transform in the future?
- What are the barriers to a greater contribution by mid level managers in informing the strategic direction of the organisation?
- What is the impact of organisational culture on strategic planning and strategic implementations?
- What is the relationship between the past and the quality of strategic decisions?

### 1.5 Case study: A 'wake up call' for a new organisation

This section will draw briefly on the formation of Great Places Housing Group based in Manchester, UK, to illustrate the events that culminated in the decision to break with tradition and develop a new leadership development approach. A more detailed analysis of the outcomes, supported by evaluation evidence, can be found in Chapter Five.



Great Places Housing Group, as a legal entity, was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 and joined together Manchester Methodist (MMHA) and Ashiana Housing Associations. At this stage, Manchester Methodist Housing Association was the larger and more geographically spread of the two organisations, managing 6,000 properties. Ashiana Housing Association, in contrast, was a black and minority ethnic (BME) led association based in Rochdale. The primary mission of Ashiana was to address the lack of appropriate housing, for BME, in the North West of England. In addition, Ashiana staff were involved in community regeneration, research and consultancy. With 1,450 properties leased and managed, there was a significant difference in the scale and strategic intent of the two businesses.

In 2007, a third Housing Association, Space New Living Ltd, based in the Salford area and managing 4,000 homes, joined the Great Places Housing Group, as a subsidiary. Space New Living staff brought general needs housing experience to the new business entity. With ambitious plans to grow their business, the decision to join Great Places Housing Group, gave them the financial security and brand identity to thrive and grow. The collaboration of three UK Housing Associations created significant opportunities for service improvement and the development of housing stock for growth in the North of England.

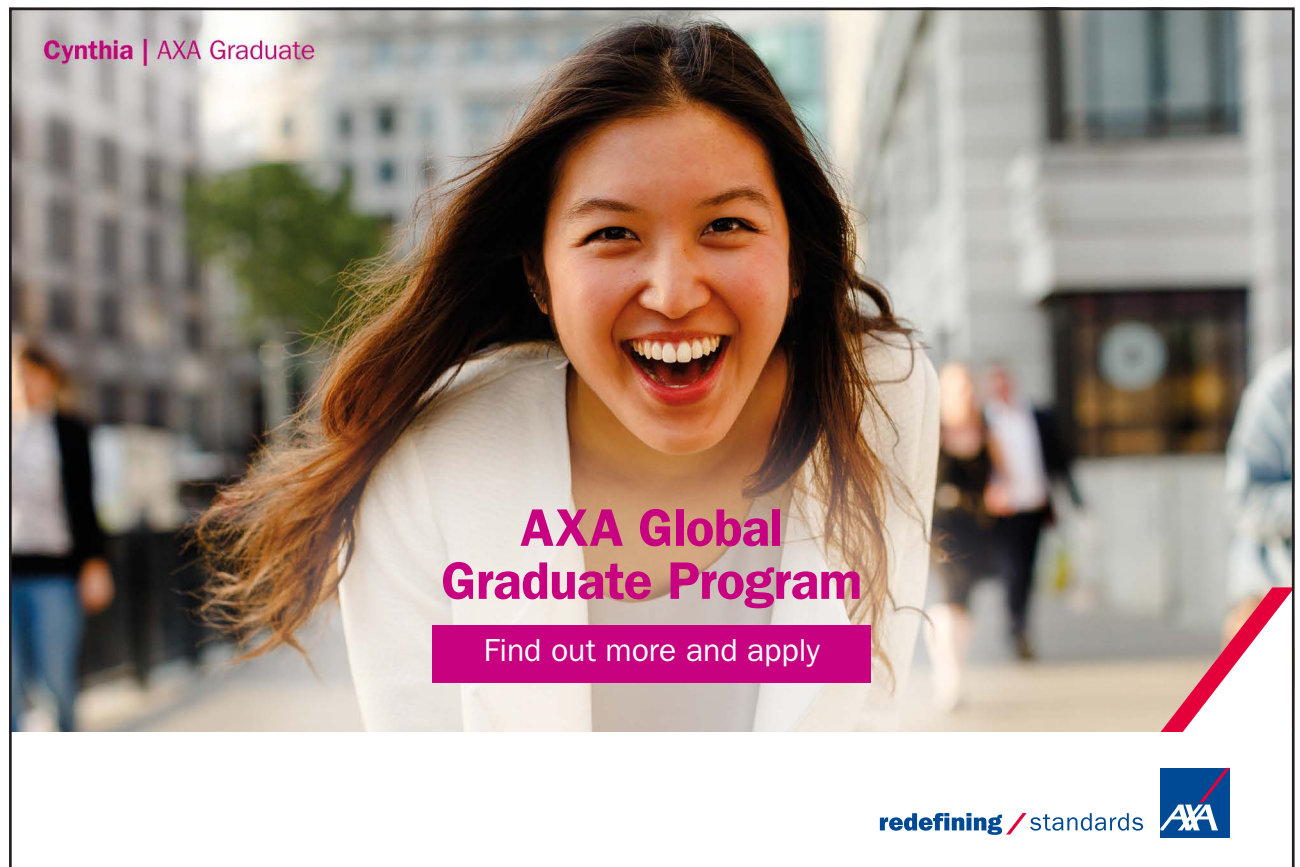
The immediate impact of this structural change was felt by both senior management and staff across the three organisations. While the rationale for the expansion of the new Group structure made sound business sense and supported development of new housing stock and services to customers, it was important to recognise that this was a profound cultural shift required by managers and staff alike. The diversity of the three businesses presented an excellent opportunity to leverage capabilities in a full spectrum of housing needs in the North West. The big challenge was to manage the human aspect of this change and define a set of values and culture for the future and, at the same time, respect the successes of the past.

The prologue of any story is an important source of understanding and can inform the future aspirations of the people involved. The past is a prologue and plays a key part in the creation of future strategies. The paradox for leaders is to create opportunities to share the past with respect and then build strategy, which challenges traditional ways of working.

The “wake up call” for the new Great Places Housing Group management team was a realisation that, just as the new Group needed clear visions and strategy, there was a pressing need to bring a collaborative ethos to the three businesses.

By 2007, the Great Places Housing Group management team had grown in size and diversity. The Group CEO recognized that a development event was needed to accelerate the integration of new directors and ensure that the new senior management team was focussed on the future vision, values and performance of the new Group organisation. In January 2007, the whole senior team went offsite for two days with Sally Watson in the role of facilitator. The outcomes of this workshop became a turning point in the way this team operated. It was clear that a radical approach was needed to signal change to managers and staff across the different parts of the business. The traditional output from events involving top teams is invariably a new strategic document. With the pressure to communicate and generate a result, the complex issue of cultural change is rarely addressed at this stage.

Through a series of practical exercises, this new team explored the cultural and behavioural implications of the new group structure and agreed it was essential that staff were engaged in the plans for the future and were supported in their understanding of how the organisation would change. It was key that change represented the new Group entity rather than from three separate businesses. Directors realised that the way they behaved at this early stage set the tone for how the structural changes would be accepted across the organisation.



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## 1.6 The Midland 23

The next tier of management was a group of assistant directors operating across the new structure. This group was engaged in leadership development and, by February 2007, formed a community of 23 directors and assistant directors called the Midland 23, named after the workshop venue in Manchester.

The formation of this community signified a key turning point for the organisation. The discussions and analysis conducted by the Midland 23 concluded that a middle managers' development programme was needed to accelerate the development of the new Great Places Housing Group. The support of the Midland 23 was crucial in the design of the first 'Leading from the Middle' programme. There was a shared understanding that a traditional approach to a middle managers' programme would not deliver the practical outcome needed at this stage in the lifecycle of the new group structure.

Over seven years, the Midland 23 operated in a variety of roles to support middle managers operating as coaches, project champions and project team members. The unique design of the first 'Leading from the Middle' programme accelerated the development of senior and mid level leadership capability and resulted in a more collaborative organisational culture.

The potential of middle managers can be optimised by taking a systematic and strategic approach to their development. It is in the middle of the organisation that knowledge and experience are available to plan workable strategies and facilitate change. Leaders in the middle act as custodians of service quality and hold strong values about what is both practical and moral. This first case study, the 'Wake up call' has set the scene for the rest of this book. The following chapters will present a blend of theory, case study findings and best practice.

**Chapter One: Learning activity****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.

**Timings**

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.

**Materials**

- A large piece of paper and coloured pens,
- All notes are made on this sheet of paper.

**The following steps will guide you through the process and are relevant to established leaders, trainers, coaches and students.**

**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 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 about 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?

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# 2 A new landscape for middle managers

## 2.1 Introduction

*'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)*

This chapter will outline the leadership challenges facing not for profit organisations and charities in UK. The future role and contribution of middle managers, in facing these challenges, is the major theme running through all the chapters. Later, evidence will be presented that middle managers have a significant role to play in leading change and sustaining quality services. At this stage in the book, however, it is important to explore why the development of middle managers is now critical for not for profit organisations and charities. In the UK, a new operating landscape has emerged, that presents complex political and economic challenges for leadership and governance. This landscape is continuously changing and frequently unpredictable, as service demand grows and government funding declines. In this context, the development of both senior and middle managers is key to organisational performance and resilience.

In changing circumstances, the leadership capability of middle managers is both a crucial advantage and untapped asset. As their operating environment changes, it is essential that middle managers are developed to take more active roles in strategic planning, change management and service development. Literature findings in the next chapter will demonstrate that middle managers are potentially a new organisational centre of gravity, providing senior managers with vital knowledge when the context changes. The focus in Chapter Two is an exploration of the not for profit landscape and the impact on middle managers, and will provide a generic context for the case study findings and a specific context for understanding the challenges facing leaders at all levels.

Chapter One provided a backstory, of a UK Housing Association, to intrigue the reader about the capability and potential of middle managers. This story will continue in Chapter Five. In Chapters Six and Seven, two further case studies will present more evidence of middle management leadership capability. The term 'not for profit' will be used throughout this book, to describe organisations where surplus income is used to deliver services. This term also includes charitable organisations. Both not for profit and charitable organisations generate income from government funding, charitable donations and fundraising activities. The surplus from this income is used to develop services, unlike profit organisations where surplus income is paid to shareholders. This is a fundamental difference, which has implications for leadership, governance, organisational culture and values.

The learning activity for Chapter Two includes two surveys, which focus on leadership style and governance. The questions are designed to help the reader study the contents of this chapter and reflect on the political, social and economic context, that shapes both senior and middle managers.

## 2.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To analyse the operating environment for not for profit organisations in the UK,
- To examine the complex drivers and challenges that face these organisations,
- To explore the paradox of social value and economic return and the implications for leadership,
- To explore models of leadership behaviours which adapt to changing conditions,
- To consider the role and influence of middle managers as the new centre of gravity for organisational change.

## 2.3 Chapter learning outcomes

- To recognise the difference between social and economic value,
- To appreciate the impact of a growing commercial agenda on not for profit organisations and the implication for their cultures,
- To understand the impact of multiple stakeholders on leadership and governance,
- To appreciate the rationale for new models of leadership and leadership development,
- To gain an understanding of the role, and contribution of middle managers, in managing change and developing organisational resilience.

### **Chapter guide**

#### **This chapter will cover the following topics:**

- A new landscape for middle managers,
- Social, intellectual and political value,
- The commercial imperative and cooperation drivers,
- Multiple stakeholders, governance and transparency,
- The implications for leadership.

**Chapter terms**

The following terms will be used in this chapter and throughout the book:

- **Charity:** an organisation set up to provide help and raise money for those in need,
- **Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH):** a professional organisation for people who work in housing,
- **Co-production:** a means of delivering public services by engaging service users and staff,
- **Governance:** an organisational steering function to ensure a good fit between organisational purpose and operational activity,
- **Income (profit organisation):** the difference between revenue and expenses,
- **Income (not for profit organisations):** money received from government funding, charitable donations and fundraising activities,
- **Not for profit organisation (also termed nonprofit):** is an organisation that uses the surplus income to further achieve its social purpose or mission,
- **Profit organisation:** surplus revenue (income) is distributed to directors and shareholders as a dividend,
- **Revenue:** total amount of money received by a private sector company. This includes goods sold, services delivered, company assets and investment interest,
- **Shareholders:** members of a profit-making organisation who receive a 'share' of the profits,
- **Social value:** the benefits of a social or public service for individuals and their communities. Unlike economic value, this form of benefits is more difficult to quantify,
- **Social capital:** a term used to describe the social benefits of networks, groups and communities sharing knowledge and expertise. This term is borrowed from mainstream economic language,
- **Stakeholders:** people or organisations that have an influence on the organisation and its performance and sustainability. Stakeholders can be real or assumed,
- **Trustees:** members of a charitable board who ensure that income is used for the stated purpose of the organisation. They can be recruited from all sectors and professions.

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## 2.4 A new landscape for middle managers

The challenges facing the not for profit sector, in the UK, are varied in nature and include both external pressures and internal assumptions about those pressures. Several writers point to a vicious cycle where social purpose and service ethos are threatened by commercial pressures in the aftermath of economic crisis (Anheir 2014; Porter & Kramer 1999). The political response to a financial crisis has historically resulted in some form of austerity. On the surface, this appears a practical response but the danger lies 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. Internally, job roles are at risk and people are faced with deeply distressing moral questions, as services are cut.

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 economic imperative of delivering profit to shareholders. In the short term, a commercial approach across the not for profit sector will deliver cost savings but in the longer term, the damage to social value may impact the credibility of the organisation, especially in the wider political arena (Moore 2000).

The values which underpin the cultures of not for profit organisations appear, on the surface, to be diametrically opposed to the notion of making a profit. This is a not a new phenomenon. In the 1990s, Ryan (1999) predicted a future struggle where not for profit organisations would be forced to compete with private service providers. He argued that many, in the short term, would be forced to compromise their values, capabilities and assets.

*'Greatest peril is to be driven out of their own social service market place.'*  
(Ryan 1999, pp. 127–135)

In all three case study organisations, the entry of private sector service providers has become a reality and there is an additional pressure to adopt private sector values and business processes. Private sector organisations are culturally and procedurally set up to maximise profit margins and pay dividends. This focus shapes behaviours and performance towards a single goal and is, therefore, unsuitable for organisations with a social purpose and complex service needs. Cost reduction in a private sector organisation is about maximising profit. This mission is clear and focuses all stakeholders on financial targets.

In contrast, cost reduction in a not for profit organisation, means a reduction of income for delivering essential services. Income generation for both not for profits and charity organisations is derived from government funding, charitable donations and fund raising. When government funding is reduced, these organisations need alternative sources of income and start to focus on commercial activities e.g. charity shops. UK Housing Associations which are structured as not for profit organisations have been increasingly drawn into more commercial ventures to fund their services e.g. building new homes for sale. With further funding cuts, commercial activity becomes essential and the organisation is drawn further away from the social mission.

History reveals that cycles of economic growth and decline tend to consolidate a one dimensional, financial view of not for profit organisations (Anheir 2014). This is a damaging pattern, which overlooks the operational complexity of delivering services to the most vulnerable groups in society. In addition, it diverts attention from social purposes and on the ways in which society, as a whole, might be mobilised to support the delivery of services.

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 clearly the common denominator in this new landscape.

<b>Functions of not for profit organisations</b>	
<b>Service provider (Operational role):</b> <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>	<b>Vanguard (Innovation role):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pioneer new processes and approaches,</li> <li>- Serve as sector change agents and innovators,</li> <li>- Collaborate with other providers to deliver service.</li> </ul>
<b>Value guardian (Political role):</b> <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>	<b>Advocacy (Representational role):</b> <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)*

#### 2.4.1 Social, intellectual and political value

In a private sector operating environment, profits serve as common language, which shape the leadership efforts, and provide a clear framework to measure performance and organisational success (Kong 2007). In a not for profit scenario, there is no uniformity of financial goals that can be applied to the range of services provided. A commercial enterprise operates with a primary mission of delivering profit to fund the shareholder dividends. Customer expectations and satisfaction are key to private sector organisations but these are met through operating processes, assets and resources that are primarily profit orientated.

In a not for profit scenario, value can mean different things to different stakeholders and, therefore, more difficult to articulate and measure (Anheir 2014). Several writers argue that intellectual value is the means for organisations to stay focussed on their social mission despite commercial pressures (Moore 2000: Mouritsen 2005). Intellectual value is derived from an integration of professional knowledge, skills and practical experience. Social value is primarily about the external impact of the services provided. The impact of both social and intellectual value on service users, and their communities, are a key source of political influence because it challenges a one dimensional, financial view of performance (Kong 2007).

Both social and intellectual values provide a mechanism for motivating people and sustaining their commitment to a deeper organisational purpose. This can be observed in both organisational members and the people they serve. In the case studies, it was clear that powerful service values operated at all levels. These values shaped organisational behaviours towards a social purpose irrespective, of financial incentives. Impact evidence demonstrated that the social incentive to serve people is very powerful and frequently transcends individual concerns. Culturally, this is difficult to replicate in the private sector.



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It is clear that both social and intellectual values offer an alternative analysis to a financial model of organisational performance. A good example can be seen in the commissioning of UK health care, where contracts for services are awarded to a full spectrum of service providers, including not for profit organisations, charities and private sector. The commissioning bodies judge both intellectual and social value when awarding contracts. However, while commissioning bodies acknowledge social and intellectual value within contracts, there is a risk that service providers are forced to compete for funding and lose sight of their social mission. The presence of private sector providers operating in this market makes the likelihood of intensified competition inevitable. This brings a concern that further adoption of ‘business like’ management strategies that will, over time, compromise the social purpose and benefit (Young, et al 2007).

An interesting contribution to understanding the complexity of delivering social value is ‘Managing for Value’ (Moore 2000). In this model, appraisal of organisational performance includes evidence of political and societal impact. The benefit of this model is the way it builds the legitimacy of social value. Attention is focussed first on the organisational capacity and capability to deliver value and then the funding needed to sustain it. This focus is in stark contrast to a singular financial response to a funding cut. A ‘Managing for Value’ approach brings a measured strategic response to service provision and provides a more sustainable change in service provision. In the future, impact evidence of social value will become an important source of legitimacy and power for not for profit organisations.

This attention to impact evidence is a very important focus for leaders at all levels. In particular, there is significant scope for middle managers to contribute to the development of social, intellectual and political value. Their proximity to the service users allows them to gather impact evidence on a regular basis. Senior managers are frequently engaged in external audits, funding proposals, tenders and performance measures. As a result, their work is focussed on economic value and quantifying results. Middle managers are much closer to the social value of their service provision. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, there are case study examples of middle managers engaged in the production of social impact evidence. The organisational benefits of their research activity also included political influence, both internally and externally, and the development of significant intellectual value.

#### 2.4.2 The commercial imperative

*‘All not for profits need to demonstrate the worth of what they do, and to operate efficiently and effectively in the public interest. This will require something more than traditional management training, or the wholesale adoption of management techniques imported from the business or government sector.’*

*(Kong 2008, page 290)*

The reality, and risk, for many not for profit organisations, is the lack of sustainable income or cash reserves. The urgency of their funding needs may initiate decisions that are not in the best interest of their social mission and organisational purpose. Accessible funding is frequently restricted to specific initiatives, which may fall within the broad mission of the organisation, but do not meet the operational needs of service users. A major hidden risk is when funding is aligned to a specific donor's agenda. The donor organisations may have specific requirements on how their funds are accounted for and used (Rangan 2004). This brings a significant pressure on the organisational leadership and governance to stay focussed on the core social mission and communicate a clear strategic pathway which ensures alignment between funding, funding sources, service users and service provision.

At this stage, it is worth making the distinction between social value and social capital, which are terms, used in public sector organisations to articulate the social benefits of building capability and capacity in local communities. This appropriation of language, from economics theory, is misleading because unlike economic capital, the benefits of social capital are not depleted by use. Social capital is more likely to be depleted by a lack of cohesion between individuals and communities who are engaged in supporting services. The use of language presents an interesting example of a commercial approach being used to evidence social value. While the measurement of social capital is a political expedient, the language indicates the scale of influence of the private sector on not for profit organisations.

It is argued that the long-term viability of not for profit organisations can be found in a more aligned approach to mission, strategic priorities and operational planning (Krug & Weinburg 2004). Sadly, for some organisations, strategic planning is rapidly becoming an elaborate funding pitch (Llewellyn & Tappin 2003). The evidence of social impact is used to secure funding but organisational performance is measured economically. It is clear that the quality of leadership and governance will be vital in the future to ensure that the social mission is in good hands. The politics of social value versus economic return will continue to challenge not for profit organisations. Their leaders, at all levels, need to champion the social mission and manage the worse excesses of an increasing commercial agenda.

**Future scenarios: not for profit organisations**

It likely that the expansion of not for profit organisations and charities will continue as a response to reduced central government funding. In the UK, the potential scenarios include:

- **Supplementary role:** voluntary provision of services not covered by central government,
- **Complementary role:** contracts and partnerships with government to provide 'contracted out' services,
- **Adversarial role:** groups advocating the rights of vulnerable people and lobbying government,
- **Champion role:** advocating new models of service and ensuring equity of service provision,
- **Leadership role:** encouraging collaboration across different service providers and setting the standards for service quality.

### 2.4.3 Cooperation drivers

There are many small not for profit organisations that are financially and organisationally weak (McCormick 2000). When these organisations are geographically close, they are likely to be competing for funding in the same pool of potential donors and funding organisations. Geography can, however, serve, as an advantage for smaller organisations, especially when they are community orientated and sensitive to client/user needs. Indeed, the advantage of community orientation can be lost when smaller organisations are forced towards alliances, partnerships and mergers. In the current financial landscape, however, cooperation does present both practical and commercial benefits, such as:

- Brings economies of scale and scope for cost savings,
- Reduces the power of intermediaries e.g. sub contractors,
- Leverages political, intellectual and social impact,
- Brings greater autonomy from political interference,



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**How to cooperate with other providers****The following good practice is suggested:**

- 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 between the cooperating organisations,
- Ensure excellent communications throughout the process.

Within the not for profit sector, the traditional demarcation between profit and non profit status has become more complicated, as new models of service are created to cope with rising demand and reduced government funding. In this scenario, the importance of measuring social and intellectual value will become more urgent. The economic drivers for cooperation are already pushing housing, health and social care to deliver a more integrated provision of services (Thornhill, 2013; CIH 2013; Porteous 2012; Kings Fund 2015; Boyle & Harris 2009). There are significant opportunities for health and housing professionals to collaborate in the communities they serve (NHS Alliance 2015).

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.

*'New, effective solutions are emerging where local CCG's, GP's and Housing Associations work together, and this needs to be more widespread. We know that there is huge ambition for this connection from both sides of the fence, but moving from rhetoric to reality can be challenging.'*

*(NHS Alliance 2015, page 1)*

There is, however, a good opportunity for not for profit organisations to take a lead, mediate relationships between different providers and influence the development of partnerships across services (National Health Service Alliance 2015). 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.

#### 2.4.4 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)*

A unique feature of not for profit organisations is the diverse range of stakeholders with different interests in operational activities and organisational performance. In a challenging economic scenario, this diversity can present more of a threat than an opportunity e.g. trustees are frequently volunteers who joined the board for a social purpose and may resist the adoption of private sector practices. With no single bottom line for multiple stakeholders to coalesce around, there are serious implications for how the organisation is led, for example:

- The organisational 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.

Ideally, not for profit organisations need to stay as independent as possible and pursue a social mission (Kong 2007). The impact of multiple stakeholders needs to be well managed and viewed as a rich source of social and intellectual value. Multiple stakeholders present a big 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 interference.

In the future, both senior and middle managers will be working externally with a diverse range of service users and in collaborative structures, which involve new political and social stakeholders. Unlike profit organisations, stakeholder relationships are not solely based on a financial transaction. So despite the complexity of multiple stakeholders, there are new opportunities emerging for political and social influence.



## 2.4.5 Governance and transparency

*‘Transparency can be considered as the norm of good governance.’  
(Marschall 2010, page 1567)*

A key group of stakeholders, in not for profit organisations, are board members or trustees. Their governance of the organisation is primarily concerned with furthering the social mission and ensuring that surplus income is used to support that mission. Many trustees serve on the board as volunteers and bring a significant breadth of experience from different sectors and professions. The landscape is changing for trustees as their board membership comes under greater scrutiny from central government (Anheir 2014). Governance is primarily an organisational steering function, which relies on careful boundaries, and the skill of individuals to stay focussed on the core mission.

### The role of a board

A few practical guidelines for not for profit board members include:

- To ensure the organisation has a clear mission and strategy, but not necessarily engaged in the development of it,
- To ensure that the organisation is well managed but not to become involved in management,
- To provide guidance on the overall allocation of resources but less concerned with the precise numbers

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Governance is about ensuring a fit between the organisational mission, activities and performance (Kumar& Nunan 2002). Governance is, therefore, a leadership function and not a managerial responsibility. This can be challenging for board members with experience of executive leadership in other sectors. The board of trustees is a focal point for governance and the Chief Executive Officer, a focal point for management. Both parties are senior leaders and it is imperative that this relationship is equitable and collaborative. In a not for profit organisation, the board has an important representational role which is key to relationships with external bodies such as auditors, general public, legal entities, funders and partners.

Leadership and governance will become more challenging as new forms of cooperation across service emerge. Commissioning bodies already present incentives for service providers to collaborate. While the immediate political driver is cost cutting, there is scope for not for profit organisations to enjoy the long term benefits of collaborative relationships. A strong social mission is a binding force between different professional groups delivering service. Collaboration around information, knowledge, skills, systems and practices builds trust and ensures the longer-term sustainability of services.

The complexity of service provision is making governance a more skilful and professional responsibility. A political push for accountability and transparency and the growing pressure to cooperate with other organisations to provide services will continue to bring fresh challenges for leadership and governance.

#### 2.4.6 Implications for 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)*

In the previous section, a new landscape for middle managers was presented which concluded that new models of service provision and greater collaboration across service providers would become key drivers in the future. The quality of leadership and governance was seen as a major issue for the long-term sustainability of many not for profit organisations. In this context, leadership capability is not only concerned with the behaviour of people at the top. The role and contribution of middle managers are key to organisational performance, service quality and the successful navigation of further austerity cuts.

New models of leadership are needed to sustain the service values of not for profit organisations, and at the same time, challenge organisational practices that disempower professionals working in the middle of the organisations. The operating environment, of not for profit organisations, cannot sustain a traditional 'top down' view of leadership. Complex and collaborative service delivery will require a more facilitative style of leadership, which enables others to showcase their capabilities.

A heroic model of leadership 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. Clearly, this is a damaging interpretation of leadership and one that is untenable in the immediate future for not-for-profit organisations. In Chapter Three, a more detailed analysis of leadership and middle managers is presented.

#### 2.4.7 Distributed leadership

*'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, page 1)*

Earlier in this chapter, significant evidence was presented that traditional attitudes to leadership are not tenable, for organisations facing rapid political, economic and social change. Distributed leadership is a radical challenge to a 'top down' approach and means that power to act is more widely distributed and to the appropriate level. 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.

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.

#### 2.4.8 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)*

Not-for-profit leaders face pressure to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver services. Traditional leadership styles and behaviour, which reflect a command and control approach, will not produce the level of adaptability needed where contracts and funding involve multiple stakeholder or multi-agency relationships. Collaborative learning and working practices are needed to ensure the development of quality relationships across diverse service providers. A collective approach to leadership is beneficial when service provision requires new models of engagement and communication between different levels of leadership and across different organisations.

External cooperation drivers 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). The additional benefit is seen in organisational cultures and individual behaviours that are more likely to preserve and sustain the future service provision.



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### 2.4.9 Leadership and technology

Technology presents both an opportunity and a challenge for leaders in not for profit organisations. Routine process work can be automated to release valuable contact time between key stakeholders. The work of frontline staff can be greatly enhanced through communication technology because it frees them to be out in the community sustaining relationships and evaluating service. The performance measures and various reporting deadlines can be managed using technology. The impact of social networking means that success stories and failures are in the public domain, and issues reported and dealt with quickly. A key advantage of technology is that it can be designed to support the development of mid level leadership capability. For senior managers, technology allows them to focus on the strategic picture of organisational performance, rather than getting side tracked by operational detail. For middle managers, technology improves the operational efficiency and gives them the medium to influence senior management. The speed and efficiency of social media brings a major challenge to traditional models of leadership where power is vested in the most senior roles (Maltby 2007).

### 2.4.10 Developing the middle

In the middle of not for profit organisations are highly qualified professionals with a well-developed sense of service and the social value it brings. Chapter Two has presented evidence that leadership and governance are critical success factors in the future of not for profit and charitable organisations. 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. In the next chapter, a closer examination is made of the 'voices from the middle' in the form of a literature review.

## 2.5 Reflection and learning

The following section is an opportunity to check your understanding of Chapter Two. The following questions will guide you:

- What are the key differences between social and economic value?
- What are the four functions of not for profit organisations? Illustrate with examples from the chapter or fast-forward to a case study.
- How does the growing commercial agenda impact not for profit organisations?

- What do you notice about the organisational culture of a not for profit organisation?
- What is the impact of multiple stakeholders on leadership and governance?
- Why are distributed and collaborative leadership styles important in a partnership between service providers?
- What can middle managers contribute when the organisation is subjected to a sudden change?

### **Chapter Two: Learning activity**

The following questions will help you to appraise the quality of leadership and governance in your organisation. Did you find any gaps in your knowledge? If yes, then reflect on what this means and what action you will now take. Now imagine that you are a middle manager and reflect on what this means for the organisational culture.

#### **How effective is your leadership and governance?**

- Is there a clear mission and purpose that communicate the goals of the organisation and the means to achieve them?
- How frequently is this statement of mission reviewed?
- Does the board actively support the CEO to achieve the goals of the organisation?
- Is the strategic plan clear and communicated to all employees?
- Was there a consultation process when the strategic plan was created?
- Are all stakeholders' views sought and communicated?
- How well aligned are the activities of the organisation to the stated mission?
- Are there adequate resources to fulfill the mission?
- How frequently is a financial overview communicated and explained?
- How often do you meet board members and senior managers?
- How accessible are board members and senior managers?
- How active are your board members in representing the organisation?

#### **How collaborative is the leadership style in your organisation?**

The following set of questions will help you to assess the quality of collaborative leadership in your organisation:

- Have you observed leader behaviours that are for the benefits of the service user rather than protecting individual power? If so, please describe them.
- When someone works collaboratively with another department, is this encouraged by senior managers or seen as disloyal?
- Consider two situations, one that requires collaborative behaviour and one where competitive behaviour is more appropriate. What do you notice about the situation and the outcomes?
- How responsive is your organisational culture to collaborating with other service providers? Give some examples.
- To what extent are you encouraged to be collaborative with others when an operational issue arises?
- How collaborative is the strategic planning process in your organisation?

## 3 Voices from the middle

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, a rationale for new models of leadership development in not for profit organisations was presented. A combination of austerity measures and cuts to public sector funding have created tough operating conditions. These conditions are likely to continue and this brings an urgent need to rethink leadership styles and the ways both senior and mid level leaders are developed. There is an opportunity to maximise the leadership capability in the middle of an organisation and challenge traditional attitudes to leadership where responsibility lies with one individual. In the future, there will be an increasing need for individual, team and organisational resilience as new pressures emerge to challenge leaders at all levels. The challenge for senior leaders is to create organisational cultures that are more collaborative and enable people able to adapt to sudden change. The challenge for mid level leaders is to influence policy and strategy from their unique position as operational experts.

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The evidence presented in this chapter will challenge assumptions about the leadership contribution of people working in mid level roles. Why now and why the urgency? After twenty years of extensive research and mountains of published work, the prevailing attitudes towards middle managers remain negative. They are consistently portrayed as an issue; take for example the two examples below, which span twenty years:

*'Most writers portray the middle manager as a frustrated, disillusioned individual caught in the middle of a hierarchy.'*

*(Dopson & Stewart 1994, pp. 55–78)*

*'Why are middle managers so unhappy? Stuck in the middle of everything.'*

*(Zenger & Folkman 2014, page 1)*

### 3.2 Literature approach

A review of literature, 1990–2015, will be used to establish historical discourse themes on how middle managers are viewed. The evidence indicates that while the external challenges faced by middle managers have changed dramatically, the leadership issues they face remain the same. There are examples of flawed assumptions, at all levels of leadership, that impact on the confidence and performance of middle managers. There is, however, a wealth of evidence that the voices from the middle of the organisation are crucial to the quality of strategic formulation and operational performance.

The core purpose of this literature review is to challenge traditional views about middle managers and demonstrate that people working in the middle of the organisation are capable of leading change, contributing to strategy and facilitating innovation. It is also apparent that senior leaders have a significant role to play in developing the potential of the middle and building mid level leadership.

The learning activity for Chapter Three is a middle managers' questionnaire. This exercise can be conducted as an individual or as a group and the outcomes form the basis for one to one or team discussions. The questionnaire is suitable for middle managers; people operating in mid level roles, aspiring middle managers, trainers, coaches and development professionals.

### 3.3 Chapter learning objectives

- To present an overview of literature on middle managers and appreciate the emergence of new thinking about the voices from the middle,
- To highlight the pervasive nature of negative assumptions about the role and contribution of mid level staff,
- To demonstrate the importance of mid level engagement in the formulation of organisational strategy,



- To demonstrate that the quality of interaction between senior leaders and their mid level staff is vital to quality performance,
- To appreciate the potential of mid level staff as custodians of change and organisational culture,
- To introduce a radical new approach to the development of mid level staff.

### 3.4 Chapter learning outcomes

- To reflect on your assumptions about middle managers and appreciate the impact of history on current attitudes to middle managers,
- To appreciate the historical discourse which shapes attitudes towards middle managers and the impact on their performance,
- To gain a practical understanding of the contribution of middle managers to strategy, change and organisational culture,
- To understand the importance of senior leaders in the development of mid level leaders.

#### Chapter guide

##### This chapter will cover the following topics:

- Where do assumptions about middle managers come from?
- External challenges and impact on middle managers,
- Role, image and identity,
- Change and the middle,
- Middle managers and strategy,
- Middle managers as catalysts and innovators,
- Views of senior managers.

#### Chapter terms

##### The following terms will be used in this chapter and throughout this book:

- **Business:** the externally focussed purpose of the organisation e.g. providing a housing service,
- **Leader:** a term used to describe an individual role or position in an organisation,
- **Leadership:** a collective process which takes place at all levels in an organisation,
- **Leader development:** the development of individual competencies and human capital,
- **Leadership Development:** the development of social capital and its application in the political context of the organisation,
- **'Leading from the Middle':** a development process for people in middle organisational roles, which grows human and social capital and engages senior managers in proactive roles,
- **Middle managers:** a term used more widely in the literature to describe individuals generally operating in a hierarchical organisational structure,
- **Mid level professional:** a broad term, which includes people occupying roles in the middle that are technical, clinical, etc. This role may not involve managing large numbers of staff but have the potential for positive influence,
- **Mid level leadership:** a term used in more recent discourse and reflects a challenge to traditional top down models. Mid level leaders operate in all professional groups irrespective of the number of people they manage,
- **Organisation:** the internal structure, culture and processes that serve the core purpose of the business.
- **Systems thinking:** a term used to analyse how all aspects of an organisation are connected. The 'system' includes structure, culture, roles, responsibilities, stakeholders, policies and processes.

### 3.5 Where do assumptions about middle managers come from?

Studies of middle managers over twenty years have been largely based on the perceptions of other stakeholders. This overview of relevant literature indicates little research into the experiences of middle managers from their perspective but reveals a great deal about the assumptions and attitudes of senior leaders. There is a disturbing lean towards negative interpretations, which appears to survive into 2015. There are positive models of middle managers in the literature, which recognize the contribution of the middle to the organisational vision, strategy and performance. In this chapter both positive and negative explanations and assumptions will be discussed. A historical treatment of the literature on middle managers will be used to illustrate the pervasive nature of traditional attitudes to leadership and the impact on organisational culture and individual behaviours.

Today, there are leaders operating at all levels of the organisation. Front line professionals are frequently working with complex problems, which may not have a 'right answer' or an immediate solution. The traditional 'relay' system of communication where information is passed from level to another is not feasible in a fast paced service organisation.



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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. Back in the 1990s, Mintzberg (1994) recognized that middle managers have access to priceless qualitative information about their customers and staff. His contribution and that of others (Nonaka 1988; Polakoff 1987) have persisted and given us positive images of middle managers.

### 3.5.1 External challenges and impact on middle managers

The context facing middle managers has dramatically changed. Their place in organisations has been variously downsized, restructured and re-engineered in response to external changes. Embertson (2006) commented on middle managers' vulnerability and the trend to reduce headcount in the middle as an easy tactic to cut costs. Middle levels have consistently felt the impact of external crisis through structural changes sanctioned by senior leaders and this appears to have left a powerful legacy in the psyche of senior leaders. Despite the rhetoric of developing talent (Klagge 1998), there is evidence of deeply entrenched perceptions of middle managers 'being expendable' in terms of cost and contribution. Other writers (Sims 2003, Dopson & Stewart 1999) point out these contradictions about middle managers. Their seniors expect them to be profitable, efficient and accountable (Holden & Roberts 2004). Over time, expectations have grown to include emotional intelligence (Huy 2001; Huy 2011) and transformational leadership ability (Stoker 2006).

An interesting discourse is 'doing more with less' which has dominated service organisations since the global economic crash in 2008. There appears to be little written about the voices of middle managers in response to this rhetoric. Is 'doing more with less' experienced as a rallying call or another form of control exerted by senior managers? Instructions to middle managers continue to operate from a top down paradigm and reveal an interesting assumption that the strategic direction communicated by senior managers is the right way forward. The result is that the 'voices from the middle' are closed down. Senior managers' behaviours impact the capability and confidence of their middle managers. When their behaviour reflects a top down perception of leadership, middle managers become increasingly disengaged (Thomas & Lindstead 2002).

In contrast, Drucker (1988) noted that middle layers of management neither make decisions nor lead. He argued that their key role was as part of a relay system within a hierarchy and as such, middle managers were themselves part of the problem (they had become custodians of a relay system and further disempowered themselves as a result). With the advances in communication technology, any power middle managers might have retained in the 'relay system' has been eroded further. New models of mid level influence (Floyd & Wooldridge 1997) provided an alternative perception. The negative perceptions of middle managers have left a legacy, which lingers in management thinking and impacts organisational performance (Balogun 2003). Discourse themes such as 'Destructive Dynamics of Middle Management' (Meyer 2006) and 'Middle Managers Self Interest' (Guth & MacMillan 1986) have had a lasting effect on the image of middle management.

The challenge delivered by Floyd & Wooldridge et al. (1994) to the top down relay communication system represented a significant shift in thinking about middle managers. This new model of middle managers provided a conceptual framework to explain the possibilities for middle manager engagement in developing a strategic response to change.

Recent work (Marichal & Segers 2015) brings the concept of social capital to explain the key communication work of middle managers. Social capital developed through networks and relationships enables middle managers to build their capability to manage contradictions facing staff as external challenges surface.

It is important to consider the cultural and behavioral aspects of change and (Johnson 2000) challenge the interpretations of middle managers as powerless victims of dark economic forces. There is a pattern in the negative discourse. The political life of middle managers is largely ignored or perceived as destructive. With little understanding of the messages emerging from the middle, it is unlikely that senior managers will have a full appreciation of how their organisation functions in the middle or even lower.

Later in this book, the voices of middle managers will be introduced in the form of practical case studies from UK health care and housing. Both sectors face further financial cuts, complex demographic issues, rapid advances in technology and changing expectations of service users. These case studies will demonstrate that voices from the middle signal a deep understanding of the challenges facing service provision. Middle managers are closer to the frontline staff and familiar with the issues experienced by service users. This makes them experts on the operational impact of external challenges (Ahearne, Lam & Kraus 2014).

Ironically, deep contradictions and flawed assumptions about middle managers persist. The position of middle managers is inconsistent in the literature. There are gloomy images of frustrated individuals trapped in a hierarchy and powerless to make decisions. However, there is evidence of radical explanations where middle managers are crucial players in strategic formulation and change management. The co-existence of both positive and negative interpretations will be further explored in the following sections.

### 3.5.2 Change and the middle

The previous section reveals a spectrum of interpretations of middle managers' behaviour in times of external change. There appears to be a lack of material on middle managers as subjects of research or, indeed, academic interest in the voices from the middle. The prevalence of a top down paradigm in both leadership theory and practice has consequences for decision-making, performance and morale. There is a strong challenge to traditional 'command and control' model of leadership especially in the face of external challenge (Ladkin 2010; Tate 2009; Huy 2003; Wheatley 1992). A top down leadership ethos impacts the quality of engagement and communication. Senior managers may assume that their communication efforts are successful and fail to access the valuable knowledge in the middle of the organisation:

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

*(Huy 2001, page 74)*



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Theories of change management grew exponentially in the early 1990s (Kanter 1982 et al.) and there were many attempts to create a worthy role for middle managers. The rise of Total Quality Management brought the creation of 'change agents' where middle managers were given a structured role in engaging their staff in organisational change (Fenton & O' Creevy 1998). It is interesting that the change agent role was delineated by senior leaders and frequently imposed as part of a change management initiative. The role of mid level change agents was to facilitate change i.e. implement the instructions from the top (Currie 1999; Nutt 1987). There appears to be little engagement with middle managers on operational consequences of change.

Gratton (2011) has predicted the demise of middle managers and sees little future in a layer of management whose sole function is to monitor others. It is interesting that twenty years earlier, Nonaka (1988) advocated a 'middle-up-down' model of management to produce the quickest response to changing market conditions. The 'middle-up-down' concept represents an early vision of developing middle managers where strategic formulation is an iterative process, which integrates day-to-day operational knowledge.

The dual challenges of organisational downsizing and rise of the quality improvement in the 1990s produced more models of middle management involvement in change. An interesting turn in the literature demonstrates that middle managers were seen as crucial to a more human response to change. Klagge (1998) talked about the middle as a key asset and emphasized the importance of their development.

Literature between 2001–2004 presented fresh contradictions in the way middle managers are expected to perform during change (Holden & Roberts 2004; Gabel 2002). The demand for profitability, efficiency and accountability resulted in conflicting messages for middle managers to interpret and communicate to their staff. At the same time, the model of change agent remained popular in development programmes, reinforcing and added to the expectations of middle managers. The pressure to deliver profits, improve efficiency and, at the same time, be accountable for the performance and morale of staff is a day-to-day experience for people in mid level roles.

The emergence of these contradictory role pressures appears to build momentum in the literature and is variously described as 'irreconcilable forces' (Stewart 2002), 'foot draggers and saboteurs' (Guth & Macmillan 1986). Between 2005–2009, there is a challenge to negative perceptions of middle managers (Balogun & Johnson 2004). Economic pressures and the consequences of austerity accelerated the need for more proactive models of middle management. New external challenges have presented new opportunities to challenge theories and assumptions about a disempowered middle layer.

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.

### 3.5.3 Role, image and identity

From the 1990s several authors draw attention to the negative image of middle management as ‘frustrated, disillusioned and impotent’ (Dopson & Stewart 1994), ‘without a voice’ (Sims 2003) and ‘caught’ (Stewart 2002). The image of middle managers is perceived as self-interested and destructive, especially post-merger (Meyer 2006). This view is an interesting reflection of senior leaders perception of the power of middle managers to hinder the process of change. It is important to recognise that negative views on the image of middle managers still prevail (Zenger & Folkman 2015). The result is an impact on self-image, morale and quality of engagement with senior managers.

Initially, Total Quality Management created a more positive role and identity for middle managers. It provided an acknowledgement of the complexity of mid level roles in the context of increasing operational pressures to achieve excellence. The role of the middle manager as a change agent or change intermediary was perceived to eliminate the chaos within the organisation (Nonaka 1988). Total Quality Management legitimised the roles of middle managers as champions and custodians of empowerment and this is reflected in the substantial training and development in quality assurance and change management in the 1990s (Klagge 1998).

The unfortunate consequence was to further embed the image of middle managers as trapped in the middle. It is interesting to note the language used to describe middle managers roles and image at the time; ‘rock and hard place’ and the focus on ‘coping’ with change.

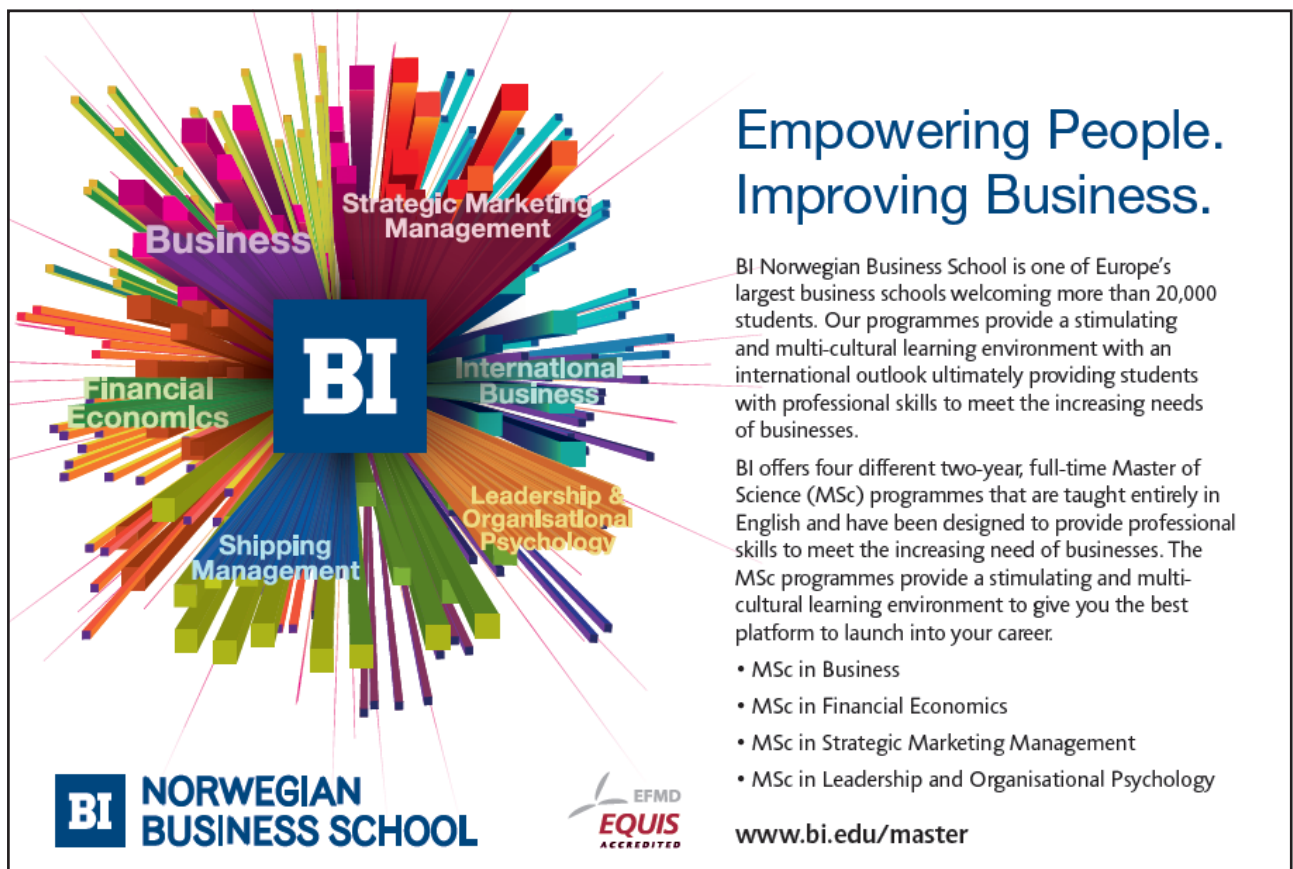
*‘They get lost in the recurring re- organisations and pressure to over work.’  
(Thomas & Lindstead 2002, pp. 71–93)*

However, the notion that middle managers play a crucial role as change agents continues to bring a positive note today. The middle is perceived to be responsible for engaging and managing staff in quality improvement and performance. The term empowerment is variously explained as the need for delegation to lower levels, as a method of increasing the role of the middle managers (Klagge 1998) and a rationale for development programmes (Adey & Jones 1998).

However, from 2005 onwards, there has been an interesting shift from empowerment through control systems to empowerment through the quality of human relationships and social capital. An expectation of leadership emerged for middle managers, which brings an emphasis on self-awareness, personal identity and authenticity. The image of a self-aware, confident leader presents a different picture of the power and influence of middle managers (Rouleau & Balogun 2011; Huy 2001) and their social capital (Ahearne, Lam & Kraus 2013). This is a major turning point. The responsibility for image creation and identity construction rests with people operating in the middle. The traditional 'top down' leadership culture was challenged and still is. In later chapters, case studies will illustrate the urgent need for the development of leadership at all levels.

### 3.5.4 Middle managers and strategic conversations

Earlier, evidence was presented that middle management discourse has been largely shaped by top down assumptions. Further study of middle managers and their role in relation to strategic thinking and formulation reveals further insights. Since 1990, there have been several advocates for greater inclusion of middle managers in strategic formulation (Westley, 1990). The term strategic conversation appears to have emerged to encapsulate the benefits of including middle managers in building organisational visions and ideologies and contributing to organisational strategy (Liedtka & Rosenblum 1996; Balogun 2003).



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The proximity of middle managers to the service operation provides crucial information for senior managers who are responsible for setting performance targets. Without a two-way conversation between levels of management, crucial practical knowledge is left out of strategic decisions. The contribution of Systems Thinking has made significant contribution to understanding the interdependency of managers in both vertical and horizontal relationships (Seddon 2008). 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.

The use of the term 'divergent influence' signals another fundamental challenge to traditional 'top down' conversations (Floyd & Wooldridge 1997). Divergent influence is manifested as challenge to 'top down' policies and decisions. Senior managers may have a predisposition for convergent behaviour, which means achieving goals and performance targets. Senior managers are primarily assessed and rewarded for compliance by external stakeholders. More junior levels may have knowledge or experience to present strategic alternatives or advise on operational issues especially when there are resources implications. Is it possible that middle managers represent divergent views and possibilities rather than resistance or non-compliance? There is a role for middle managers as catalysts in the process of change. In their unique position, they are competent to challenge strategic assumptions and to make sure that organisational values are considered, as key strategic decisions are made.

### 3.5.5 Middle managers as catalysts and innovators

The literature reveals that middle managers have been considered organisational catalysts but from a 'top down' perspective. From 1990s literature, it is clear that Total Quality Management (Klagge 1998) made a major impact on thinking about innovation. Middle managers were seen as key to promoting innovation and change but it was senior managers who were the key drivers of change programmes. The term 'change agent' implies degrees of freedom to support and develop staff to accept the change. Change agents were trained to carry their roles in a systematic way. Innovation was encouraged but only with senior management permission.

Dutton et al (1997) concluded that there were favourable and unfavourable times for middle managers to 'sell issues' to seniors. On the surface, this appears good advice, but notice how 'selling an issue' still implies a hierarchy where the boss knows best. When middle managers produce evidence based strategic options, they deserve full attention from senior stakeholders irrespective of status. While middle managers are seen as innovators vital to the organisation their freedom to innovate has defined limits set by the top or translated by the top.

The literature from 2005–2009 presents interesting ideas on the contribution of middle managers to innovation (Currie 2006). Middle managers and mid level professionals witness rare and unusual events and use their experience to manage them. Senior managers initially distrust this behaviour because it destabilizes reporting processes and external stakeholder expectations. Senior managers then appear resistant to new ideas and innovation. The divergent information that middle managers may bring to meetings appears to challenge the current strategy. Middle managers interpret events from a practical operational perspective and this can be an alarming experience for other stakeholders.

Ren (2011) sheds more light on the interactions between middle and senior levels in the context of innovation. Mid level leaders will seek and exploit ‘policy windows’ in an attempt to push forward an innovation that benefits the organisation or service users. The disturbing insight from this work is the notion that senior managers and their agendas may corral the innovations of others. Attempts at innovation linked to a ‘rare and unusual event’ will have to pass tests set by the top. The effect of external expectations and demands may cause senior managers to prescreen new ideas.

Writers between 2011–2013 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 irrespective of whether innovation is on the agenda (Conway & Monks 2011). In organisations where there is a history of traditional leadership, challenge from the middle is potentially a risk. The influence of middle managers can be channeled upwards and have successful outcomes when their ideas are founded on robust evidence. This means a step change in how strategic work is viewed by senior and middle managers alike.

### 3.5.6 Middle managers as organisational strategists

Westley (1994) was an early writer on the contribution of middle managers to strategy processes. At the time, strategic sense making was predominantly regarded as a responsibility of top managers. Sadly, this attitude still prevails and results in strategic decisions that are based on insufficient evidence and poor regard for organisational culture and values. Yet there is expectation and, certainly, case study evidence that middle managers are capable of thinking strategically, with no detriment to their operational responsibilities:

*‘Middle managers who participate in strategic conversations and are permitted some dominance in these discussions will be more likely to sustain high energy levels around strategic issues.’*

*(Westley 1994, page 349)*

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). For two decades, there has been substantial contribution from strategy literature to understanding of the positive contribution of middle managers to organisational performance. Middle managers have been described as champions, synthesisers, facilitators and implementers (Wooldridge, Schmidt & Floyd 2008; Floyd & Wooldridge 1994). All these explanations signal a redistribution of power between levels of management.

Balogun (2003) challenged the negative perceptions and countered this with the idea of a 'change intermediary' role during implementation of strategy. In later work, Balogun (2006) warns of unintended outcomes of strategic implementation if the 'sense making' of middle managers is not considered. 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. In Chapter Seven, a model of good practice will be used to illustrate how strategic conversations about change can deliver positive outcomes and workable solutions.

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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, and 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.

**Strategic conversations**

This is a model developed by participants and staff from the Masters in Hospice Leadership at Lancaster University, UK. The process is outlined below:

- Dialogue in small groups with a clearly defined question,
- An exchange of practices, knowledge, experiences and ideas,
- A process of learning through listening, questioning and reflection,
- A space where both subjective (personal experiences) and objective (facts of an issue) are welcome,
- Contributions are designed to stimulate curiosity rather than debate answers,
- Operates from a premise that organisational challenges and issues are complex and will not have clearly defined answers.

In practice, strategic conversations have the potential to create improvements, transform thinking and generate new ideas for testing. The key is to create an environment where everyone has a voice and all contributions are respected.

### 3.5.7 Views of senior managers

The positive contribution of middle managers to strategic formulation has been a growing theme in the literature since 1990s. Strategic conversations between different levels of management bring a higher quality of motivation and engagement for all parties (Westley 1994). However, it is less apparent whether multi level engagement delivers practical outcomes. In UK Housing Associations, there is an increase in methods called Co-production and Co-design where several levels of management will have an input into strategic decisions (Boyle& Harris 2009). In this process, senior managers are required to occupy a different role in the organisational system. The style of leadership, which generates high quality outcomes from Co-production, is more facilitative and collaborative. For some senior managers, however, this is not a comfortable position.

The perceptions of senior managers toward their mid level staff is complicated by historical baggage in the form of organisational structures, organisational culture and collective memories. A negative portrayal of middle managers, as disaffected and impotent individuals, has its roots in major structural changes such as downsizing back in the 1990s (Dopson & Stewart 1994). This image has lingered and, to some degree, permeated assumptions about managerial roles and responsibilities at both middle and senior level. The future for public sector and non-profit organisations is more rapid and complex change. If flawed thinking about leadership is a lasting legacy from previous organisational forms and issues, then challenge is long overdue.

Middle managers keep the company working and provide consistency for front line staff. This consistency stems from a deep understanding of the core values of the organisation. Middle managers are not only close to the business; they are also closer to values and cultural norms of the organisation. Rather than being resistant to change, they are frequently more adaptable in the face of operational challenge and mindful of the values that support a service culture. In practice, middle managers have learned how to manage continuous operational change. Contrast this to a senior manager who may direct a major change every 2–3 years.

The lack of appreciation of middle managers is seen a failure of senior managers to communicate change more effectively (Rouleau & Balogun 2011). Strategic management theory has made a significant contribution to the role of middle managers in the formulation of strategy. A communication cycle between strategic planning and operational reality makes practical sense. This makes the strategic leadership role of senior managers a process of facilitation between different professionals rather than a top down direction. The onus was placed on senior managers to spend more time communicating the rationale for change and for middle managers to check their understanding. This model of relationship transforms the leadership capability of the organisation with immediate benefits on morale and performance. The case studies, in later chapters, will illustrate the practical outcomes, when middle managers take a more proactive role in leadership managers. A realisation that middle managers may be the centre of gravity for the organisation, effectively transforms the role of senior managers.

### 3.6 Reflection and learning

The following section is an opportunity for you to reflect on the chapter and develop your own views on the role of middle managers in organisations facing continuous change. The following questions are to guide you through an analysis of your own organisation or one of the case studies.

- What are the prevailing assumptions about middle managers?
- How do assumptions impact the performance of middle managers?
- How has historical discourse shaped attitudes towards middle managers?
- What contributions are middle managers capable of?
- What are the key roles of senior managers in the development of mid level leadership capability?

**Chapter Three: Learning activity**

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).

**Forms of influence for middle managers: a self-assessment tool**

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



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		<b>Never (1)</b>	<b>Rarely (2)</b>	<b>Occasionally (3)</b>	<b>Regularly (4)</b>	<b>Frequently (5)</b>
1.	Monitor and assess the impact of changes in the organisation's external environment.					
2.	Implement action plans designed to meet strategic objectives.					
3.	Bring together information from a variety of sources to communicate its strategic significance.					
4.	Evaluate the merits of new proposals.					
5.	Evaluate the merits of proposals generated in my team.					
6.	Translate organisational goals into objectives for individuals.					
7.	Provide a safety net for experimental ideas.					
8.	Assess and communicate the operational implications of change to senior managers.					
9.	Search for new opportunities and bring them to the attention of the board.					
10.	Communicate and sell senior leadership initiatives to my team.					
11.	Define and justify the role of new ideas or processes to senior managers.					
12.	Encourage a multi-disciplinary / cross-departmental approach to problem solving.					
13.	Proactively seek information about your business from customers, suppliers, other organisations, business publications, etc.					
14.	Tell senior managers about the activities of other organisations you have benchmarked.					
15.	Justify to senior managers initiatives that have already been established.					
16.	Provide support and resources for unofficial projects.					
17.	Translate organisational goals into departmental action plans.					
18.	Relax rules and procedures in order to get new projects started.					
19.	Propose new ideas or projects to the board.					
20.	Monitor activities within your team to ensure that they align with the strategic plan.					

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

3.6.1 The four forms of middle manager influence are:

- A Championing,
- B Facilitating,
- C Synthesising,
- 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.

**Now transfer your scores to the table below and interpret how you currently influence within your organisation.**

Score	Influence	
	A	Upward and divergent influence e.g. developing strategic options and presenting them to the senior team.
	B	Downward and convergent influence e.g. coaching your team to find ways to make a change.
	C	Upward and convergence influence e.g. conducting some research and taking a solution to your boss.
	D	Downward and divergent influence e.g. implementing a planned change in your area.



Now reflect on your current style and consider how you can increase your influence in each of the four boxes:

A	B
C	D

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# 4 Developing the middle: best practice

## 4.1 Introduction

*'Leadership is not simply the domain of the few, but is prevalent throughout the organisation, in the untapped talent of all its employees.'*

*(Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2008, page 33)*

The speed of the challenge facing charitable and not for profit organisations, requires a smarter approach to leadership development in the future. The leadership capability, at both middle and senior levels, is key to individual, team and organisational resilience. Functional knowledge and qualifications are important for professional development, but more emphasis is needed on the skills that facilitate a robust organisational responsive to change. The acquisition of professional capability is important, but potentially time limited and centred on service priorities, that are continuously shifting. In an environment of continuous change, leadership is about helping others to cope with the complexity of competing demands. When the scenario changes and the current strategy has failed to predict a change, there are scarce resources to cope or time to learn to adapt ready for the next change. The development of mid level leadership capability and capacity is key to navigating change, maintaining service quality and sustaining morale.

The traditional position of middle managers as implementers of top down instructions is no longer feasible. Both literature and case study findings indicate that adaptable and collaborative leadership styles are more effective in service organisations. It is clear from previous chapters that organisational resilience and adaptability are developed through greater distribution of leadership responsibility to middle managers and front line staff (Fitzgerald & Ferlie 2007). Distributed and collaborative models of leadership both require senior managers to reflect on their attitude to power and status. The development of middle managers into organisational leaders disrupts familiar routines, relationship dynamics and power bases.

The literature review, in Chapter Three, concluded that middle managers have a significant contribution to make in managing change, contributing to strategy and improving performance. In practice, an effective approach to optimising these contributions is a collaborative process between senior managers and middle managers. Senior managers have an important role in creating an environment that supports development and ensuring that appropriate resources are available. Middle managers are responsible for maximising opportunities to influence and develop strategic thinking.

This chapter introduces a strategic approach to leadership development, which engages a range of organisational stakeholders in learning. The development of middle managers requires a systematic approach which allows middle managers to understand how their operational roles interconnect within the wider organisational system, ensuring that content, delivery methods and evaluation approach are all aligned to strategic priorities.

*'The vast majority of studies into, and books about leadership are of limited help. They concentrate on the activities of charismatic and maverick chief executives or famous explorers whose situations are so far removed from those of most managers and supervisors as to be of minimal value.'*

*(Gillen 2008, page 20)*

This chapter will present a best practice approach to developing middle managers. The learning activity for Chapter Four is a practical introduction into the use of case studies as a method of study. Reflective questions are provided to help with interpretation of the material. The contents of Chapter Three will support an analysis of middle managers and leadership development.

## 4.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To understand the importance of clear alignment of leadership development programmes to strategic imperatives,
- To recognise how external challenges have a major implication for the approach used to develop leadership capability,
- To appreciate that new models of learning and development are needed to get the best out of both senior and middle managers,
- To present an overview of learning design and demonstrate the value of clear alignment of evaluation methods to learning purpose,
- To demonstrate best practice methods in leadership development,
- To appreciate the impact of action research on the role, influence and contribution of middle managers,
- To provide evidence of the benefits of impact evaluation on quality engagement between middle and senior stakeholder,
- To appreciate the value of case studies as a method of study.

## 4.3 Chapter learning outcomes

- To understand how to align learning design, delivery methods and evaluation tools,
- To recognise the design flaws when planning a leadership development programme,
- To appreciate the best practice methods used in a systematic approach to leadership development,
- To gain an insight into the benefits of action research in the development of middle managers,
- To explore evaluation as a method of engagement and effective approach to evaluation,
- To gain confidence in the case study method of learning.

**Chapter guide****This chapter will cover the following topics:**

- From individual to organisational development,
- A systems approach to developing the middle,
- Leadership styles in the future,
- Leadership learning for tomorrow,
- How to get started,
- Evaluation options and impact evidence,
- How to get the most out of a case study.

**Chapter terms****The following terms will be used in this chapter and throughout the book:**

- **Action research:** an approach to research that involves collaboration across different parts of the organisation to investigate an issue, present findings and recommend actions,
- **Appreciative Inquiry:** a qualitative approach, which gathers views from diverse stakeholders to establish the impact of learning on individual, team and organisational performance,
- **Case study method:** a detailed examination of an organisation, event, scenario or person to reveal practical insights and generate new ideas, that promote learning,
- **Content knowledge:** an intellectual understanding of leadership models and theories,
- **Process knowledge:** a practical understanding of how to apply learning to different situations,

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#### 4.4 From individual to organisational development

Charitable and not for profit organisations have been profoundly affected by the effects of global economic crises and public sector funding cuts. The scenarios of slow growth and continuous change make it crucial that leaders are able to improve organisational effectiveness, stimulate organisational renewal and enhance organisational health (Holbeche 2013). The focus for leadership development has traditionally been focussed on individual leaders and their ability to operate as change agents. The urgency for non-profit organisations is to build their change readiness to face challenges, such as growth, sustainability and governance (Deloitte 2015). In this context, a singular focus on individual leadership development has limitations. Individuals may return from courses with great ideas but research indicates that a quality transfer of learning is difficult, in the face of further change, cultural norms and internal power structures (Swann et al. 2010).

A systematic approach to middle manager development is a more cost effective and practical use of time. With a greater emphasis on strategy, it is possible to develop leadership capability through work-based tasks that are conducted in teams and with immediate impact on the organisation. The potency and reach of collaborative learning is magnified when middle managers from different parts of the organisation learn and work together. Learning needs to be firmly located in the priorities of the organisation to enable middle managers to grow their individual confidence and competence.

As charities and not for profit organisations compete for finite resources it will become increasingly important that their leaders can present impact evidence of successes. There is an inevitable performance gap between an individual attending a training course and an observable change in their leadership behaviour and impact. A systematic approach to the development of leadership capability delivers measureable results quickly because teams and individuals are engaged in work related application of learning. Not only is a systematic approach more cost effective, it accelerates change and brings tangible results. The case studies reveal many examples of middle managers producing innovations that contribute to the economic and social value of their organisations. Middle managers gain the opportunity to showcase their knowledge, experience and passion. Powerful learning about leadership radiates out from the middle and impacts senior stakeholders.

#### 4.4.1 How to use a systematic approach to developing middle managers

The key to successful leadership development is to start with a clear focus on organisational challenges and outcomes. The case studies will present good practice examples of how a systems approach was taken with four different non-profit organisations. The approach taken to developing the middle was informed by research conducted in the private sector (Ready & Conger 2003). While the context of their research was a large global company, the concepts have significant resonance and value to leadership development programmes within charitable and not for profit organisations. The following three principles offer practical advice to anyone embarking on a leadership development initiative:

- Shared ownership of leadership development across different stakeholders,
- Leadership development is regarded as a process not a product,
- Evaluation methods are designed to produce impact evidence.

#### 4.4.2 Shared ownership across different stakeholders

Traditional ways of managing are frequently in collision with new realities. People operating in the middle feel the tension between future challenges and current cultural norms and behaviours. A traditional approach to management training can leave the recipients more frustrated and unable to influence the status quo (Blume, et al 2010). The first principle is to ensure that investment in the development of middle managers has a strategic focus, which can be shared with other organisational stakeholders. When participants, senior leaders, board members and colleagues understand the learning design, the development experience becomes more meaningful to a larger group of people.

The approach, taken from the start, will shape the way middle managers engage with the learning. A collaborative ethos at the start will bring an early ‘buy in’ to the programme, making both middle and senior managers more accountable in delivering both social and financial returns on investment.

#### 4.4.3 Leadership development: a process not a product

*‘The rush to productize ideas causes managers to think leadership development can take place in “paint-by-the-numbers sessions.’*

*(Ready & Conger 2003, page 86)*

The proliferation of education and training products that relate to leadership, management and change, has resulted in a highly competitive market with an ever-increasing complexity of offerings. In profit and charitable organisations, this trend presents a challenge. With diminishing financial resources, it is crucial that investment decisions represent value for money and that the outcomes are sustainable. However, this cannot become an excuse to opt for short term or low quality development. Leadership development is not a quick fix to an operational problem. A short-term training intervention will recycle prevailing issues and detract from the issue of future leadership capability. Leadership development is not a product.

Leadership development is a sustainable process with no prescribed life cycle. The key is to create environmental conditions that are conducive to learning and growth. A sustainable impact can be achieved through collaborative learning, work based tasks, team development and, above all, the support of senior managers.

*'Organisations need to be more involved in decisions about course content. I can see no way back to product driven solutions. The future will be driven by collaborative learning and courses that are fit for purpose.'*  
(Watson 2010, page 1)

Learning about leadership produces sustainable outcomes when there is a balance of process and content knowledge. The content of a leadership development programme is primarily relevant to the current context of the organisation. When an organisation faces an unpredictable future, an emphasis on learning content may limit the leadership capability to manage sudden change. On the other hand, process knowledge equips people with transferable knowledge and the social skills to manage the new situation and remain resilient.



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#### 4.4.4 Impact evaluation

*'The metrics that most companies are using to assess the effectiveness of their leadership development is leading them astray.'*

*(Ready & Conger 2003, page 87)*

Investment in leadership development needs to demonstrate that leaders are able to think more strategically, work more cooperatively in teams and coordinate cross business efforts.

A learning design that meets this range of expectations needs an integrated approach to evaluation, that is discussed and agreed at the early diagnostic phase. Both diagnostics and evaluation measures are, therefore, closely aligned to strategic imperatives and desired culture. This complexity presents a challenge for programme design and evaluation. Traditional models of evaluation focus on input measures or provide evidence of individual learning through competencies or similar performance measures (Kirkpatrick 1994).

In the charitable and not for profit sectors, the pressure is on to deliver sustainable service provision and improvement at reduced cost. This pressure drives poor decisions about leadership development. The flaws, in the original decisions, are perpetuated in the approach to evaluation. Input evaluation measures are an easy option because they provide quick information, but faulty in the weakness of the method and the false sense of security. For example, a course feedback form will provide data about the people's experiences on the leadership programme but nothing about future performance. The impact of learning requires output evaluation, at intervals over an extended period of time, to evidence sustainability.

Clearly, it is important to measure what matters and plan an evaluation approach that delivers rigorous impact (Tushman 2007; Ready & Conger 2003). The current political and economic challenges for all sectors are shaping attitudes that initiatives that cannot be measured quantitatively have no value. This is a dangerous assumption, which reinforces short-term fixes. If leadership development is an integrated experience of individual, team and organisational learning, then it is crucial that evaluation measures offer a broad range of impact evidence. Impact evaluation is particularly relevant to middle managers because it enables them to influence organisational stakeholders and showcase the sustainability of their learning. A best practice approach to evaluation will be presented later in this chapter.



**Developing the middle: diagnostic checklist**

These questions follow the three principles introduced earlier (Ready and Conger 2004) and reflect the practical experiences contained within the case studies. Use the questions to ensure a systematic approach to programme design and evaluation.

**Programme ownership**

- Is there a clear business rationale for leadership development?
- Will the strategic plan be served by developing leadership capability?
- Are you aware of current perceptions of middle managers and their needs?
- Have you consulted with senior managers across the organisation?
- Have you got the support of senior managers?
- Have you considered all key stakeholders?
- Have you planned how to manage resistance from senior or middle managers?
- Have you built a supportive group around you?

**Programme sustainability**

- Will the proposed learning design support the transfer of learning?
- Have you designed a programme that will promote learning back at work?
- What arrangements are there for senior managers to contribute to the programme?
- How will you manage stakeholder's expectations?
- How will you avoid the 'quick fix' response from other stakeholders?
- How will you retain a balance of individual, team and organisational learning?
- Have you explored the impact of previous leadership programmes?

**Programme evaluation**

- Does your evaluation approach align to the original purpose for developing middle managers?
- Have you considered three core levels of impact: individual, team and organisational?
- Does the evaluation need to deliver evidence of local or regional impact?
- Is your evaluation approach clear to all external and internal stakeholders?
- Have you created an evaluation process which is easy to use?
- Does your evaluation process engage the original stakeholders?

#### 4.4.5 Are you developing leaders or leadership?

Chapter Two presented evidence that charitable and not for profit organisations require new models of leadership, with a greater emphasis on collaboration and the distribution of power and accountability, to different levels. Both theory and practice indicate the necessity of a shift of emphasis from the leader, as an individual with a role and status, to leadership, which represents a social process independent of status (Ladkin 2010; Grint 2007). There is an increasing recognition that one person alone cannot successfully lead a complex service organisation, engaged in continuous change. Leadership is a social process where leaders at all levels feel accountable. The collective effect is a greater organisational resilience to continuous change and individual adaptability to respond to new demands.

In this context, it follows that leadership development requires a 'whole person' approach, which incorporates emotional intelligence as well as professional skills and knowledge (Goleman 2008). With an exponential growth in technology, there are rapid and major changes in service delivery and managerial work. The model of one individual, or top team, leading the organisation is defunct. Digitalisation brings a practical challenge to the traditional top down power structure and communication channels. Social media offers new ways of accessing information and social interaction across the organisation. The traditional power base of senior management is eroded. At the frontline of service, repetitive, process work can be automated and customers encouraged to 'self-serve' through web based applications. This means that more junior people can undertake high value or non-standard work.

The leaders' role is less about monitoring progress and more about facilitating organisational culture and behaviour. Leadership development is evolving, as people require knowledge that extends beyond the boundaries of their current job. The imperative, for leaders at all levels, is greater flexibility and agility to face change. All of these trends have an implication for the design of leadership programmes. A good example is 'Connectivism' which is a learning design approach which incorporates focussed work based learning (Siemans & Downes 2015). The authors advocate a '70-20-10' learning formula which means 70% work based learning, 20% coaching and feedback with only 10% content knowledge. This represents a very interesting formula which can be used in the practical design of leadership development. However, the expectations of middle managers would be to be managed carefully. Many reach a mid level role with professional qualifications gained through a more traditional education or training approach.

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There are both philosophical and practical drivers for rethinking leadership development. The traditional image of a heroic leader is a deeply rooted and flawed perspective, which disempowers talented and capable people. Over three decades, the publication of leadership theory has been prolific as academics, policy makers and practising managers struggle to make sense of this deeply emotive aspect of organisational life.

#### 4.4.6 Leadership learning for tomorrow

*'The leader's role is less to heal or help than to enlarge the capacity for responsible freedom.'*  
(Koestenbaum 2000, page 1)

The term 'responsible freedom' brings a new perspective for leadership development and one, which helps to transform unproductive hierarchical cultures. In later chapters, there is impact evidence of middle managers taking 'responsible freedom' through collaborative research on key organisational challenges. Irrespective of status or time served, leadership ability is now more about learning skills and agility than functional knowledge or years of service. With rapid and unplanned change, past knowledge is not necessarily an advantage. Organisational histories are full of flawed assumptions, which have impaired judgement and resulted in poor decisions. The development of leadership capability, in middle managers, is about growing a culture of collaborative learning and promoting responsible freedom at all levels. This growing focus on collaborative leadership is needed to engage diverse stakeholders and raise the quality of strategic decisions. Collaborative skills are relevant to the new forms of business relationships which are emerging across charities and not for profit organisations e.g. mergers, partnerships and strategic alliances.

The social value of charitable and non-profit organisations will become increasingly important as central government funding decreases. From a unique operational position, middle managers will be able to influence the direction of their organisation and sustain a service culture. Leadership styles, which are collaborative, distributed and engaging, will be essential for middle managers.

In the next section, three development approaches are described:

- Middle managers and critical reflection,
- Middle managers and strategic thinking,
- Middle managers and action research.

#### 4.4.7 Middle managers and critical reflection

*'We spent a great deal of time reflecting, which is something not many middle managers spend time doing.'*  
(Middle Manager, Housing Association 2015)

The fast pace of organisational life impacts the quality of thinking of both senior and middle managers. The call for action and results is a cultural driver that impairs the quality of strategic planning which, over time, impacts operational effectiveness. Some of the common human issues, in charitable and not for profit organisations, include powerlessness and fear in the face of uncertainty. The tension between social values and economic necessity is felt keenly by middle managers. There is great scope for developing reflective skills in middle managers. The process of reflection brings changed awareness of issues and increased motivation to take responsibility for action. The practical action following reflection is based on deeper, more strategic thinking and relevant information.

In the case studies, middle managers were asked to reflect both as individuals and as teams. In practice, reflection created a greater openness and motivation to discover new ideas and research options for change. People shared multiple perspectives and learned to challenge the 'taken for granted' aspects of previous solutions and decisions. Middle managers were able to deliver strategic options to senior managers based on sound evidence. Reflection also became a feature of team performance and established as a key skill in all collaborative work.

Individual reflection was introduced during early modules to increase self-awareness. In Chapter Six, a leadership retreat was designed into a programme for middle managers. The participants were asked to journal both during and between modules. Journal entries were confidential with an option to share with a partner. The use of reflective blogs is growing and another option for encouraging reflective skills. The confidence of middle managers is greatly enhanced by understanding how they learned to lead. Assumptions about leadership are quickly changed when they appreciate their individual leadership style and realise that they do not have to change to match a theory of leadership.

Our history and experience shape our views about leadership and our response to others. The notion of 'Learned leadership' is in direct contrast to traditional models, which debate whether leaders are born or made (Kempster 2006). Learned leadership implies that we can learn and change in the future to manage the demands of a new organisational context. Individual leadership is, therefore, not fixed by heritage. An understanding of past experiences and their impact on our assumptions represents freedom from emotional and intellectual constraints.

***In Chapter One, the learning activity called 'The Blind Spot of Leadership' was an opportunity to map your own learned leadership. This is a good moment to revisit the notes that you made and reflect on what it means to you now.***

#### 4.4.8 Middle managers and strategic thinking

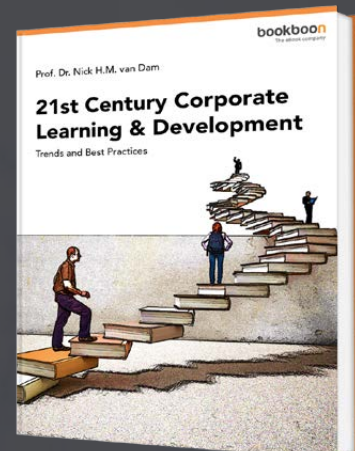
The combination of individual reflection and collaborative learning has an immediate impact on the quality of learning about leadership and organisational strategy. As middle managers experience the benefit of reflection and share their insights with colleagues, new ideas about organisational issues emerge. Strategic thinking becomes another tool for middle managers to use, both individually and across the organisation. In the case studies, middle managers worked through key business challenges as a small team. Their collective strategic capability grew as they learnt to challenge assumptions and explore strategic options. This learning was in direct contrast to the day-to-day operational work and highlighted the need for greater cohesion across functions and parts of the organisation.

Middle managers are very skilled at fixing operational problems as they occur but, equally important, is their ability to analyse the source of the problem and avoid costly recurrence. This requires skills and confidence in research and analysis. In a top down organisational culture, middle managers are tasked with supplying senior managers with operational information but rarely involved in analysis. In a fast paced service environment, this is a major constraint and slows down the flow of vital information between strategic priorities and operational reality.

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The middle managers, in the case studies, developed their research skills by working together on business issues. Strategic models were introduced to build their confidence in environmental scanning, strategic planning and culture mapping. The approach taken was very similar to a traditional senior executive programme. While this type of work was unfamiliar to them, the collaborative approach taken enabled all members to grow their skills. Work based team tasks provided a realistic setting to practice reflection and strategic thinking. The learning outcomes from work based tasks then progressed into action research and more substantial business projects.

Middle managers started to appreciate that their contribution was more powerful when they delivered evidence to support their views. They were able to make strategic challenges, in a constructive manner, and influence their senior managers. Senior managers realised that their middle managers were capable of understanding and translating organisational strategy into operational practicalities. Middle managers learnt how strategy was developed and were therefore, more able to make a positive contribution. Both senior and middle managers learnt a great deal about each other's perceptions and aspirations. Their practical common ground emerged through business projects, where both parties could collaborate on a crucial issue.

***At the close of Chapter Seven, there is an activity, which will give you practice in applying the strategic tools to your current working environment. Either work through the prompt questions as an individual or invite some colleagues to a strategy session and work through a specific issue.***

#### 4.4.9 Action research and developing the middle

The influence of middle managers can be developed through action research projects conducted in small teams, and focussed on a key organisational problem. Action research involves researchers and clients in the diagnosis of a problem and the development of a solution (Brymen & Bell, 2003). The process empowers and develops all the participants of the research. Both the research process and outcomes lead to new patterns of thinking and produce both practical solutions and new ideas. Outputs from action research are accessible and meaningful to other members of the organisation. The project outcomes are varied and depend upon the topic chosen. Some project teams remain focussed on a strategic issue and they produce strategic options, future scenarios and recommendations. If the research findings indicate a clear recommendation, the teams may generate a business plan to support their argument.

Action research may involve a team in a more operational issue. The strategic tools are now applied to an operational context and the outcomes more likely to include a practical solution. The case studies illustrate a full spectrum of typical business projects with qualitative evidence of their success. This form of research is totally embedded in crucial issues facing the organisation. Middle managers understand that their research findings will provide a major opportunity to have a voice. The case studies will demonstrate the power of this form of development and provide impact evidence of team and organisational development.

On a final note, it is important to recognise that conducting any form of research in your own organisation requires attention to ethics and confidentiality (Brymen & Bell 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 2004).

*At the close of Chapter Six, there is a practical exercise that will guide you through the ethical and political considerations of conducting research in your own organisation. The questions are a helpful prompt for senior stakeholders who may have a vested interest in the research outcomes.*

## 4.5 Developing the middle: How to get started

### 4.5.1 Who owns the diagnosis?

A systems approach to design, delivery and evaluation of leadership development requires a skilful approach to diagnosing development needs. When the target population for development is middle managers, it is essential that there is a quality engagement between key organisational stakeholders. Diagnostic material can be collated from a number of sources and likely to include the visions and views of senior leaders including HR professionals. It is essential when developing the middle, that the diagnostic process involves the participants. The introduction of a development solution that has been created by senior leaders, or an external expert, communicates a message of 'top down' and may result in cynicism and resistance. Compliance is another negative by-product, especially when a leadership development programme is part of a talent management strategy. In this context, internal politics and competition may drive a cultural drift towards a leadership style that is rewarded by the dominant culture.

From practical experience, an approach called Appreciative Inquiry creates an environment where middle managers can discuss issues and interact with colleagues to discuss individual, team and organisational development (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987). The process can be conducted in self-managed teams or with a facilitator. Appreciative Inquiry serves to engage a range of stakeholders in conversations about future direction and sharing knowledge. The outcome is a learning design that is grounded in shared thinking and values, rather than a solution created by an expert to solve a problem.

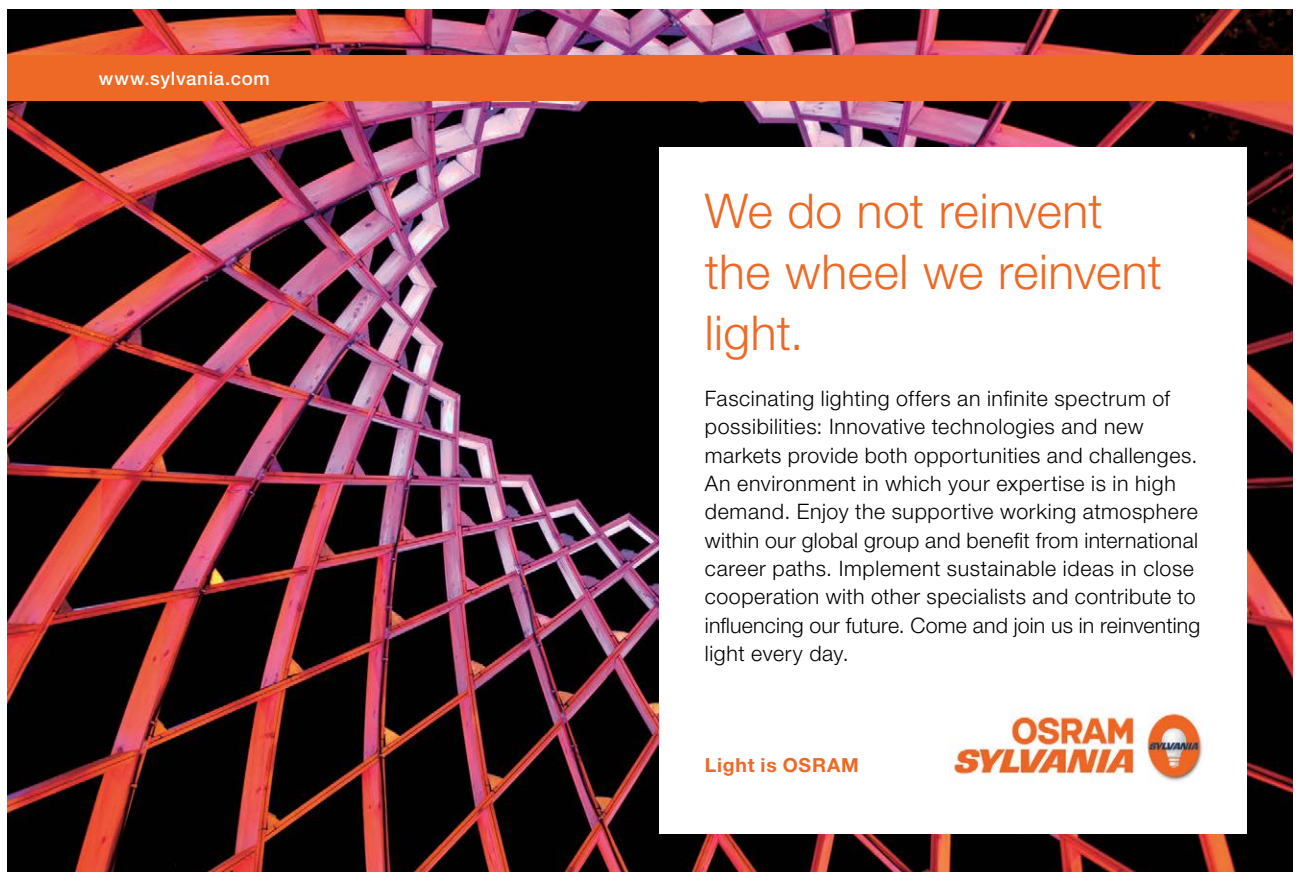
Appreciative Inquiry can also be used as an evaluation tool (Watson 2013). The tool can be used to generate impact evidence and is most effective within six months of the original development initiative. The middle managers and key stakeholders generate impact evidence from stories of individual, team and organisational success. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, there are more detailed accounts of evaluation research carried out by middle managers.

#### 4.5.2 How to ensure quality outcomes

In the previous section, an inclusive approach to diagnosis was introduced and it is essential that the evaluation approach is equally rigorous. The purpose of evaluation is to provide evidence of an improvement in performance and whether this can be attributed to leadership development. Overall, the goal is to generate high quality evidence, which can be used to prove that the leadership development was worthwhile e.g., value for money, talent development, service improvement, cultural transformation or managing change.

There are three major forms of evaluation:

- Theory evaluation: a way of proving that the programme is working e.g. competency frameworks, performance indicators.
- Process evaluation: a way of showing that the learning approach was relevant and key skills have been transferred to the organisation e.g. reflection, action learning.
- Impact evaluation: a way of tracking short, medium and longer term outcomes e.g. recommendations and examples of implementation, service improvement.




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The evaluation approach should be clearly aligned to the original purpose for leadership development and developed in the diagnostic phase. This alignment is very important when the participants are middle managers. The final approach may combine more than one method. An interesting study into the link between leadership and performance recorded that organisational performance was positively associated with engaged leadership styles (Alimo-Metcalf 2015). The evaluation method used case studies and focussed on impact findings. It was interesting that leadership, expressed as competencies, did not predict performance in the same way. Leadership competency frameworks are an important structure to guide middle managers, in what is expected of them, but rarely detail explicit leadership behaviours.

Impact evaluation can be designed to demonstrate:

- Improved leadership activity,
- Quality engagement between learners and other stakeholders,
- Proof of practical application,
- Sustainability of individual and team learning,
- Insights into the challenges on the ground,
- Information for funding bodies,
- Information on social and economic changes,
- Impact on service users.

#### 4.5.3 Developing middle managers and evaluation

*'An organisation is a miracle to be embraced rather than a problem to be solved.'*  
(Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, page 130)

Successful outcomes in the case studies were evidenced with impact evaluation generated by the middle managers. Process and impact evidence were gathered from individual, team and organisational stories of learning and measurable, improved performance. The voices of the middle were heard through the quality of project outcomes and the presentation of team learning. Appreciative Inquiry, when used as an evaluation tool, brings a rich understanding of changes in behaviour. The approach and outcomes reveal cultural shifts and works well over extended periods of time. With a focus on strengths rather than problems, the starting point for evaluation is non-threatening and more likely to get a positive response.

There are four stages that encourage participants to share the impact of their learning:

- **Discover:** identification of the impact of learning on leadership behaviour, successes and strengths,
- **Dream:** a visioning of how leadership performance could be even better,
- **Design:** planning and prioritising actions as leaders to help develop excellent performance,
- **Deliver:** implementation of agreed actions and commitments.

In the case studies, the ownership of impact evidence resided with the learners, rather than senior managers or programme facilitators. Appreciative Inquiry provided a 'day to day' practical understanding of leadership and culture that so often eludes organisations living with complex change. The middle managers involved were committed to learning as individuals and leaders.

This evaluation method puts the responsibility for research with the learners. Their accounts of their learning, and subsequent experiences, form the qualitative evidence that is used to assess the practical outcomes of developing middle managers. Other stakeholders, including external stakeholders and senior managers, can make a contribution at any stage in the four-step process. This approach to evaluation is designed to sustain the quality of engagement between middle and senior managers and promote collaboration across the organisation.

In summary, best practice in developing the leadership potential of middle managers is based on a clear alignment between strategic priorities, robust diagnostics, learning design approach and impact evaluation. The next three chapters present qualitative evidence that middle managers have a major role in organisational development and performance. The case studies have been selected to provide practical examples of the contribution of middle managers to strategy, innovation and culture. In all case studies, senior managers took on active roles, were changed in the process, and learned a great deal about their leadership role.

#### Case study chapters

- **Chapter Five:** What happened to the Midland 23? A longitudinal study of middle management development,
- **Chapter Six:** 'Leading the Way'; best practice in housing leadership development,
- **Chapter Seven:** Leading from the Middle. 'When horses run together'

## 4.6 Reflection and learning

The following questions provide an opportunity to reflect on Chapter Four and develop your own views about best practice in the leadership development of middle managers. You may wish to evaluate the development approach used in your own organisation, or a previous personal experience of leadership development.

- What should be in place before investing in a leadership development programme?
- Why is it important to align the learning design with delivery methods and evaluation tools?
- Name three best practice methods which are successful with middle managers.
- How can Action Research build the influence of middle managers?
- What is meant by evidence based approach to evaluation?
- Why is it important to engage senior managers in learning about leadership?
- What advice would you give a senior manager about their role in developing middle managers?

**Chapter Four: Learning activity****Preparing for a case study**

A case study presents you with an opportunity to develop a range of skills. Consider the following prompts and reflect on your current learning needs. Your response will depend on whether you are a Postgraduate student, practising manager, Human Resource professional or management consultant. How do you want to use the case study?

- To gain knowledge about the sector,
- To understand principles of programme design and evaluation,
- To gain an insight into the challenges senior and middle managers,
- To learn for to define issues and analyse qualitative findings,
- To apply theory and concepts to a case study,
- To assess personal decision making skills,
- To become aware of personal perceptions and attitudes,
- To challenge your assumptions about leadership,
- To explore new methods of developing middle managers,

**How to learn from a case study**

Now select a case study and use the questions below to deepen your understanding. Finally, return to your responses in the previous section, and reflect on your learning.

The questions are a guide to check your understanding of the case studies and develop your thinking about middle managers and leadership development. Make notes on your answers as you study the case study chapters and remember to consult Chapter Three for some theory to support your answers.

**Organisational context**

- What were the key features of the organisational context?
- What were the major external challenges faced by senior managers?
- How did the senior managers view the middle managers?
- How did the middle managers view the senior managers?
- What were the strategic priorities of the organisation?
- What did you notice about the culture of the organisation?
- What were the issues for middle managers?

**Programme design**

- What were the key features of the programme design?
- Why was clear alignment an important aspect of programme design?
- What were the main delivery approaches?
- How were the delivery approaches aligned to strategic priorities?
- What was unique about the evaluation approach?
- What were the key outcomes of the evaluation research?
- Why was it important to align the development of middle managers to strategic priorities?

# 5 'Leading from the Middle': What happened to the Midland 23?

## 5.1 Introduction

*'Give people the authority to make decisions and then trust them.'*  
(Midland 23 2015)

This chapter will present a longitudinal case study of leadership development, from 2007–2014, to illustrate the benefits of developing mid level housing leaders. The case study demonstrates that the quality of engagement between mid level leaders and senior leaders was key to individual, team and organisational performance. The findings from an evaluation research project conducted in 2010 have significant correlation with the major literature themes in Chapter Three. The case study organisation is Great Places Housing Group and their story featured in Chapter One to explain how pioneering work with middle managers, conducted in 2007, developed a leadership programme called 'Leading from the Middle'. The learning experiences of 160 middle managers, over a seven-year period, will provide practical insights into the development of mid level leadership capability. The evaluation research conducted in 2010, with 80 middle managers, will also be used to demonstrate the sustainability of the learning approach.



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The original programme (2007) was the result of collaboration between senior managers, from different parts of a new group structure, to diagnose the major learning and development themes. The 'Midland 23' was a group of eight directors and fifteen assistant directors who took an active role in developing middle managers. This collaboration resulted was the first 'Leading from the Middle' an innovative programme designed to accelerate organisational development, develop middle managers and involve senior managers in action learning.

The 'Midland 23' played a vital role in 'Leading from the Middle' and this contribution will be explored later in this chapter. The programme design was radical and designed to challenge both middle and senior managers. The collective aspiration to develop a collaborative high performance culture required a strong commitment to learning about leadership. The case material will demonstrate that the 'Midland 23' rose to that challenge in 2007 and were able to sustain the learning outcomes over seven years.

In summary, the quality of engagement from senior managers had a major impact on the success of 'Leading the Middle' and this chapter contains a variety of evidence for the reader to study evaluation research, business project outcomes and reflections from members of the original 'Midland 23'. Great Places Housing Group went on to grow internal coaching capability and this became a key feature of developing middle managers and organisational culture. The chapter learning activity is a self-assessment questionnaire on coaching skills.

## 5.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To plot the impact of 'Leading from the Middle' on middle managers' influence over the period 2007–2014,
- To consider the organisational challenges faced by senior and mid level leaders during this time period,
- To reflect on best practice programme design that is customised to the strategic priorities and operational imperatives,
- To examine the impact of engaging a wider group of stakeholders in a development programme for mid level leaders,
- To present case study evidence of team business projects and their impact on Great Places Housing Group,
- To explore the learning of the Midland 23 group and assess the practical outcomes of investing in the development of middle managers.

### 5.3 Reflection and learning

- To gain practical knowledge from a longitudinal case study of middle managers and their influence on a newly formed group of businesses,
- To understand the role that senior leaders have in the development of mid level leaders,
- To explore the challenges of a collaborative approach to learning,
- To appreciate the power of internal coaching on the development of individual leaders and teams,
- To be clear on the essential design components of a leadership development programme that delivers sustainable business results.

**Chapter guide:****This chapter will cover the following topics:**

- Programme design,
- Analysis from the Midland 23
- Pilot programme,
- Mid point evaluation research,
- The vision of middle managers.

**Chapter terms****The following terms will be used in this chapter, and throughout the book:**

- Individual coaching – a one to one relationship, where an individual is helped to reflect on their performance and well- being
- Team coaching – where the skills of coaching are applied to a team as a whole rather than collection of individuals
- Supported housing- an umbrella term which is applied to a range of housing provision for vulnerable people

### 5.4 Background

In 2007, the political context for Great Places Housing Group was becoming complex. In 2006, Manchester Methodist joined with Ashiana, a Black and Minority Ethnic ( BME) Housing Association with specialist capability in neighbourhood development. A third Housing Association, Space Living, joined the new Group in 2007 bringing local knowledge and well developed operational systems. Within a year, Great Places Housing Group had expanded to cover range of 2,800 square miles from Blackpool to Sheffield (West to East) and from Lancaster to Cheshire (North to South). The formation of this new housing organisation brought an urgent leadership challenge to the newly expanded management team. The diversity of the three businesses brought significant opportunities for growth in housing development and to improve the way the new Group operated. The three businesses were geographically and culturally very different and there was a risk that the synergies of collaboration would be eroded by internal competition and 'silo' thinking.

The emergence of the Midland 23 was in response to a growing realisation, that the new Group needed to develop a collaborative culture and to avoid the potential fragmentation of diverse businesses coming together under one banner. The original design and development of the first 'Leading from the Middle' focussed on bringing all parts of Great Places Housing Group together with a clear vision and shared culture. A culture of engagement and collaboration is very difficult to achieve if the development programme models traditional old leadership styles. It was essential that the design of 'Leading from the Middle' empowered the middle managers across Manchester Methodist, Ashiana and Space Living to work across the whole business and build a collaborative group culture. This had implications for the role and status of senior managers. It was likely that their authority, ideas and experience would be challenged. With some trepidation, the Midland 23 became involved in a programme that would transform the culture of the organisation.

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## 5.5 Programme design

### 5.5.1 Introduction

The success of 'Leading from the Middle', in 2007, was attributed to a clear design philosophy. Group strategic imperatives were used to structure learning content, delivery methods and team projects. The emphasis on action learning, team development, collaborative learning and action research helped to focus all learning on practical organisational issues. The close alignment of learning design to the strategic direction resulted in a leadership programme that was fit for purpose and produced a research framework for impact evaluation.

Over time, the programme philosophy strengthened as more managers joined or supported programme learning. Active involvement of the Midland 23 resulted in a more sustainable impact on the organisation.

### 5.5.2 Conceptual framework

*'Some companies with hierarchical structures and cultures, devise a strategic plan and communicate it downwards. Leaders wonder why their plan is not working. It is not that middle managers are highly resistant, it is that they are not being listened to.'*

*(24 Housing 2010).*

The programme design had a sound conceptual basis for programme content and was informed by key writers on middle management influence (Wooldridge 1997). The sustained success of the programme aligned well to later research on middle managers (Balogun, 2003, Balogun & Johnson 2004; Balogun 2006). In summary, the design was shaped by the following ideas:

- Middle managers are 'Change Intermediaries' and in a prime position to enable operational change and ensure cultural alignment to strategic priorities,
- Middle managers are capable of interpreting strategic change for staff,
- Middle managers help others make changes but focus on keeping the 'business' of the organisation going during transition,
- Middle managers are a strategic asset and need support to maximise their influence across the organisation.



### 5.5.3 Analysis from the Midland 23

*'There were managers who, until that point, did not understand their place in the organisation, or the impact their work had on others.'*

*(Midland 23 2015)*

The diagnostic work conducted by the Midland 23, in January 2007, confirmed the disparity in culture, practices and behaviours across the new group structure. Senior managers were now focussed on growth but aware that the organisation still had to deliver 'business as usual'. There were very different cultures in the three original housing organisations but some evidence of a shared vision and values about social housing. Corporate services (Human Resources, Finance and Information Technology) were managed from a new Head Office in Manchester with some staff relocating from different regional offices.

*'At that event, we saw the penny drop! We needed each other.'*

*(Midland 23 2015)*

Great Places Housing Group employees now worked in very diverse regions of the North of England. The new scale of the business had the potential to isolate them from the Group headquarters in Manchester. Additionally, the local knowledge of housing professionals in each of the Group areas was seen as crucial to the future aspirations of the new management team. This knowledge covered tenants, neighbourhoods and communities plus partnerships with local councils, police and community groups. There were pockets of good practice across the group that could be leveraged for the benefit of the whole organisation.

Initially, the policies and procedures of each housing association were different and it was important to bring consistency across the whole organisation and start to leverage the benefits of being a larger housing group. The Midland 23 agreed that their role was becoming more complex and the priority was to transform the three separate entities into one group organisation. It was crucial that senior managers focussed more on the strategic picture and started to delegate more operational work to middle managers. The big challenge for all parties was whether the next tier of management was ready for this responsibility.

The outcomes of the Midland 23 diagnostic work provided a series of questions that also informed the programme design:

- How do we ensure our performance does not suffer as we grow as a Group?
- How do we create a new culture that incorporates the best practice of the organisation?
- How do we make new colleagues feel welcome and engaged in the new organisation?
- How can we be more visible in the different locations?
- How do we involve colleagues in new ways of delivering service?
- How do we retain our local services but gain the efficiencies from the larger organisation?
- Who can we trust to deliver this as well as we could?

- How do we let go of operational detail?
- How do we keep track of actions and who will take responsibility for them?
- Who can help us through this change?

These questions also provided a consistent message about 'Leading from the Middle' right from the start. It was crucial that the learning approach mirrored the changes that the senior management team wanted to see. The delegation of responsibilities from senior to middle level was a relationship challenge for everyone involved. Action Learning was used to create a practical experience for senior leaders to rethink their attitude to the influence and power of their middle managers. Members of the Midland 23 worked alongside middle managers and operated as team members during the project. This was an innovative learning approach that engaged different levels of leadership in collaborating to solve a key business issue. The outcome did not erode conventional reporting lines and provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to challenge assumptions and generate fresh thinking.

In summary, the diagnostic work clarified the purpose of the programme and the next section outlines programme learning objectives, design features and benefits.



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- The number 1 MOOC for Primary Education
- Free Digital Learning for Children 5-12
- 15 Million Children Reached



## 5.6 The pilot programme (2007)

### 5.6.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose was to ensure the development of Great Places Housing Group through the individual development of middle managers across the organisation and specifically:

- To introduce action learning as the core process to growing internal capability aligned to the strategic direction of the business,
- To explore the style of leadership at both middle and senior level which would sustain the growth agenda in the next five years,
- To deliver practical outcomes of action research projects as a vehicle for middle managers to influence strategy.

It was crucial that programme design delivered individual and team learning to the organisation and this was observed as a measurable impact on performance. The pilot programme was structured to include the development of internal coaching capability. This organisational capability proved invaluable in the aftermath of global recession in 2008. Great Places Housing Group was in a stronger position to manage the impact of economic downturn and, as a result, developed a robust organisational resilience to unexpected changes.

From 2007, the development of middle managers and coaching capability became embedded in the organisation. The involvement of the Midland 23 ensured that individual and team learning delivered value to the business quickly. The team business projects represented a practical form of action research, which promoted a collaborative culture and encouraged middle managers to present sound proposals to solve operational issues. The pilot programme demonstrated that middle managers could deliver value to the business, engage several levels of management and create new models of leadership. From 2008 onwards, the pressures on Housing Associations were fast paced and relentless. Political, economic, social and technological challenges emerged as central government attempted to address deep-rooted issues in the UK housing market. These challenges and their impact on middle managers in 2015 are explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

*'In a complex organisation it's not possible for a few people at the top knowing how to do everything. Good leadership has to be inclusive, letting other people lead. Your reputation is only as good as the people you work with.'*

*(Midland 23 2015)*

Back in 2008, it was unlikely that an old style, top down leadership approach would have brought the required adaptability for Great Places Housing Group to thrive and grow. A focus on middle management development with dedicated support from senior managers created a model of collaborative leadership that proved an asset to the Great Places success story.

## 5.7 Leading from the Middle

### 5.7.1 Key features:

- Action Learning (groups of 6–8 people) was cross business and multilevel,
- Teams worked on 'live issues' generated by middle managers and sponsored by directors and assistant directors,
- Collaborative learning and leadership were experienced through practical experiences,
- Each action learning team has a trained team coach (Lancaster University accredited and supervised),
- A three-day module started the process and embedded key skills of collaborative learning, dialogue, critical reflection and thinking,
- Teams conducted research into their 'issue' and generated recommendations for a one day Learning Forum,
- All teams presented their research outcomes and recommendations at a Learning Forum,
- The Learning Forum was a key calendar event attended by a wider range of stakeholders (board members, customers and research participants),
- Team coaching was promoted as a method of creating and sustaining high performance teams.

### 5.7.2 Key practical outcomes

- Significant shift in collaboration across the organisation that had an impact on team and organisational performance,
- Managers developed capabilities to accelerate the process of change during acquisitions,
- Practical, operational outcomes of action learning convinced directors of the power of developing middle managers,
- Assistant directors and directors became more strategic in outlook and examined their leadership style,
- The building of internal capability and resilience impacted the way the organisation coped with the 2008 recession and subsequent challenges,
- Outcomes of team projects provided evidence of impact – this supported Investors in People and Best Social Housing Landlord of the year, Sunday Times, Top 100 companies to work for,
- An internal coaching service has become embedded in the organisational culture making a big difference to the learning and development budget,
- The identification of talent across the housing group gave a more strategic view of succession,
- The team projects supported rapid business growth by introducing innovation and new thinking.

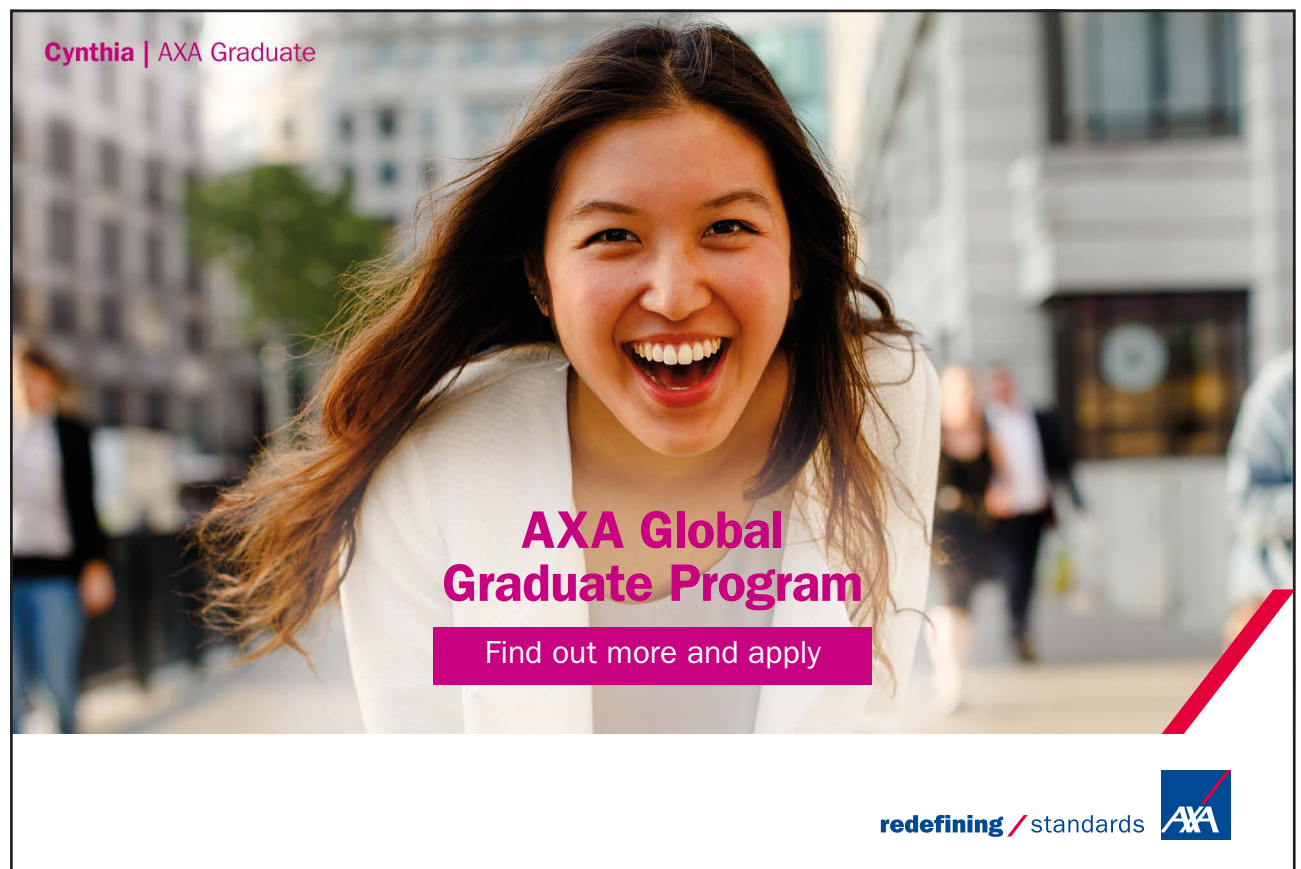
### 5.7.3 Key success factors

The following section is drawn from programme feedback. Both middle managers and the members of the Midland 23 reflected on their learning over a period of seven years. The following success factors emerged:

#### **Balance of reflection and action**

*'A previous active style of learning was tempered by an understanding of the power of reflection.'*  
(Midland 23 2015)

The three day workshop was predominantly reflective with an emphasis on self-awareness, personal leadership style and team skills. This provided a strong foundation for later project work and reinforced the need for critical reflection as a way to challenge flawed assumptions and manage performance. Business project teams were formed from different parts of the organisation. This was a deliberate design feature to ensure synergies and networks across the business were optimised. Collaborative working and learning, across middle managers, had a major impact on the integration of three Housing Associations into one group structure.



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**Action Learning**

*'We found it challenging not to automatically assume the role of leader. We felt equally that it was initially a challenge for middle managers to treat us as equals.'*

*(Group Director 2010)*

A model of empowered leadership was created inside the Action Learning teams. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined and all members, irrespective of status, had a part to play. Groups were able to experiment with new ideas and approaches in the knowledge that they would be listened to. The approach to Action Learning challenged the impact of a traditional hierarchy and allowed senior leaders to appreciate the contribution of the middle to operational effectiveness. Trained team coaches joined these sessions to support individual learning and reflection. The reflection of learning and review of performance helped all team members to bring their best to the project work irrespective of status. In this setting, both middle and senior managers experienced a new and collaborative culture.

**Coaching capability**

Prior to the first 'Leading from the Middle' programme, eight volunteers were trained to be coaches over a six month period using a combination of work based practice and reflective assignments. The coaches were selected from different parts of the business and different levels of management responsibility. The coaches attended Action Learning sessions and were available for one to one coaching. Their focus was to support individual and team development.

The coaching programme was customised to Great Places Housing Group and accredited with Lancaster University. Over seven years, internal coaching capability developed and helped to sustain the transfer of learning. This model of coaching has since been adopted for other business purposes and it is now a cultural norm for a coach to be invited into a meeting to support team performance reviews. The key to success was a structured approach to coaching supervision. Internal coaches were encouraged to reflect on their own practice with peers. Structured supervision was introduced in the first module of the coaching programme and reinforced by a reflective written assignment.

## Business projects

*'Middle managers take charge quickly, in a lower risk environment, with the time and space to think differently.'*  
(Great Places Director 2010)

A key success factor for the programme was a project phase that lasted three months. Project work was aligned to strategic priorities and operational challenges. The scoping of projects was a collaborative effort and typical business topics included:

- Customer expectations and orientation,
- Reaching out to disadvantaged groups,
- Challenges faced by sheltered housing,
- Expansion of maintenance and repair services,
- On line information services,
- Collaboration with other agencies (Social Services and Police),
- Affordable housing options,
- Benchmarking quality improvement processes,
- Mobile working – issues, security and technology.

## Typical projects

In 2007, some employees and managers felt disconnected from the head office in Manchester. The new group was now responsible for the housing needs of a large geographical area with diverse populations and cultures. It was important to generate a sense of one group structure and ethos. One project team developed a 'job swap' scheme where individuals visited a different part of the business for a day. The greatest benefit was derived from the interaction between people in different roles.

*'It really opened my eyes to what happens beyond Head Office – antisocial behaviour, rent arrears, matching property to tenant.'*

(Leading from the Middle participant 2010)

*'I spent a day with the IT team and what an eye opener that was. I was shown the system for logging jobs across the business and seeing the vast number of jobs was a real revelation to me.'*

(Housing Manager 2010)

Several projects made a contribution to health and well being within the organisation. One project team developed a rolling programme of lunchtime activities, which included Tai Chi, Yoga and running. The approach helped to transform attitudes to well being using the internal capabilities of staff. Another project team improved the accessibility of housing for the most vulnerable people. The team produced easier to follow instructions, an improved application process and a more efficient matching system. A pilot scheme was introduced in collaboration with health care professionals in the area.

One of the immediate consequences of the new Group formation was in the increase in travelling across the region. The situation was unsustainable and proving to have a detrimental effect on people's work life balance and productivity. Another team managed the installation of Web conferencing, with 360-degree cameras and large screens. A virtual round table meeting culture was created and the cost savings were impressive.

*'The programme Leading enabled us to do projects which would not otherwise be on the business calendar.'*  
(Midland 23 2015)

Individuals on a project team were often working on a business issue outside their professional expertise. As a result, they learned a great deal about the strategic issues facing senior leaders and were encouraged to research outside Great Places Housing Group and when relevant, outside their sector. Project team members learned the value of benchmarking and researching best practice. These learning experiences developed the confidence of middle managers to champion their ideas. The immediate benefits of a neighbourhood project were seen in greater community spirit. Tenants were asked to nominate an area of unused land for a 'makeover'. Project team members including members of the Midland 23 participated in the 'makeover'.

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## 5.8 Mid point evaluation research (2010)

### 5.8.1 Introduction

Middle managers generated the following evaluation findings during workshops, in March 2010. The workshops were designed around the Appreciative Inquiry method, which is a practical team process for evaluation of learning through engagement with diverse groups of managers. This method was outlined in Chapter Four. The purpose of the evaluation study was to research the practical impact of 'Leading from the Middle' on individuals, teams and the organisation. Eighty middle managers were joined by the Midland 23 to discuss and collate evidence of individual, team learning and organisational learning. The Appreciative Inquiry approach proved an effective method of mapping the impact of leadership development on business performance. The participative nature of the method brought a high quality of engagement between middle, senior managers and team coaches.

#### **Evaluation workshop: Learning Objectives**

- To practice dialogue and critical reflection to understand the impact of learning on individuals and teams,
- To evaluate both the learning approach and outcomes of the business projects,
- To share a vision of how leadership development can continue to shape and inform the development of managers in across the organisation,
- To discuss and agree practical actions that managers can take to ensure that the investment in development is sustained.

### 5.8.2 Impact findings

The following section is a selection of qualitative evidence generated during the Appreciative Inquiry workshops in 2010. Stories of individual, team and organisation impact were shared at the workshops. The findings outlined below are based on contributions from middle managers and the Midland 23.

### 5.8.3 Planning and prioritising

*'I now work best when I take the time to reflect rather than acting and reacting immediately.'*  
(Leading from the Middle participant 2010)

There was evidence that managers were more aware of the need to reflect and plan. The benefits of stepping back and avoiding a 'fire-fighting' approach were a key theme. Strategic planning was deemed to be important for Great Places Housing Group so that staff could gain a clearer understanding of their own goals. Planning was also seen as a skill to manage multiple tasks, workloads and responsibilities. The evaluation findings indicated that managers saw the benefit of mapping a clear plan of action and believed it gave them a greater ability to manage distractions.

#### 5.8.4 Communicating the plan

*'Understanding the different ways that people feel they can perform best.'*

*'Checking out anxieties with the task rather than dismiss reactions.'*

*(Leading from the Middle participants 2010)*

There was substantial data related to this theme and it consistently provided evidence that the workshop participants made clear links between planning and implementation. Several managers reported an improvement in delegation of tasks specifically in ensuring that staff understood their responsibilities. The links between planning ahead, organising and communicating well to staff were acknowledged in the evaluation material. Several people reported that they have improved their communications when delegating to staff. There was greater understanding of the power of motivation when delegation and communication is managed well and connected to the bigger picture or plan.

Some managers reported that they were involving others in decisions and that consultation had brought greater motivation. The human side of delegation was a recurring theme. The idea that delegation was more than the task itself, but a method to ensure people are motivated to take personal responsibility for their performance. Here are some workshop quotes:

#### 5.8.5 Leading and working in teams

*'I was aware of the team struggling, picked up on this and tried to help **them** solve the problem.'*

*(Team coach 2010)*

There was significant evidence that participants both experienced and witnessed a greater degree of teamwork and team learning. This was evidenced in the practical use of learning styles to get the best out of individuals and improved communications within teams. Overall, managers had learned that greater consideration of their staff brought greater understanding of their strengths and new ways to improve team performance.

The diversity of style and experience within the organisation Great Places was seen as a positive and several managers reported that they were more confident and capable at bringing together a variety of people and getting them to work effectively. Some managers reported that their active listening and coaching skills were improved and particularly useful when trying to motivate staff in challenging situations or reconciling different viewpoints.

*'I am working at my best when I have a clear understanding of the problem and individual learning styles.'*

*(Leading from the Middle participant 2010)*

The benefits of teamwork were perceived to be a greater level of sharing and engagement with others. Some managers experienced an improved appreciation of others' skills and comfort zones. The responses generated during the evaluation workshops indicated a greater degree of willingness to listen to staff and encourage them to come up with their own solutions. Some managers reported examples of where mentoring and coaching were having a positive benefit on performance.

#### 5.8.6 Greater confidence

*'More junior managers learnt the process of influencing senior managers and bring ideas from the customer interface. In parallel, senior managers learn how to develop others by working with them on issues related to Great Places.'*

*(Midland 23 2015)*

There were several examples presented of a greater degree of confidence in the role of leader. Some examples were related to a specific outcome e.g. ability to make presentations, influence others and deliver projects. The majority of examples given were related to personal confidence and self-awareness. Skills such as active listening and knowledge such as learning styles were perceived to be key tools to support the development of confidence in a leadership role.

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Self-awareness and greater understanding of others in the team appeared to have given some managers a greater ability to respond to deadlines, sudden changes and working under pressure. There was a clear acknowledgement emerging that planning, reflecting and organising are key tools but in times of unpredictable challenges, some managers reported an improved ability to deal with that pressure.

### 5.8.7 Specific examples of project outcomes

Greater confidence was evident in the specific examples that participants shared during the evaluation workshop. There was evidence of work-based application of learning in the following examples:

- More drive to push through projects,
- Greater strength as a negotiator,
- More confident in mentoring and training people,
- Better work life balance,
- More effective and quicker decisions,
- More successful neighbourhood team performance.

## 5.9 The vision of middle managers

As part of the evaluation exercise in 2010, middle managers were asked to share their vision of the future success of the organisation. Three major and very powerful themes emerged: honesty, sustaining our learning and skills development.

### 5.9.2 Honesty

The theme of honesty emerged repeatedly and participants were specific in their views on how to develop the leadership capabilities that would be key to sustaining a Great Places Housing Group culture. Specific examples included being honest about what we want from our leaders and being open when the work is overwhelming us. Clear delegation was also seen as an example of greater honesty. The major theme in this section was desire for greater transparency in the way work was delegated. The responsibility for checking understanding (as a way of promoting honesty) was seen as an individual responsibility.

### 5.9.3 Sustaining our learning

Material from the workshop indicated a strong desire from managers to sustain their learning about leadership. The desire to continue some form of personal development was clear but individuals had a range of specific needs. Some participants saw personal development as better work life balance while others felt that fresh challenges would present opportunities to learn and grow. Sustaining learning was also linked to support. Leadership was seen as a lonely place and some form of learning support was perceived to be key to growing leaders across the Great Places Housing Group. For some people, learning support was seen as personal coaching and mentoring. For others, learning support was seen as a method of evaluating personal development. The workshop material indicated a strong desire in both groups to find methods, which enabled them to spend time together working on their development.

#### 5.9.4 Skills development

This theme is characterised by some specific needs in skill development ranging from listening and learning skills to financial acumen. There was a strong theme on communication. The ability to communicate well was seen as a key leadership skill and one which needed continuous attention and development. Communication was seen as a key skill to understand individual needs in the team and a process for getting improved teamwork and motivation. Active Listening was cited as a key skill for all working relationships in Great Places Housing Group. Delegation was acknowledged as a method of providing opportunities for personal growth. Reflection was seen as a key skill for housing leaders in the future.

#### 5.9.5 Summary: evaluation research

Evaluation workshops generated robust evidence that middle managers had applied their learning in practical ways back in the organisation. There was strong evidence that learning about teamwork in the period 2007–2010, had been sustainable. Honesty and openness in communication and working relationships were powerful themes that indicated emergent cultural norms. The positive engagement at the workshops indicated a desire for forums that promote learning and it was clear that participants enjoyed being consulted. The workshop process enabled people to work from a position of strength and this encouraged participation and a refreshing level of frankness. The 'voices' from the middle now had a forum to improve the quality of their contribution to the business.



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The evaluation findings proved that learning from 'Leading from the Middle' was sustainable. The development of qualified internal coaches had a major impact on the quality of learning and coaching is now a key capability, which supports individual and team performance. The sustainability of learning has been enhanced by informal learning forums where people reflect on learning experiences. The method of Appreciative Inquiry encouraged participants to take responsibility for their learning and, as such, was both a collaborative research method and a model of engagement.

**Views of the Midland 23**

Members of the Midland 23 provided the following insights in 2009. The feedback summarises the benefits of developing middle managers from the perspective of the senior managers as:

**Efficiency**

'Management development activities are based on Action Learning. Managers work on real projects that add value to the organisation.'

**Engagement with business**

'We have been named 61st in The Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For. There is evidence that the programme is pushing decision making down the organisation and deriving real benefits for both our customers and staff.'

**Value for Money**

'It is not just another training course. Participants get to practice their newfound skills on real life projects, working as teams on issues that are important to them.'

**Enthusiasm**

'The programme helped us to know and understand our people. The cross-department and, multifunctional teams have brought geographically distant managers together.'

**Breaks down barriers**

'Each Action Learning group included a Director and Assistant Director who take a role in the team. It is not hierarchical and helps to build long lasting relationships.'

**Long lasting**

'The value of the programme is that the approach is now embedded and the use of multifunctional teams to tackle complex problems has become part of our culture and way of working.'

**Promotes coaching culture**

'Each team had a trained coach working alongside them to focus the team on achieving its objectives. We have trained internal coaches and this model of coaching is appropriate to other business applications.'

**Increases knowledge and understanding**

'With an emphasis on reflection and learning, the organisation is better placed to achieve its corporate objectives and be successful.'

*(This material was published in Talent Management Review 2009)*

**Chapter summary**

The case study examined the impact for senior leaders of a new group structure formed from several smaller organisations. The larger group formation was able to explore alternative source of income and innovative ways of delivering service but there was a powerful historical legacy and distinctive sub cultures. A new organisational mission, structure and culture were key to displace aspects of the past that might inhibit people's response to change.

Senior leaders acknowledged that they needed to change their style in order to integrate the three separate businesses into one large group. Collaboration across working practices, systems, knowledge and experience became an urgent agenda. A programme called 'Leading from the Middle', in conjunction with an internal coaching initiative, brought measureable and sustainable results. Middle managers accelerated a cultural transformation that brought three diverse organisations together and helped to build a highly successful group formation.

**Chapter learning outcomes**

The following section is an opportunity to reflect on the contents of Chapter Five and develop your own views of middle managers and their capability to lead. The case study illustrates the contribution of senior managers to the development of mid level leadership.

Consider your own organisation or current context and makes some notes using the reflection and learning:

- To gain practical knowledge from a longitudinal case study of the influence of middle managers on innovation, fresh ideas and thinking,
- To understand the role that senior leaders have in the development of mid level leaders,
- To appreciate the power of internal coaching in the development of leadership at all levels,
- To be clear on the essential design components of a leadership development programme that delivers sustainable business results.

**Chapter Five: Learning activity****Coaching Skills Evaluation**

The following questionnaire can be used for a number of purposes:

- Self evaluation – complete the questionnaire by reflecting on your own view of your skill level,
- Peer evaluation- an observer evaluates your performance as a coach and uses the questionnaire to give you feedback,
- Skills assessment – part of a coaching course or coaching accreditation
- Coaching supervision – a tool for both coach and supervisor

Consider your current situation with regard to coaching. Are you a practicing coach, aspiring to train as a coach or intrigued by the idea?

Are you an external consultant, Human Resource professional or learning and development specialist?

Please test out the questionnaire for yourself.

**1. Listening Skills**

Maintains interest in

what is being said: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Forms response when

client has finished: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Focussed without

internal interference: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Able to identify what

is not being said: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

I trust my senses when I

listen to a client: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

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**2. Use of questions**

To pace the session: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Coach staying in role: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Questions are related to  
the topic: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Questions enable client  
to learn: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Questions used to gain new  
insights: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

**Comments:**

**3. Skills of challenging**

Use of feedback to develop  
the client: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Appropriate style of  
challenge (does not  
derail the client): 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Evidence of prior contracting  
on challenging: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Uses non-judgmental  
approach: 0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

**Comments:**

**4. Sense making**

Skilful use of hypothesis

to summarise

client's issue:                   0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Appropriate self-disclosure

to encourage client:

0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Reflecting back key

themes to client:

0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Appropriate use of

Interpretation:

0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

Helping the client

make links:

0 -----25 -----50-----75 -----100

**Comments:**

## 6 'Leading the Way': best practice in housing leadership development

### 6.1 Introduction

*'The programme gave us licence to not only influence the whole company from admin assistant to board level, but to bring about real change.'*

*(Middle manager, Housing Association 2015)*

The first part of this chapter will outline the challenges facing Housing Associations in the UK and the implications for leaders at all levels. Evidence will be presented from literature and case study findings that confident and capable mid level leaders are key to organisational performance. The case study material is drawn from evaluation outputs, practical impact evidence and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Outcomes from work based learning will provide additional tangible evidence of the benefits of developing mid level leadership in a rapidly changing landscape. The case study organisation is Yorkshire Coast Homes (YCH) in Scarborough, UK. The content of this chapter has been reviewed and authorised by participating managers, directors and board members.

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The chapter will illustrate how a leadership development programme accelerated organisational change, delivered practical outcomes and made an impact on services. The participants were middle managers working in all parts of the business and possessing a diverse range of professional and managerial experience. Four months after the final event of this leadership programme, participants engaged in a comprehensive evaluation of the impact on individual, team and organisational performance. The programme outcomes were reported to the board of directors and, with permission, have been incorporated into this chapter. The evaluation findings indicate that a customised approach to developing mid level professionals accelerates leadership capability at all levels.

The chapter learning activity presents a good practice approach to conducting action research and includes a practical tool for starting a work based team project.

## 6.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To provide a summary of the challenges facing UK Housing Associations,
- To outline the political, economic and social pressures facing middle managers in UK Housing Associations,
- To present impact evidence of the benefits of developing mid level leaders in organisations experiencing radical and rapid change,
- To explore the role of mid level leaders in transforming organisational culture and improving organisational performance,

## 6.3 Chapter learning outcomes

- To appreciate the contribution of high performance teams to individual morale and performance,
- To gain a clear understanding of how 'voices from the middle' are key to strategic formulation and operational performance,
- To understand how action research can produce tangible results and influence senior leaders,
- To explore the leadership behaviours needed to support the growth of organisational cultures that are adaptable and resilient in the face of change.

**Chapter guide:****This chapter will cover the following content:**

- Radical shifts in Housing Associations,
- Future directions and challenges,
- New forms of leadership development,
- A case study of mid level influence,
- Role of business projects,
- Programme evaluation,

**Chapter terms**

The following terms will be used in this chapter.

- **Action Learning** is a reflective approach to problem solving which results in action
- **Action Research** involves members of an organisation in researching an issue that concerns them and producing practical actions,
- **Appreciative Inquiry** is a participative model of impact evaluation,
- **Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)** is the professional body for housing,
- **Critical reflection** is a method of thinking which challenges assumptions,
- **National Housing Federation**, a membership organisation which represents UK Housing Associations

## 6.4 Radical shifts in Housing Associations

### 6.4.1 Mission drift or progress?

*'Is the social purpose about to be extinguished?'*

*(Chartered Institute of Housing 2013, page 2)*

This is a deeply emotive question being asked across UK Housing Associations. The values, which underpin social housing, are now under threat from austerity measures, changing political agendas and welfare reform. Change in the provision of service is inevitable when there are significant reductions in the government funding available. Some housing experts predict that new solutions and innovations will emerge which are more closely aligned to the needs of housing customers (Pawson & Wilcox 2013). Despite this optimism, the harsh reality is that more new homes are needed. In a submission to the Lyon's Review, the campaign group SHOUT (Social Housing Under Threat) argued that half of all new build homes would be needed for social renting by 2020. Historical evidence confirms that successive UK governments, of all political ideologies, have failed to meet the demand for new homes (Barker 2014).

There is now a grave concern the reduction in public investment in housing development is so severe that it will not solve the problem of the gap between housing provision and housing needs. The 2015/2016 central government review cut capital spending on new homes by 60% and pushed Housing Associations closer to operating as commercial businesses. The shift of policy towards a private sector business model is deeply frustrating for many housing professionals who see the social purpose of their work being devalued.

On a positive note, the purpose of social housing, rather than becoming obsolete may evolve into a new format where Housing Associations operate more closely with their tenants and build strengths within their local communities. There is an opportunity for Housing Associations to take the lead on promoting greater cohesion between different services and develop social value by operating in a more collaborative way. An interesting development is the growth of 'place based' housing services where an integrated approach is taken to improving the quality of life and levels of well being of local communities (Chartered Institute of Housing 2014). This powerful vision of the future is fast becoming a practical reality with housing providers engaged in non-housing activities. A collaborative approach to service provision is now highly probable, as seen in the development of joint networks between the Kings Fund and the National Housing Federation (Porteous 2015).

#### 6.4.2 Is partnership the way forward?

Housing Associations are already managing substantial and transformative change. In addition, there is an increasing likelihood of further integration of services with health and social care providers. New partnerships, alliances and cross sector activity appear to be a practical way to deliver the service and make the cost savings expected by central government. With a growing political rhetoric of self-sufficiency and social mobility, the current UK government is placing clear conditions on their public funding of Housing Associations. Commissioning and cross subsidisation are key funding incentives to persuade Housing Associations to transform their approach to service provision and delivery.



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Another interesting rhetoric is that of neighbourhood development. With a greater emphasis on building community capacity, local regions are being encouraged to fill the gap left by withdrawal of public funding. The future will include a greater diversification in Housing Associations' role and purpose in supporting neighbourhoods. Powerful cultural norms exist in UK Housing Associations, about serving tenants and their local communities. Many Housing Associations already have well developed neighbourhood teams dealing with a diverse range of needs. The funding cuts will put pressure on their services presenting tough decisions and stressful working conditions. The rhetoric of partnership appears on the surface to be a positive step forward, but partnerships are challenging relationships to set up and sustain. A productive partnership requires clear leadership across the collaborating services and sound governance, for when issues emerge (HCA 2015).

#### 6.4.3 A changing social and political vision

Housing Associations are experiencing a clear move away from a historical welfare approach to one based on more sustainable social and economic returns. Over the past ten years, central government funding has dramatically changed from housing development to funding personal benefits. In 2014, 5% of the UK social housing budget was spent on 'bricks' compared to 95% on housing benefits (Pawson & Wilcox 2013).

The housing benefit system is now seen as highly complex, inequitable and not fit for purpose, (Barker, 2014). Frontline housing professionals face the consequences of economic cuts in the rise of vulnerable individuals needing support and resource. Clear evidence can be found in the numbers of homeless people, rise in bailiff activity and increase in rent arrears, over the past three years (Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley & Wilcox 2012). Homelessness has risen by 8% across UK and 16% in London.

Another dynamic across the UK housing market is the significant drop in owner-occupiers and gradual rise in private rentals across the board (ONS 2013). The number of first time mortgages plummeted in the aftermath of the global banking crisis in 2008, which prevented first time buyers from joining the housing market.

This changing social and political environment has resulted in demands on Housing Associations to provide a full spectrum service ranging from social to private rents, housing development, management and maintenance of properties and community engagement. Housing professionals are now managing a dramatic and complex expansion of services and dealing with vulnerable individuals and families. In the next section, the growing commercial focus of Housing Associations will be examined in more detail.

#### 6.4.4 A growing commercial focus

Despite the gradual recovery of the UK economy, there has been a sluggish response by banks to grant the scale of mortgages prior to the 2008 global crash. The aftermath of economic problems brought some banking reform through regulation and a greater drive for value for money in the cost of banking services. Some political pressure has been used to force banks to manage the money more efficiently and with transparent and ethical procedures. Ironically, the outcome for potential homeowners has been much tougher rules on borrowing and mortgage applications.

On the social side of housing, the Welfare Reform Act (2012) introduced Universal Credit as an individual benefit paid directly to the tenant. This reform was an attempt by central government to manage the rapid rise of people being drawn into housing benefit. The consequences have been a rise of homelessness, rent arrears and more people requiring extra support. As housing needs become more complex and unpredictable, equity and accessibility of housing provision continues to be a major challenge. The issues always come back to funding. The political drive to cap the growing bill for social housing and social services has added to the imperative for Housing Associations to seek additional sources of funding.

Another interesting trend is in home ownership, which has been declining over a number of years (Williams 2007; Williams & Whitehead 2011; Heywood 2011; Sprigings 2013). At one end of the spectrum, first time buyers have been unable to access mortgages or raise the scale of deposit required by lenders (Fisher & Gervais 2009) and this has had an impact on the demand for private rental housing. In the 'golden age' of homeownership (1971–2005) many people accumulated great wealth by owning a home. This 'locked in' wealth may be crucial for homeowners facing retirement and the possibility of paying for long term care needs. At the other end of the spectrum, new pension rules have presented 'Baby Boomers' (those born between 1940–1960) with options to buy second homes and 'buy to let' properties as investments for the future. With the UK interest rates remaining low, property is seen as a good investment. All these developments have an impact on the supply and availability of homes.

Finally, there are societal groups who for various reasons, will remain in rented property for life and this trend is increasing the demand for privately rented homes (Halifax 2014). There are a growing numbers of 'late starters' entering the market (Bottazzi, Crossley & Wakefield 2012). A typical late 'starter' is likely to be aged 30–40, financially more stable and able to take advantage of the continuing low interest rate. Mortgage lenders are coming under further increasing political pressure as fresh attempts are made by central government to stimulate the housing market. The trend in private sector renting appears to be growing and this has implications for Housing Associations in the way they develop their business. The trend towards commercial Housing Associations is inevitable and opens up further challenges for leadership and governance (Housing Quality Network 2015).



## 6.4.5 Impact of technology

*'A big cultural shift is required. Reliance on data rather than gut instinct and sharing information rather than owning it. It's not about diminishing their role, but working out how Housing Officers can have more time to do more of the social stuff.'*

*(Frontline report 2014, page 23)*

Housing Associations face challenges to keep pace with technological advances. The new complexity of housing provision and services has resulted in the emergence of new and complex roles, which require specific knowledge and greater dexterity. New technologies are being developed that potentially improve the quality and efficiency of services. Technology is transforming the interaction with tenants, customers and other stakeholders, but also raising the customer expectation of a fast response and 24 hour service. The commercial pressure on Housing Associations has resulted in a greater focus on cost saving and efficient service provision e.g. amalgamation of 'back office' services into one shared service. Technology has the potential to strip out costly and time-consuming processes but it also has the potential to alienate customers. Social housing tenants range in age and vulnerability. Technology has the potential to simplify processes and systems but the risk is that the specific needs of individuals and their communities is subsumed in the drive towards efficiency.



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#### 6.4.6 Greater awareness of the 'housing customer'

*'The way we work has disempowered customers over many years. It will take time to reverse this.'*  
(Housing Association focus group 2015)

It is clear that a transition to a more commercial culture has consequences for the relationship between Housing Associations and their tenants (Richardson et al 2010). People occupying a Housing Association property, in the future, could range across a wider spectrum of housing need. Irrespective of whether the property is a private or social rent there will be cultural change in the way tenants are perceived. Across public and non-profit organisations, there is growing awareness of the relationship between *choice* and *empowerment* in the delivery of public services. There is a shift to a co-regulatory approach where service users are actively engaged in service design and delivery (Bovaird 2007; Pestoff & Branden 2007; Horne & Shirley 2009).

In summary, the reduction in central government funding has created opportunities for housing tenants/customers to gain more local power in decision-making. The relationship between local councils, Housing Associations and their local communities is transforming and this has an effect on all levels of leadership. Mid level leadership capability is crucial to developing an organisational culture that can adapt and manage political, economic and social change. In the next section, the implications for housing leadership are explored in more detail as a preparation for a social housing case study called 'Leading the Way'.

#### 6.4.7 Implications for housing leadership

##### **Housing context**

Critics of Housing Associations believe that they have moved away from their mission of social housing and now regard themselves as large development and regeneration companies (CIH paper 12 2015). This is an alarming shift from the original social purpose and one that impacts the values and attitudes of housing professionals. The call to develop a 'soft heart and hard head' approach to housing leadership is an inadequate term to describe the substantial change in government policy that now impacts housing professionals (Frontline Futures 2015). Housing Associations are now under pressure to pick up the deficit in housing supply and succeed where commercial developers have failed. This begs the question as to whether they are ready, capable and funded to take on the responsibility.

### Front line changes

Front line housing roles are changing to reflect a new relationship with tenants. The key frontline skills are seen as good listening and negotiating with a high level of professionalism and integrity (Frontline Futures 2015). Tenants will play a more important role in scrutinising their housing provider and taking responsibility for helping to improve service provision and quality. This represents a paradigm shift for front line professionals as it requires them to move away from solving tenant problems. The unintended consequence of a caring frontline professional is that the tenants can become disempowered and unable to solve issues for themselves.

An interesting development is an asset-based approach to working with tenants. Here the focus is on the knowledge, skills and potential that resides in a local community. The focus on individual and community strengths helps to build self-sufficiency and resilience to change. An asset-based approach can empower tenants and their communities but it will require a cultural shift with leaders at all levels developing their skills in facilitation and coaching. This has an implication for both mid and senior level managers.

#### 6.4.8 New forms of leadership development

In previous sections, the challenges facing Housing Associations were presented to provide a context for the case study 'Leading the Way'. The scale and complexity of sector change requires new models of leadership, which are more adaptable, promote collaboration and enable a distribution of power to frontline professionals. This is a very important shift for housing leaders and away from the operational detail of service delivery. Greater autonomy for middle and junior levels to manage the service is not an abdication of leadership responsibility. The complexity and scale of demand for housing services requires senior leaders to become more political, strategic and collaborative. Their future role is to anticipate and manage the external complexity and enable others to run the operation. When senior leaders intervene frequently in operational detail, mid level leaders are devalued and subjected to energy-sapping levels of control. The result is an organisational culture that stagnates leaving the organisation vulnerable when the next challenge arrives.

Housing leaders of the future will need:

- To have clarity of vision,
- To adopt a coaching and mentoring style,
- To be adaptive and effective in a changing environment,
- To be able to evidence the social value of their services,
- To possess commercial awareness,
- To be able to interpret data,
- To be self aware and critically reflective,
- To promote team cultures,

- To optimise learning opportunities and develop networks,
- To create a culture of respect and support,
- To acknowledge that careers are going to be more diverse,

*(Adapted from Chartered Institute of Housing 2015)*

#### 6.4.9 Implications for middle managers

In Chapter Three, the role of middle managers was explored from a historical perspective. A repetitive theme emerged which focussed on the interaction between senior managers and the professionals who report to them. The overwhelming evidence from this literature was that 'top down' leadership styles do not promote accountability and leadership at all levels and appear to foster organisational cultures that are compliant and constrained by 'relay system' communications. A top down leadership culture traps talented professionals in the middle. Case study outcomes and subsequent evaluation research both indicate that skilful leadership exists in the middle of the organisation. Mid level operational knowledge and skills are an abundant resource to be tapped into and yet, in a crisis, this is overlooked or, worse still, made redundant.

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New more transformational practices are being adopted across Housing Associations and these include Action Learning and reflective practice. The issue for learning, development and education providers is to ensure their learning designs and processes are aligned to future possibilities. In the next section, a case study called 'Leading the Way' will be described and discussed to illustrate the importance of tight alignment between individual development needs, strategic direction and learning design.

## 6.5 Leading the Way: A case study of mid level influence

### 6.5.1 Background

Yorkshire Coast Homes (YCH) is a Housing Association, which owns and manages over 4,000 homes across the Borough of Scarborough. They are the largest provider of social housing in the area and face a complex and changing economic, social and political landscape. The complexity for YCH leaders is to provide clarity of purpose, focus on what matters, and respond to rapid change whilst keeping a strong hold on the ethos and values of the organisation.

In 2013, the senior leadership team at YCH developed a competency framework that mapped managerial effectiveness in five major areas: value led leadership, leading change and improvement, cultivating high performance, working partnerships and effective relationships and building on business growth. The document set out expectations of leadership behaviours and served as a succession-planning guide. The framework was designed to enable high performing staff to aspire to attain high-level skills.

Earlier in the year an Appreciative Inquiry exercise had produced a number of leadership themes, which were subsequently aligned with the management competency framework. This produced a sound diagnosis and rationale for the 'Leading the Way' programme, a customised leadership programme for middle managers. Parallel themes of individual, team and organisational learning were designed throughout the five modules. The programme finale involved small teams working on a key business project with impact evidence and learning presented at a one-day event called a Learning Forum.

### 6.5.2 'Leading the Way' – Programme design

#### **Module 1 Value led leadership**

The focus is on individual leadership and the role of leaders as custodians of values, behaviours, culture and strategy. A key feature of this module is a collaborative approach to learning which acts as a sound foundation for later modules. This module is a three-day leadership retreat in a remote location.

#### **Module 2 Influencing self and others**

This covers stakeholder management and influence. It is a key module, which addresses internal and external communication skills, power and personal presentation. An individual task follows this module, which involves planning and implementing a strategy to influence a work situation.

**Module 3      Leading high performance teams**

The focus is high performance teams and the styles of leadership which support collaboration both within a team and across the organisation. Action Learning is used as a tool to promote personal reflection and leadership awareness. A team task follows this module and involves small teams working with other teams to review performance.

**Module 4      Leading change**

This module introduces organisational change, organisational culture and strategic alignment. It includes collaborative working with other providers and stakeholders. The module task is a cultural mapping exercise, which is conducted in pairs. Each pair had a choice of an internal or external team or organisation.

**Module 5      Developing the business**

The final module is designed to prepare teams for Action Research. The learning from the previous modules is integrated into a final work based team project. The findings and outcomes are delivered in the form of written report and team presentation.

**Module 6 Learning Forum**

A one-day event where programme participants and senior leaders collaborate to share learning and discuss implications for change and performance improvement. Teams deliver the findings and recommendations of their projects to an invited audience. Learning about leadership is shared and success is celebrated.

**6.5.2      The role of business projects**

The business projects were a practical method of consolidating the module learning and creating an opportunity for the middle managers to influence the strategic direction of the organisation. The outcomes of the projects included new knowledge, practical recommendations and team development. Action research conducted by middle managers resulted in a powerful combination of robust research and practical actions. The knowledge generated by project team members gave them significant power to influence other stakeholders. The outcomes challenged senior leadership assumptions and cultural norms.

The 'Leading the Way' teams arrived at business project topics after hearing the Chief Executive deliver his vision and goals. Previously, the participants had carried out their own analysis of external and internal challenges for the business, and created their own vision of YCH in the future. The interaction between CEO and the participants helped the teams to agree their project rationale and scope. It was essential that all project teams owned their business project topic from an early stage. Participants had a personal choice on which business project they joined. Project teams were formed using key criteria, which included: personal learning style, professional expertise, skills, and passion for the subject and areas for personal development.

Three business projects were proposed and passed to the senior leadership team and facilitators for approval. A project plan format was used which included: scoping and defining the project, stating how it would be managed, identifying risks and breaking the work into manageable tasks. For some managers this was new territory, whilst others were familiar with managing complex projects as part of their normal duties. Team members supported each other in their learning by drawing on experiences and models from the programme. Post programme evaluation findings indicated significant collaborative learning and knowledge transfer.

The experience of managing a project together created a realistic environment to learn about leadership and teamwork. For one team, a problem emerged when workloads were uneven, and some members of the team felt they were carrying others. Leadership styles and approaches were tested, solutions discussed and the problem resolved satisfactorily. The project phase was a practical opportunity to try out skills gained during the preceding modules. Individuals and teams were able to innovate with new techniques, test new technology and experience different forms of leadership in a real work based setting. Senior leaders were reassured by the structured project plans and supportive of the teams experimenting with novel ideas.



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One team went on to influence a major change across the business by initiating and testing new technology. By using a mobile application to manage their project they modelled the change themselves. This practical application enabled them to champion new ideas and demonstrating how effectively knowledge could be shared in the future. Their enthusiasm and belief in their recommendations were supported by evidence and delivered in a professional and technologically impressive presentation.

Another team chose to look at the future housing needs of the elderly population in the area. Using a range of research methods, which involved internal and external stakeholders, they were able to present a business case for the development of an Extra Care scheme. This is now being progressed by the organisation. In undertaking the work, the team enhanced their own knowledge, gained experience of working to tight deadlines and bidding for resources.

The three teams presented their findings and recommendations at a Learning Forum in December 2014. The immediate impact can be summed up in a number of key success factors.

### 6.5.3 Key success factors

#### **'Old dogs, new tricks'**

It was vital to the success of the programme that the experienced and more senior managers were fully engaged and open to learning. Their support provided credibility for the programme, and encouraged less experienced managers to feel that leadership learning was worthwhile. For some managers, the programme presented an opportunity to consolidate earlier learning and deepen their self-knowledge. For others, the programme content and approach was novel. The participants learned to optimise this diversity and the evaluation findings indicate that this collaboration has been sustained. The crucial point here is that 'Leading the Way' was designed to help both experienced and newly appointed managers. Assumptions about seniority were challenged and a realisation that all participants, irrespective of status, were active in the development of a high performing team.

#### **Time to reflect**

The programme gave participants space to reflect on their learning through journaling, discussion and quiet time away from the pressures of work. Ironically, the leadership retreat on the first module was challenging because the normal demands of home and work were not crowding in. Participants realised how little time was devoted to reflecting on performance in a normal working week. The remote location created a team atmosphere and memorable learning experience. This culture was sustained throughout the programme and was instrumental in accelerating the quality of performance especially during the later team projects. Throughout the programme, participants were encouraged to keep a journal and reflective sessions were designed into modules. At the final Learning Forum, teams presented their individual and team learning, as well as the practical outcome of the projects. The quality of reflection was outstanding. These were leaders who had grown significantly in their skills, behaviours and experiences during 'Leading the Way'. The whole group demonstrated a clear awareness of the journey they had undertaken, the learning they had gained and ability to put this into practice.



### **Support from senior leaders**

The executive team participated throughout the programme and were supportive of the managers, giving them time, encouragement, coaching and resources to complete the course. A senior leader championed each module and they joined the teams in some of the learning activities. The Chief Executive was also personally involved, contributing to the strategic context and business planning sessions. A workshop with the leadership team also helped ensure an alignment between their vision and expectations and those of the middle managers. The result was a leadership programme with a shared sense of purpose, language and outcomes. The leadership team joined the final Learning Forum and were involved in learning reflections.

A reflective approach to learning helped both middle managers and their leaders to recognise the impact of assumptions on key business decisions. The group became clear on the challenges facing them and their leaders in the months after the programme. They recommended that the organisational culture be continuously reviewed to ensure congruence with strategic priorities. The greatest threat to on-going success was seen as a drift back to old behaviours.

### **Emphasis on personal leadership**

Managers reported a greater level of confidence in both their personal leadership style and their ability to lead a team. The project teams managed personal leadership learning by running action learning sessions and, at the same time, provided robust data that indicated improvement in team performance. The benefits for collaborative working were transferred to the business throughout the programme, both in terms of leadership development and operational performance. A balanced approach to personal and team development ensured that individual leadership behaviours remained a fundamental priority. The project teams learned to optimise their individual diversity in role, expertise, perceptions and personal style. A focus on personal leadership style, which started in Module One, became a major feature of the programme. The module content changed as individuals grew but the emphasis on personal development remained throughout the programme.


### **Work based tasks**

Between modules, individuals and teams were set short tasks to complete in a working environment. The first two tasks were designed to encourage individuals to test out new behaviours and practice their influencing skills. The outcome of these tasks was shared on the first session of each subsequent module. Task three involved small teams conducting some research on team performance within the business. Participants made wise choices in their choices of teams and consulted with the business leaders and the team member to ensure that their participation was voluntary.

Task three was a rehearsal for later project work and also an opportunity to practice researching leadership in a practical setting. It was also crucial that ethical considerations of research were discussed early in the programme. During task four, the group divided into consulting pairs and had the choice of researching organisational culture with an internal or external group. Many pairs researched a business partner or subcontractor, generated excellent findings and produced a short report. One pair used the cultural task to evaluate the performance of a new venture within YCH. Their findings were extremely helpful to the manager of this venture.

#### 6.5.4 'Leading the Way' evaluation

In April 2015, participating managers of 'Leading the Way' reconvened to reflect on experiences, share learning from different perspectives and plan for the sustainability of their learning within YCH. The evaluation method chosen was Appreciative Inquiry, which was introduced and explained in more detail in Chapter Four. This approach to evaluation involves a full spectrum of programme participants, internal and external stakeholders. It is essentially a collaborative research method and aligns well to the development of middle managers (Watson 2013). The process can be internally or externally delivered and this is an ideal method for growing internal capability in facilitation and evaluation. This evaluation purpose was structured into key learning objectives and practical outcomes:



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### 6.5.5 Evaluation objectives

- To capitalise on the learning through dialogue and reflection,
- To evaluate the impact of leader development on individuals, teams and the organisation,
- To share visions of how senior leaders can leverage the benefit of learning and sustain individual and team performance,
- To share experiences and outcomes of team project work and appreciate the potential for influencing strategic direction,
- To appreciate the contribution of 'Leading the Way' to the development of an organisational culture that is aligned to strategy,
- To agree practical actions and ensure that the investment in development is optimised.

### 6.5.6 Evaluation method

Appreciative Inquiry was chosen because of its practical alignment to the values and ethos of the programme. The emphasis of this method is on building the confidence and capability of all participants. Appreciative Inquiry encourages people to reflect on the tangible, practical outcomes of learning. The success stories generated during an evaluation workshop bring 'real world' ideas and issues into the conversation about the future. The accounts of learning and subsequent experiences are the qualitative data that is used to assess successful outcomes. Other stakeholders, including external stakeholders and senior managers, can make a contribution at any stage in the four-step process. The role of facilitators is to keep the group focussed on the task and not to intervene in data collection. The ownership of the impact evidence resides with the learners rather than senior managers or programme facilitators. This method of evaluation is different to traditional approaches where a researcher gathers information and makes a judgement on what it means. Appreciative Inquiry provided a detailed understanding of leadership behaviours that shape organisational culture.

### 6.5.7 Evaluation findings

The following evidence was collated at the Appreciative Inquiry workshop and where appropriate there are qualitative comments from participants. Permission was sought from the participants of 'Leading the Way' and their senior leaders to include these comments, where appropriate, to support the impact findings.

### 6.5.8 Trust

Trust was seen to be a fundamental factor in promoting the well being of staff and ensuring high performance. The participants concluded that mutual respect between individual leaders was a prerequisite for a collaborative culture. The discussions on trust indicated the practical tasks that followed each module provided an opportunity to test out the benefits of trust and openness in an organisation facing change. The learning outcomes of Module Three (a team task) and Module Four (a culture task) enabled the managers to conclude that open and honest communication between all levels of leadership was critical to the future performance of their organisation.

The team projects were a practical opportunity to apply learning to a more complex task over three months. The complexity and changing nature of team projects (conducted in parallel with existing responsibilities) ensured practical learning about high performance teams. The reliance of team members on each other to deliver the project outcomes, on time and to a high standard, gave the group a unique insight into the power of trust and respect on motivation, performance and learning.

#### 6.5.9 Listening

*'People want to be heard, they want you to listen.'*

*'Everyone has an opinion and should be heard.'*

*(Programme participant, 2015)*

'Leading the Way' brought a greater awareness of both personal style and impact on others. Active Listening and Check In (tools used during the programme) have received a good response from staff. The process of delegation was seen in a different light. Active Listening allowed a manager to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a team. An appreciation of personal influencing style enabled managers to be more aware of their impact on others. Listening, influencing and appreciating difference were all seen to help leaders delegate effectively. A greater self-awareness was a recurring theme throughout the evaluation workshop. The combination of increased awareness and confidence appears to be linked to a greater acceptance of difference between individuals, in teams and across the business. It was agreed that managers would need to make an investment in their staff by involving them and harnessing their talent.

*'I intend to involve the whole team in the change and lead by example.'*

*(Programme participant, 2015)*

#### 6.5.10 Strategic thinking/critical reflections

A strong link was made between quality strategic thinking and the ability to stand back and reflect. Time to reflect on self and leadership style was seen to be crucial to the future organisational performance. Reflection was seen from two major perspectives: learning from past experiences and learning for the future by creating an environment that supports creativity and innovation.

*'No plate spinning – quality focus on producing a quality outcome.'*

*(Programme participant, 2015)*

Another major theme emerging was 'time to think'. The impact of reflecting on issues and being more thoughtful about consequences resulted in more effective decisions and a greater ability to convert lessons learned into sustainable practical actions.

*'I need to be more reflective and not just get on with the job.'*

*(Programme participant 2015)*

Quality planning was seen as a positive outcome of reflecting and strategic thinking. There was an acknowledgement that some pressure brings energy to a project. The impact evidence, however, indicated a desire for planning processes that engaged a wider group of managers, at an earlier stage. The team projects presented senior leaders with access to new ideas and prototyping.

#### 6.5.11 Teamwork

The impact evidence for improved teamwork was significant in quality and quantity. Teamwork was seen as key to the future performance of the organisation. The quality of project outcomes was attributed to a better understanding of different skills within the team and a clearer focus on how to get the best out of everyone.

The team project work was a catalyst in the process of learning about high performance teamwork. It was clear, however, that the module format had supported a gradual development of team skills as the teams progressed to more complex tasks culminating in a business project. There was practical evidence of participants applying their team skills in a practical way in the business.

*'I have a new team and it is important to get a feel for the service and get to know them individually'.  
'I want to support my team to bring more answers and solutions to me'.*

*(Comments from programme participants 2015)*

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### 6.5.12 Collaboration

The major outcome about collaborative working was the realisation of the benefit to high quality engagement with staff. There was concrete evidence of more productive meetings and improved communications between teams. A reduction in tension at cross-departmental meetings was reported.

*'We can now see the ramifications for others when there is a 'quick' win for one team.'*

*'We need a broader powerbase that is non departmental.'*

*(Programme participants 2015)*

A collaborative culture is a challenging aspiration in a fast paced, growing organisation. The evaluation outcomes indicate that quality communication is a major enabler of cultural change in a business.

### 6.5.13 Organisational culture/ Leadership models

*'A new leadership culture which is direct, strong, modern and pace setting.'*

*(Programme participant 2015)*

The evaluation outputs relating to culture and leadership proved that leadership attitudes and behaviours are a very powerful dynamic in this organisation. Participants discussed a vision of future leadership that was more collaborative, inclusive and inspirational. These criteria were seen as essential to a customer-focussed organisation where the culture supports and challenges both individual and team performance.

The ability to think strategically was concluded as crucial to future leadership performance. In addition, the quality of individual and team learning was clearly attributed to a well-defined organisational culture, which focuses on continuous learning.

*'A company of employees working in the business who feel empowered to make a real difference. They are highly motivated and feel supported.'*

*(Programme participant 2015)*

Over the programme span, leadership behaviour became more conscious and deliberate. Programme participants developed a shared experience of learning about leadership and were able to reflect and discuss issues as they arose. There is now a shared language for individuals to use to interact with each other and deal with challenges.

## 6.6 Reflection and learning

At the start of this chapter, four learning outcomes were presented to guide you through the case study. In this section, a short summary follows each outcome and you are invited to reflect on the case study to develop your own thinking about middle managers.

- **To appreciate the contribution of high performance teamwork to individual morale and performance.**

Learning about teamwork was a positive outcome of the programme. The extended period of teamwork with work based learning and projects resulted in empowering people to try new ideas and take some risk. Action Research conducted in teams produced evidence-based cases for change and allowed people to express views in a positive and powerful way. Teamwork across different departments and services was concluded as the quickest way to break down divisional barriers and accelerate organisational development.

### *Personal reflection*

*In what ways could high performance teamwork impact your organisation or your client's organisation?*

- **To gain a clear understanding of how the 'voices from the middle' are key to strategic formulation and operational performance**

The powerful outcomes of project work impressed the senior leadership. The voices of the middle were presented as a powerful mix of robust research, clear business cases and passion. The interactions during a final forum generated a positive and creative climate which added value to the communication between mid and senior levels of leadership. The project illustrated ways of collaborating across the business and sharing the successful outcomes.

### *Personal reflection*

*Why was the final Learning Forum important for both middle and senior managers? Return to Chapter Three and reflect on the material on strategic conversations to help you produce a robust answer.*

- **To understand how action research can produce tangible results and influence senior leaders**

Action Research was conducted during the programme as a method to empower middle managers and give them a stronger voice. Attention was paid to the challenges of conducting Action Research internally, especially ethical considerations. The major advantage of this for the project teams was a high level of support for their research from internal and external stakeholders. The process of action research brought practical outcomes and, at the same time, profound learning about collaborative and adaptive styles of leadership. This form of skills development is both repeatable and sustainable.

***Personal reflection***

***What are your views on the opportunities and risks of conducting action research in your organisation, or your client's organisation?***

- **To explore the leadership behaviours needed to support the growth of organisational cultures that are adaptable and resilient in the face of change**

The experiential design of the modules enabled middle managers to innovate with different styles of leadership. Housing literature cites adaptive, collaborative and distributed models of leadership as the way forward. The participants of 'Leading the Way' were able to experience and reflect on their style and make informed judgements about the leadership behaviours needed in the future. It was clear that the future of housing leadership was less about the actions of one person and more about the collaborative capability of leaders at all levels. The practical application of leadership tools such as action learning, critical reflection, collaborative working and Action Research all represented mechanisms for developing leadership styles aligned to future changes.

***Personal reflection***

***Which styles of leadership are dominant in your organisation, or in your client's organisation? How does this impact the organisational culture and individual behaviour?***



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**Chapter Six: Learning activity****Action Research in your own organisation****Introduction**

Action Research is a very powerful approach to bringing about change in an organisation. The process encourages collaboration, raises constructive questions and delivers a more robust analysis of issues.

This form of research is a practical approach for mid level leaders to influence the development and performance of their organisation. Small teams engage in carefully scoped projects to generate strategic options and new approaches to operational challenges. Action Research needs support from advocates within the organisation. Advocates could be a director who is keen to solve an issue, a colleague who would like some support with building a business case for a new idea or some customers who have suggested an improvement to service provision.

All of these situations, require mid level leaders to gather information, communicate with key stakeholders, analyse the information and create a persuasive argument. A team approach is more productive and allows you to access the diverse skills and knowledge in the group. Some team members prefer to do detailed research and collate material. Others enjoy the contact with other stakeholders, holding focus groups and conducting interviews.

**Action Research outcomes**

The key to this form of research is motivation. The research issue must be a topic that makes all team members feels inspired and determined. This is your opportunity to influence senior stakeholders and remember, it is for the benefit of the organisation and its customers. The scope of the team project needs to have clear parameters on time, expectations and deliverables. This is not an academic exercise with an assignment to submit, but a work based activity that is led by you and your team members. A project template is attached to give you some guidance.

Your project deliverables will have political influence and will enable you:

- To foster enthusiasm across the organisation to change,
- To encourage senior leaders to take action,
- To promote reflection and healthy challenge to the status quo,
- To model a collaborative culture,
- To demonstrate the benefits of across silos,
- To deliver practical results,
- To contribute to strategic formulation,
- To demonstrate the contribution of middle managers,
- To generate impact evidence,
- To engage multiple stakeholders.

**Learning from others**

Any of the above project outcomes may appear threatening to the norms and culture of the organisation. You may have developed a new option, new system or new approach that may challenge a previous working practice. The key focus of Action Research is to generate useful and valid information, which is important to the organisation. Your outcomes are not a personal attack on any previous leaders or groups. Your political skill and influence as mid level leaders is crucial. You will manage both internal and external stakeholders who may have very different agendas and personal interests. Part of your role, as a project team, is being active building support and acceptance for new ideas. At the same time, it is important to maintain support by listening to resistance and opposition. The following guidelines will help:

- Identify your stakeholders and make your ideas and intentions clear,
- Work on their comfort zones – if people feel threatened by your project you will lose their support,
- Network and go beyond your immediate sphere of influence and build coalitions.

Transparency is ideal but you may need to be pragmatic about what and how you communicate. Think about the state of organisational readiness for your research findings and then plan your communication style and content.

**Ethical considerations**

Action Research conducted in your own organisation needs clear ethical guidelines, for example:

- Negotiate (do not assume) your access with research participants and authorities,
- Agree terms of confidentiality (information, identity and data),
- Give your participants the right not to participate,
- Keep stakeholders informed in a communication form that suits them,
- Seek permission to use documents, especially from other institutions,
- Keep good faith by demonstrating trustworthiness and check for misunderstanding,
- Consult with all concerned on how you will publish findings.

Below are some practical exercises for you to test before you start an Action Research project in your organisation:

**Political issues**

Consider the following typical political issues and discuss with your action research team:

- Challenging the status quo: Can we do things differently?
- Changing existing power relations: Do we have the power to change this?
- When the system reasserts the existing power relations: Do we have the authority to change this?

Now consider the possible ethical dimensions:

- When we collaborate with others, how do we manage confidentiality?
- If the research evolves over time, how we ensure informed consent?
- All research is political, how do we ensure there is no harm to others?

# 7 'When horses run together'

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the impact of developing mid level leaders in a UK hospice. The history of hospices in UK and their development, as providers of End of Life (EOL) care, is the context for the case study in this chapter. The changes facing UK hospices and the implications for hospice leaders will be presented as a background. The legacy of hospice development is a vital clue to understanding the complex issues, which are facing providers of hospice, EOL and Palliative care. The case study findings indicate that middle managers and mid level professionals have a significant contribution to make in developing the culture and leadership capability of their hospices.

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The case study is focussed on a leadership development programme called 'Leading from the Middle' which was designed for middle managers in a UK hospice. The case evidence has been drawn from evaluation research, impact stories and interviews with key stakeholders. The organisation is Earl Mountbatten Hospice (EMH) on the Isle of Wight and this chapter has been authorised by all key organisational stakeholders. Unlike traditional middle manager training, the approach engages hospice managers, directors and trustees in pro-active roles. The case study is called '**When horses run together**' and illustrates how a customised programme for middle managers created a cadre of mid level leaders and transformed organisational culture. The evaluation research will demonstrate the power of developing the middle to lead change, innovation and influence the strategic direction. The participants of the development programme produced tangible evidence that an aspiration to be a 'Well-led' hospice can be championed from the middle of the organisation.

## 7.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To outline the history of UK hospices and map current cultural norms,
- To explore the political, economic and social pressures which face hospice leaders,
- To present impact evidence of the benefits of developing middle managers in hospices,
- To highlight the potential influence of mid level leaders in transforming organisational culture and leadership behaviour,
- To reflect on the opportunities for hospices to achieve leadership at all levels and meet the criteria for a 'Well-led' hospice.

## 7.3 Chapter learning outcomes

- To appreciate the critical success factors for developing leadership capability in the middle of the organisation,
- To gain a clear understanding of how the voices from the middle are key to high quality strategic formulation,
- To understand the role of senior leaders in developing the middle,
- To have a practical understanding of the leadership styles required to develop a 'Well-led' hospice

### Chapter guide

#### This chapter will cover the following topics:

- Radical shifts in hospice and end of life care,
- Future scenarios; demographics, funding, equity,
- Implications for hospice leadership,
- Case study; 'When horses run together'.
- Evaluation research findings,
- Voices from the middle – reflections,

**Chapter terms**

The following terms will be used in this chapter:

- **End of Life care** – a range of support for people in the last months or years of their life, and their families/carers
- **Palliative care** – a multidisciplinary approach to specialist medical care for people with a serious illness
- **Care Quality Commission** – Independent regulator of health and social care

## 7.4 Radical shifts for hospice and end of life care

*'The challenge today is to maintain all the positive values and aims around the founding of independent hospices but to translate all that into today's context.'*

*(Hospice Nursing Director 2010)*

UK hospice organisations are an interesting mix of health, social care and managerial professionals, all operating in a complex health care setting. With the patient and their family at the centre of the service provision, many hospices aspire to a multi disciplinary approach but, in practice, this is a challenge (Oliver 2014). The history of UK hospices is a powerful story (Clark, Small, Wright, Winslow & Hughes 2005) and one that leaves a challenging legacy for the diverse professionals. They are tasked with developing services to match patient needs and demographic demands that are becoming more complex. The development of hospices over time has produced a powerful cultural legacy of compassionate care for the dying. Political, social and economic pressures all bring a challenge to the deeply rooted and shared values about End of Life care.

### 7.4.1 The legacy of Cicely Saunders: 'The greatest doctor of all time'

Hospice culture stems from ancient traditions of compassionate care for the poor, diseased and downtrodden, which goes back to the Middle Ages (Help the Hospices 2013). In 1961, Dame Cicely Saunders created the first modern hospice, St Christopher's in London. With her background in medical social work and degree in medicine, she brought a holistic approach to the care of the dying. UK hospices expanded rapidly with the charismatic leadership of Cicely Saunders (James & Field 1992, Clark 2006, Clark 2007) and later with children's hospices led by Sister Frances Dominica (Worswick 2000). To Cicely Saunders, excellence in the care of people at the end of their life was a holistic experience with a balanced approach to the clinical, psychological and spiritual support (Windslow & Clarke 2005). The impact of such a powerful and aspirational vision continues to shape the values of hospice; EOL and Palliative care professionals today. The style of leadership, in the early hospice movement, has been described as charismatic and driven largely from the vision of the early leaders. Several key writers point out that this legacy of charismatic leadership has been instrumental in the creation of the strong sustainable values about the quality of End of Life care (Worsick 2000, Praill 2000, Barker 2000).

### 7.4.2 The legacy of palliative medicine

By 1987, there were 300 hospice projects in the UK with a charitable income of £30 million a year. The next major development that impacted hospice culture was the recognition of Palliative Care as a medical specialism in its own right (Clarke 2006). The major drivers for this development were a greater marginalisation of death in society and the medicalisation of dying within the National Health care system. The creation of palliative medicine (Wright 2016) represented a major shift from the label 'terminal' to 'palliative'. This shift of thinking was profound and brought new clinical perspectives to end of life care.

Over time, hospices experienced an increase in regulation as a growing medicalisation of death brought more regulation of hospice care. For some hospice professionals, this represents a departure from the original vision and charismatic nature of hospice care (Worsick 2000, Sheldon & Speck 2002, Brown & Florees 2011).

Today, hospice leaders recognise the damage of diverse professional silos on the quality of patient care. The future points to a more holistic approach to End of Life care (Demos 2010, Commission into the Future of Hospice Care 2012). This powerful cultural legacy of professional silos tends to be stronger where a hospice is a physical building and patient care more aligned to traditional hospital norms.

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The emergence of Hospice at Home and community models of care, away from a hospice building, has challenged the dichotomy between a medical view of death and spiritual/social approaches. New guidance about improving people's experience of care (One Chance to get it Right 2014) has put the decision making about care at the end of life firmly with the patient and their family. The challenge for hospice leaders is to bring a more holistic approach to their services. The professional silos and hierarchies are not sustainable models of organisational effectiveness in the future.

The historical legacy of UK hospices is an interesting mix of strong values, charismatic leadership, economic independence and medical influence. The case study will illuminate how clear visions and shared values dominate hospice cultures and are an important factor in this study of hospice leadership.

## 7.5 Future scenarios

### 7.5.1 Introduction

*'In this era of great change, managing the delivery of an emotionally complex care service has never been more challenging.'*

*(David Prail, CEO, Hospice UK 2009)*

In the previous section, the traditional power structures and practices of the different professional groups have been an important factor in the way hospices have developed. Key stakeholders from all disciplines agree this is untenable in the face of a large increase in patients, more complex needs and uncertain funding scenarios. In addition, there are clear signals to all providers of hospice; EOL and Palliative care that future services will need to be equitable, accessible and integrated across clinical and non-clinical provision (Health and Social Care Act 2012). Currently, the two big drivers for change are population demographics and funding sources.

### 7.5.2 Demographic challenges

*'By 2035, three and a half million of the UK population will be aged over 85. This will account for half of all deaths.'*

*(Presentation by Nigel Hartley, CEO Earl Mountbatten Hospice 16 June 2015)*

These are stark figures, which illustrate the potential service demand of an aging population on hospice services in the future. The trends indicate that Palliative care and hospice services will not necessarily be restricted to cancer. A predicted increase in chronic and degenerative diseases (Leadbetter & Garber, 2010) will challenge the traditional perception of end of life as a sudden event (Leadbetter & Garber 2010). Dementia, for example, is now seen as a progressive terminal illness (Alzheimer Society 2015) and this has serious implications for health and social care. The expert nature of Palliative care provided by hospices will be more critical when end of life could mean several years rather than a sudden event. In the future, the greatest numbers of people dying will be elderly people experiencing uncertain deaths associated with frailty, advanced age and organ failure.

### 7.5.3 Funding

The growth of hospices has been funded through donations, voluntary service and legacies. Some hospices have grown through specific benefactors whose interest in hospice care is directly linked to the bereavement of a close friend or family member. UK hospices have, therefore, operated largely as independent health care providers. This landscape is changing, as new models of health and social care are developed to cope with rising demand. The Health and Social Care Act, 2012 opened up the provision of EOL services to 'any qualified provider'. What this means in practice is that commissioners of services can award contracts to private and third sector providers.

This change has opened up opportunities for hospices to secure alternative streams of funding but it also brings the risk of competitors winning lucrative contracts. Most hospices receive between 25–50% funding from government sources and raise the rest of their income from donations, fund raising and investments. In the past, this range of income streams has shielded hospices from political influence. The commissioning bodies now award contracts, control how funds are spent and audit operational procedures. This shift to a more tightly monitored and commercial approach is very challenging to the compassionate care culture of hospice organisations.

Cuts to public funding will continue to impact the work of hospices. The greatest threat to the long-term future of UK hospices is likely to be an increasingly competitive market for End of Life care. With new providers of health and social care emerging from the private sector and wide scale commissioning, hospices are in danger of losing their market place as expert palliative care providers.

In the wider health, housing and social care agenda, many policy makers, writers and researchers advocate for a greater integration of service provision (Dying for Change, Leadbetter and Garber 2010; Georghiou 2012; Marie Cure Cancer Care 2013). It is probable that future demographic trends and funding pressures will drive greater integration across health and social care providers and this will impact hospices.

### 7.5.4 Greater level of equity

Demographics, shifting terrain for hospices as providers of EOL care and the complexity of funding all bring a challenge to the equity of care across UK. This brings an interesting moral challenge for organisations so deeply rooted in care for the dying. The UK public perception is that hospices are set up to care for cancer patients whether they are survivors or at end of life (Office National Statistics 2011). In reality, hospices have the expertise to provide the palliative care needs of a wide range of vulnerable people but the major issue is accessibility, (Darzi 2007). In addition to a lack of equity across different societal groups, there are substantial geographical differences in accessibility of specialist Palliative care (Ahmed 2004, Mc Enhill 2013).



Research consistently indicates that a majority of people would prefer to die at home (Leadbetter & Garber 2010) and this brings another challenge to a traditional model of hospice care that is delivered in a physical building. However, there is also evidence that hospices are perceived as places of death and not as sanctuary for carers and patients (National End of Life Care Intelligence Network 2012). The Department of Health has attempted to address the troubling issue of equity by proposing EOL care is now delivered at home. In the future, the definition of 'home' could mean care home, hospice, hostel, prison or hospital (National End of Life Strategy 2008).

#### 7.5.5 Implications for hospice leadership

The predicted increase in demand for hospice and End of Life care is already having an impact on hospice leaders. Leaders at all levels now face a complexity that did not exist for the early pioneers.

*'A chief executive of a hospice is often running three different businesses: a care business; a trading company with a chain of shops; and a community engagement programme.'*

*(David Prail, CEO, Hospice UK 2013)*



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Hospice leaders are required to manage medical, business and community issues in the context of continuous change. The crude dichotomy of balancing the books and caring for patients is too simplistic to describe the scale of future demands on service. Future leaders will be juggling hospice organisations that have multiple agendas and stakeholders: social purpose, health care provider, political voice, and thriving business. The traditional demarcations between clinical and non-clinical professionals must be challenged because they limit organisational capability and inhibit all levels of leadership from learning new skills.

#### 7.5.6 Charismatic leaders – are they appropriate in the future?

Charismatic leaders have shaped hospice cultures and this is likely to continue in the future. Death and dying are highly emotive topics, which attract stories of courage, heroism and achievement. Heroes and heroines emerge from stories of patients, doctors, nurses, volunteers and fundraisers. The history of hospice and End of Life care is full of charismatic acts and courageous leadership. The paradox is that a charismatic style of leadership is essentially individual and potentially disempowering towards other styles of leadership.

The heroic nature and achievements of past and present charismatic leaders has contributed to hospice cultures that struggle with a collective approach to patient service. The challenges of the future are quite different to those of the past. Leadership in the future will need to be more collaborative and encourage all levels to take responsibility for leading service quality. Hospice leadership will not be the responsibility of one person but the collective responsibility of a body of professionals operating across functional boundaries.

#### 7.5.7 Hospice leadership – is it possible to have a lighter touch?

There is an urgent need for a change in attitudes about leadership style and behaviour. Some writers recommend lightening some of the operational constraints and tight institutional boundaries (Storey, Open University). A lighter touch from senior hospice leaders will release the potential for talented leaders at all levels and from different professional backgrounds. Professional and managerial hierarchies are now seen as the major constraints for developing health care leadership capability (Martin & Waring 2013; Birken, & Lee & Weiner 2012).

Concerns are now growing about whether the leadership capacity in UK hospices is sufficient to meet the challenges ahead (Help the Hospices Commission 2012). Sector literature is full of leadership theory (front line leadership, distributed leadership, adaptive leadership and dispersed leadership) but very little evidence of new models of leadership working in practice (Martin & Waring 2012). These authors also argue that the vision of 'leadership at all levels' is constrained by the professional, clinical and managerial hierarchies.

### 7.5.8 Hospice leadership for the future

A number of writers point to styles of leadership that represent a 'post charismatic' era where uncertainty will become the norm (Storey & Holti 2013). A greater devolution of leadership power to teams and the opportunity to innovate are seen as key to managing change. A greater distribution of leadership power across the organisation will ensure that authority reaches the level where operational decisions are needed quickly (Gronn 2002). The greater distribution of power is beneficial to service cultures because it promotes engagement across different professional groups (Hong 2013). A traditional style of leadership does not appear to have solved the need for greater integration of services and yet evidence shows that organisational performance improves with a more engaged leadership style (Alimo-Metcalf, Bradford 2008). Future hospice leaders will need to be capable of facilitating productive engagement between different professional groups both within their hospice and external with partners and other providers.

### 7.5.9 Collective leadership

In hospice organisations, collective leadership is an approach that can ensure a high level of engagement between all professionals. A collective style of leadership ensures that everyone takes responsibility for the success of the organisation. This involves continual learning, high levels of dialogue and a shared understanding of the organisation as a whole system. The Care Quality Commission now recognises collective leadership as a key driver for meeting demographic and funding challenges and, at the same time, preserve compassionate quality care (McCauley 2011). In a collective model of leadership, the sharing of power goes beyond organisational boundaries and silos (Spillane 2004) with all stakeholders focussed on the patient, their family and carers.

The momentum for change is not a reactive response to changing circumstances. There is now substantial evidence from research and consultation across UK hospices:

*'The Commission is clear that major investment is required at local and national levels to strengthen strategic leadership within the hospice sector. Hospices need to become bigger organisations with more influence in the wider health and social care system. Achieving this objective will require a leadership cadre that is politically adept, able to influence and comfortable with a high profile within their sphere of influence. This kind of leadership needs to exist at all levels within hospices.'*

*(Commission into the Future of Hospice care 2013, page 49)*

The case study, which follows, demonstrates that the key to developing hospice leadership capability starts in the middle of the organisation. This is a time of radical change and new thinking about leadership. A new paradigm for hospice leadership will be needed that respects the past, promotes cherished values, but challenges practices and attitudes that weaken the role and impact of hospices.

## 7.6 Case study: 'When horses run together'

### 7.6.1 Introduction

It is clear that hospice leaders face complex challenges and that traditional models of leadership will not be sustainable in the future. Previously in this chapter, alternative leadership theories have been presented to challenge the charismatic tradition of UK hospices. It is important now to examine the practical aspects of new forms of leadership and, specifically, the contribution of mid level leaders. Earl Mountbatten Hospice (EMH) on the Isle of Wight is a study in good practice in the development of middle managers. The approach taken ensured that leadership development was firmly embedded in the practical challenges facing leaders at all levels.

The report 'Preparing for the Future' (2012) made specific recommendations for UK hospices to ensure that good leadership is not undermined by a 'missing middle tier' of management and practice. This guidance created the opportunity for Earl Mountbatten hospice (EMH) to legitimise an investment in their managers working in both clinical and non-clinical roles across the organisation. A climate report commissioned in 2014 confirmed that an investment in middle managers would have the greatest impact on culture and performance.



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A bespoke leadership programme was designed using the 'Future Ambitions for Hospice Care' (Help the Hospices 2013) as a strategic framework for the learning experience. It was essential that the programme addressed the issues raised in the climate report and empowered staff operating in the middle of the organisation. Practical, tangible results were also seen by the senior team and trustees to be an essential requirement of the programme.

### 7.6.2 Case background

*'To provide and to promote good care and support for those people living with, affected by, or curious about death, dying or bereavement across the Isle of Wight.'*

*(EMH vision 2015)*

Earl Mountbatten Hospice, on the Isle of Wight, is the lead provider of End of Life and Palliative care to an island community of the south coast of the UK. In addition, it provides help and advice to families, friends and carers of patients affected by life shortening illnesses. The big challenge facing the hospice is to significantly increase the extent and scope of End of Life services on the Isle of Wight. The hospice plays a significant part in island life, with fundraising and volunteering for the charity touching many people's lives. The hospice engages a wide range of employees and volunteers to deliver its services, from clinical and nursing staff to facilities management, catering, fundraising, managing and running the charity shops, finance and administration. Partnerships with the hospital, other service providers, and with commissioners, are vital to the ability of the hospice to achieve its aims. There is a need for new partnerships and greater collaboration to ensure future sustainability.

### 7.6.3 'Leading from the Middle' programme (2014)

The design of a development programme for middle managers arose from a growing awareness that leadership was needed at all levels within the organisation. The major focus of the programme was to develop leadership behaviours, which met the criteria for a 'Well-led' hospice. The senior team recognised that developing middle managers and other mid level professionals from a diverse range of roles was the key to cultural change. Collaborative learning and working became a key feature of the programme. Action Learning was introduced on the first module and then used throughout the programme. The formation of project teams later in the programme was facilitated through action learning skills.

The team projects provided a powerful learning experience and offered participants the chance to apply their learning in a realistic and meaningful context. The project outcomes were an ideal opportunity for these middle managers to influence their directors and trustees. The notion of 'Leading from the Middle' as a means to effect cultural change was not the latest leadership theory but a tangible and vibrant manifestation of human motivation. Prior to the detailed design of the first programme was the engagement of senior leaders in a strategy workshop. A systems approach to programme design was used to provide a clear framework for participants and senior leaders throughout the one-year programme (see Chapter Four).

#### 7.6.4 Strategy workshop

This one day workshop was held for all board members, both executive and non-executive, to understand the programme approach and their role in supporting individual, team and organisational development. Strategic priorities for the hospice were discussed to provide a context for the leadership programme and potential themes for later team projects. Board members were involved in supporting participants as team coaches and project champions. This approach ensured that senior leaders in both executive and trustee roles shared their collective knowledge and understanding. 'Leading from the Middle' was focussed on developing hospice leadership capability irrespective of rank or role.

#### 7.6.5 Leadership workshops

Two practical workshops covered topics such as learned leadership, management styles, high performing teams, action learning, strategic alignment, strategic change and stakeholder mapping. Participants worked in different teams and experienced the benefits of collaborative working. The learning outcomes from these workshops became the foundation for team project work where the practice of collaborative leadership became a real and dynamic experience.

Critical reflection was a tool encouraged within the project teams. Each team was matched with a coach whose role was to encourage reflection and provide feedback and learning about team development. Project champions operated as task mentors. Their role was to help the team conduct their research through practical support or contacts. The team coach and project champion operated as additional members of the project team. It was important that all stakeholders were clear on their role and respective role boundaries. Team coaches and project champions were not team leaders or authority figures. It was important that the middle managers took responsibility for their project work. The fact that the projects are based on real issues brought immediacy to the outcomes. The teams worked through the pressures of combining their operational duties with a robust strategic investigation. The complexity of mid level leadership became a practical reality during the project phase. Further sessions on managing change, organisational culture, and project management were included, as individuals and teams started to develop a deeper awareness of organisational culture and behaviour.

A coaching workshop was included to ensure that team coaches and project champions were consistent in their approach and mindful of their own personal development. Senior leaders and hospice trustees initially took up the roles of coach and champion. The support roles were later extended to include mid level leaders who had completed the programme. Development of coaching capability from within the organisation encouraged both senior and middle leaders to practise their skills and sustain the impact of the work of the hospice.

**The 'Well-led' hospice****The following criteria are taken from the Care Quality Commission 2014:**

- People are actively involved in developing services,
- Staff are supported to question practice,
- Clear vision and values that include: involvement, compassion, dignity, independence, respect, equality and safety,
- Good leadership at all levels,
- Consistency between what management and staff say about key challenges, achievements, concerns and risks,
- Resources and support are available to the manager and the team to develop and drive improvement,
- Staff are motivated, caring and open.

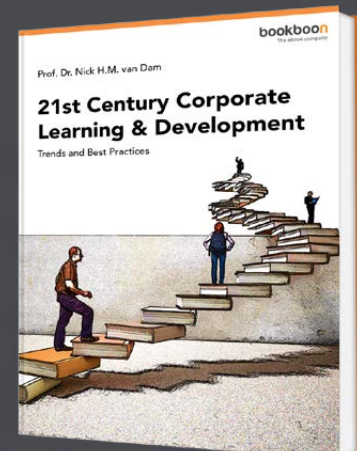
### 7.6.6 Action research and leadership development

The mechanism for integrating individual, team and organisational learning was Action Research. An outline of this learning method was introduced in Chapter Four. Team projects ensured that the participants collaborated in the scoping and researching of a specific hospice challenge and, at the same time, applied their learning to achieve practical solutions. The complexity of working in a diverse team on a crucial issue enabled individuals to think more strategically and investigate the 'bigger picture' for the hospice. Project teams were given the freedom to choose both their research focus and team formation, provided they used the hospice strategic plan, to ground all their work together.

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The range of project topic was diverse and included:

- Strategic challenges diagnosed and researched from an operational perspective – gave the board of trustees practical knowledge before decisions made,
- Collaborative activity across the organisation to discover new ways of managing change,
- Practical and innovative solutions to resource issues,
- Greater understanding of strategic alignment and impact of culture,
- New knowledge about good practice from both inside and outside the hospice,
- Clarity on the practical leadership behaviours needed in the future.

Action Research conducted over ten weeks produced practical project outcomes, which were evaluated at a Learning Forum attended by board trustees, senior leaders and key stakeholders including commissioners. This was a one-day event and an opportunity for the middle managers to present their findings, share learning and influence upwards. This was a defining moment in the culture of the hospice and demonstrated that mid level leadership and collaborative behaviours were possible in practice. The influence of the middle in strategic thinking was based on robust evidence and this was a major step forward towards the 'Well-led hospice'.

Four months later, an evaluation workshop was conducted to generate impact evidence of sustainable learning. The method employed was Appreciative Inquiry, and this was explained in greater detail in Chapter Four. It was crucial, at this stage that the evaluation method helped to sustain the development of leadership capability in the hospice.

#### 7.6.7 Programme evaluation

*'Leading from the Middle has been the catalyst for a significant cultural shift at the hospice; it has been instrumental in the development of collective leadership, meaning that everyone takes responsibility for the success of the organisational as a whole – not just their jobs or area of work.'*

*(Director of Patient Services, Earl Mountbatten Hospice 2015)*

In line with the criteria for a 'Well-led hospice', an evaluation strategy was devised to ensure that impact evidence was collated from a number of sources. The results and recommendations of team projects were presented at a Learning Forum to an audience of senior leaders and trustees. An evaluation workshop was conducted after four months of the Learning Forum to track the progress of projects and share learning reflections. Both events were attended by other hospice stakeholders, including senior leaders and trustees, and engaged all participants in dialogue and action learning.



The purpose of the evaluation workshop was to reconvene the participants to reflect on their experiences, share learning from different perspectives and plan for the sustainability of learning for the hospice. The following key learning objectives and practical outcomes were agreed:

- To capitalise on the learning through dialogue and reflection in pairs and teams,
- To evaluate learning from the programme by sharing stories of individual, team and organisational impact,
- To explore the impact of the programme on leadership behaviours within the hospice,
- To share visions of how the hospice can leverage the benefit of learning and sustain individual and team performance,
- To share experiences and outcomes of team project work and discuss the potential for influencing the strategic direction,
- To agree practical actions and ensure that the investment in development is optimised.

The evaluation workshop generated detailed evidence that participants had applied their learning back in the hospice. There was clear evidence that learning about teamwork was a sustainable capability for the future. The positive engagement at the evaluation workshop helped to sustain the collaborative working crucial to future. There were some memorable defining moments, which signalled a new perception of mid level leaders as custodians of hospice culture.

#### **Defining moments**

##### **'Ubuntu' – 'The string that connects us together'. 'I am because of you'.**

The twenty participants on the first 'Leading from the Middle' were colleagues in a small organisation, and yet, before the programme had infrequent contact with each other. On the programme, many sessions involved work in small non-departmental and non-hierarchical teams.

This connectivity unlocked new ideas, identified new talent and unleashed potential. In a specific leadership exercise on organisational systems, the African term 'Ubuntu' was used to describe the power of collaboration across a community of people. In this context, the term 'Ubuntu' was used to show how the hospice culture needed to change to ensure high quality services were delivered in the future. The exercise demonstrated that a systems approach to needs of patients, carers and families needed to involve different professional groups working to achieve a holistic approach to care.

##### **'Am I allowed to talk to contractors?'**

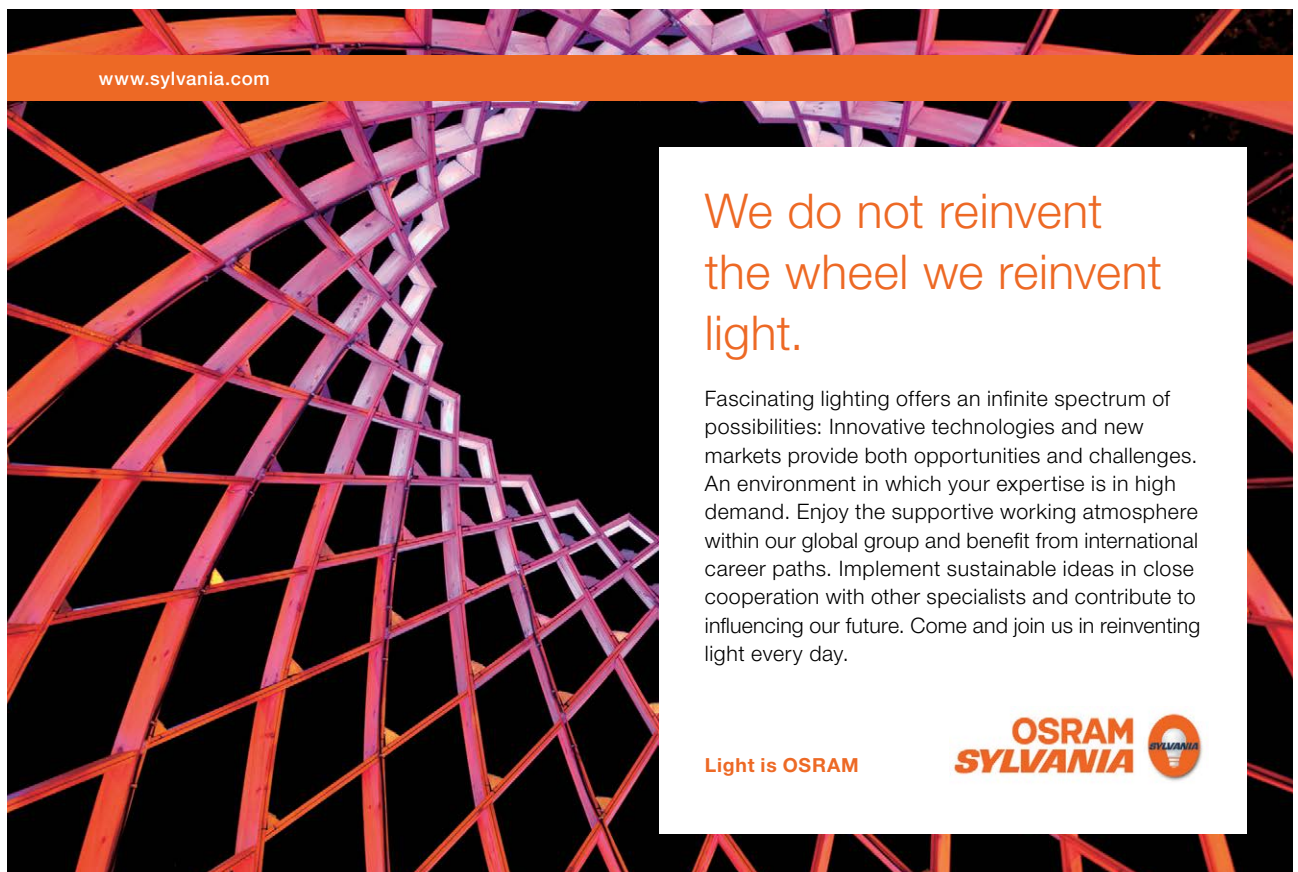
For leaders in the middle of organisations, it is important to know that they can influence upwards, have support from the top and are able to translate strategic requirements into tangible results. This approach requires trust and clear communication channels up and down the organisation. At the start of the projects there was a need to encourage managers to take risks, to act independently and to be courageous in their thinking. An example was how one team chose to review recycling at the organisation, with a view to improving performance and saving money in costs of refuse disposal, as well as being ethical and green. Early research indicated that the current contract with the refuse company was outdated and could be revised to bring greater benefits. But did the programme participants have the authority to do this? There was a belief that contracts were something dealt with by senior leaders. Once this belief was challenged, the team realised that they had the power to influence the future green agenda. Their project outcome delivered clear recommendations on recycling and significant cost savings.

## 7.7 Evaluation findings

The outputs of the evaluation workshop demonstrated that participants had a clear and practical understanding of the culture and practices of a 'Well-led' hospice. There were specific examples of collaborative leadership behaviours being practiced across the organisation. 'Leading from the Middle' had strengthened the collective aspirations to be a 'Well-led' hospice. The evaluation process was also used to assess the effectiveness of both programme content and methods of delivery.

There was detailed qualitative and quantitative evidence presented that indicated that individual, team and organisational learning had resulted in tangible project results and recommendations. The remarks in italics are drawn from discussions between participants, senior leaders and hospice trustees and used with their permission. The Learning Forum and evaluation workshop events revealed specific and tangible examples of leadership development, for example:

- Greater levels of confidence in both individual style and team leadership,
- Clear awareness of the benefits of collaborative working across the organisation,
- A realisation of that excellent service and performance requires leadership at all levels,
- A strong desire from mid level professionals to be involved in the formulation of strategy,
- Realisation of the potential and value of working with diverse skills and talents,
- Improved ability to challenge, contribute, innovate and use feedback,
- Greater motivation to solve problems collectively and across professional boundaries.



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The programme design enabled participants to experience a greater level of collaboration than their operational duties allowed them. The opportunities to work across professional boundaries were facilitated by the team projects and action research. The experience and subsequent reflection of collaborative learning and working had significant impact on the quality of project deliverables. With a greater understanding of collective leadership both senior and mid level leaders appreciated the risk of returning to previous attitudes and behaviours. The major evaluation themes were:

- Values and organisational culture,
- Organisational culture and leadership,
- Teamwork: 'When horses run together'
- Collaborative leadership,
- Strategic influence and resources,
- Empowerment: 'From ward to board'.

#### 7.7.1 Values and organisational culture

*'We now have strong bonds across the organisation and this has fostered a "yes, we can" attitude from all participants.'*

*(Leading from the Middle participant)*

The use of the African term 'Ubuntu' was meaningful because the term signalled a powerful turning point in the culture of the group. 'I am because of you' signalled a major shift from individual to collaborative learning and collective leadership. It was clear that programme participants had gained an intellectual and emotional understanding of collaborative leadership and how this could be used to develop the culture of the hospice. Their experiences during modules and later team projects demonstrated the impact of collaborative learning on both strategic and operational priorities. It appears that collaboration in the middle of the hospice had a major impact on the professional silos.

The practical outcomes of team projects proved that a diverse group of people could research a challenging subject and deliver recommendations based on sound evidence. This was a major influencing feat and more evidence of the capability of mid level leaders.

### 7.7.2 Organisational culture and leadership

Participants discussed and shaped a vision of hospice leadership that was collaborative, inclusive and inspirational. It was clear that their experiences of the programme had enabled them, as a group, to consider the forms of hospice leadership needed in the future. Everyday examples of the link between leadership style, organisational culture and performance were numerous and included the following practical insights:

*'Leadership is inspiring people to have confidence',*

*'Helping people understand the strategic direction',*

*'Encouraging people to learn from each other',*

*'Encouraging my team to reflect and think together',*

*'Encouraging everyone to have a voice and respecting the contribution',*

*'Help others to work outside their comfort zone',*

*'Enable others to take leadership opportunities',*

*'Challenge working practices at all levels'.*

*(Leading from the Middle participants 2015)*

Leadership behaviours, at all levels, became more conscious and deliberate. As individuals shared their experiences of learning, a shared language developed which integrated strategic thinking with operational reality. A new level and quality of engagement between levels made it possible for people to experience the connection between leadership behaviours and organisational culture.

### 7.7.3 Strategy and resources

*'The organisation needs a strategy, not one that is "done" to us. We are operational experts so we can be contributors to it.'*

*(Leading from the Middle project team)*

A greater understanding of strategic formulation was another major outcome and this is observable in the comments below:

*'We need to get underneath challenges and avoid a quick fix',*

*'Clear objectives are important',*

*'Agree strategic priorities after input on operational implications',*

*'Preserve quality-thinking time for strategic formulation',*

*'Make sure everyone is working to the bigger picture',*

*'Resource plans need to be built into strategic priorities',*



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*'Check for misalignment of strategy, resource and culture',*

*'Appropriate resource can mean information',*

*'Listen to the operational experts',*

*'Collective leadership improves the quality of the strategy'.*

*(Leading from the Middle participants 2015)*

These findings signal strong desire from the programme participants to influence upwards. It is interesting that the motivation to influence is both political and practical. The mid level leaders demonstrated the capability and confidence to influence the strategic direction of the hospice. The knowledge resident in the middle of the organisation is available to help the hospice adapt to changing external conditions.

#### 7.7.4 Teamwork: 'When horses run together'

*'Horses running free will not scatter – they will run together'*

*'I think we arrived as individual workers and left as a team'*

*(Leading from the Middle project team)*

Team project work presented a practical opportunity to apply learning to a complex task over four months. The complexity and changing nature of team projects (conducted in parallel with existing responsibilities) ensured practical learning about team leadership. The reliance of team members on each other to deliver the project outcomes, on time and to a high standard, gave participants a unique insight into the power of trust and respect on individual and team motivation and performance. Quality teamwork was seen as key to the successful implementation of future hospice strategy. The message is clear. When a team owns the rationale and approach for a task (rather than imposed from a higher authority), the outcome is a higher quality.

*'We need to embrace opportunity – we have a state of readiness to lead, speak a shared language and have a shared understanding.'*

*(Leading from the Middle project team 2015)*

The impact evidence for improved teamwork was significant in quality and quantity. The quality of team project outcomes was attributed to the utilisation of different skills combined with quality interactions and communication. The confidence to identify strengths and weaknesses was seen to be important to high performance teamwork.

The freedom to innovate is a dynamic between personal empowerment, the style of leadership and clearly defined cultural norms and shared values. The team projects presented an opportunity to test ideas, challenge conventional thinking and expand horizons. Team members gained practical experience of creating new ideas together and proposing change to senior leaders. A new pipeline of innovation, from the middle upwards, was created.

#### 7.7.5 Collaborative Leadership

*'The programme has helped to break down barriers within EMH and created a greater collaborative working culture.'*

*(EMH Trustee 2015)*

Collaboration and communication were seen as major enablers of cultural change. From their learning and practical application, programme participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the benefits of taking an integrated approach to service development and delivery. A sample of evaluation responses is shown below:

*'Involve others across the organisation on key pieces of work',*

*'Promote the collective ownership of key decisions',*

*'Appreciate the workload of others when planning resource',*

*'Help others to work towards similar goals and build confidence',*

*'Liaise with other teams at an early stage of planning',*

*'Engage more extensively with external stakeholders',*

*'Engage with the public before we conclude decisions',*

*'Working with other organisations and partnerships to align needs to service provision'.*

*(Programme participants 2015)*

The evidence again points to the benefit of collaborative working for hospice organisations. The group established that leadership style plays a key role in establishing a collaborative culture. It was felt that individuals had performed well once they appreciated that senior leaders were in support of people in the middle acting in an empowered way. Once permission is granted, it is more likely that staff will start to behave in an empowered way. Empowerment depends on the quality of interaction between leader and follower. The research approach reinforced the benefit of empowerment. It is important to remember that the programme participants managed the generation of evaluation material and worked alongside trustees and senior leaders. The leadership of this process was distributed across all members of the group working on the evaluation.

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### 7.7.6 Empowerment: from 'ward to board'

*'Leading from the Middle has empowered us to understand that we are just as responsible and capable of pushing through change as anyone else.'*

*(Leading from the Middle participants 2015)*

In the last section, the impact of 'permission giving' in the interaction between senior leaders and mid level professionals was an important aspect of empowerment and the co- production of service strategies. A traditional culture of 'board to ward' promotes a downward channel of communication and disempowers the professionals delivering the service. However, different leadership levels frequently perceive the process of granting permission differently. The evaluation research generated some interesting insights and practical tips to ensure that empowerment is aligned to the strategic priorities and actively supported, for example:

*'Value individuals in their own right',*

*'Leverage their capability',*

*'Help everyone take responsibility',*

*'Utilise a mix of delegation, trust, training and pride',*

*'Agree and operate a non-hierarchical approach',*

*'Ensure we have and accept the freedom to let others flourish'.*

*(Leading from the Middle participants 2015)*

It is important to note that the mid level staff experienced the effect of empowerment for themselves during the team projects. The project work created a way of influencing senior leaders with concrete facts, innovative proposals and practical solutions. Their example to other staff members was a practical display of the benefits of empowerment. Senior leaders experienced the impact of this empowerment. Both parties now have a deeper understanding of the practical challenges for leaders at all levels. The 'Well-led' agenda is a clear direction of hospice leaders and incentivised by the commissioners of hospice care. The learning from the programme delivers practical insights into how the behaviours and culture can be achieved.

### 7.7.7 Chapter summary

The case study presented a novel approach to developing leadership capability in middle managers and mid level professionals in a hospice setting. While different professional groups work together in End of Life and Palliative care, their views of death and dying are shaped by their training and experiences. The future challenges facing UK hospices can be faced by a greater degree of collaboration across different professionals and the development of mid level leaders. The case study illustrates the impact of culture on the successful implementation of strategy and the unique contribution of mid level leaders to strategy, innovation and change.

## 7.8 Reflection and learning

The following section is for you to reflect on the case study and develop your own views of middle managers in a clinical setting, facing substantial change. You may wish to revisit Chapter Three as you work through the questions.

- What are the critical success factors when developing middle managers in a hospice?
- Why is it important to involve middle managers in strategic planning?
- What is the role of senior leaders in developing hospice leadership?

### **Chapter Seven: Learning activity**

#### **Tools for strategic planning**

Below are two tools that have been used by 'Leading from the Middle' participants to plan their team projects. This process helped them to think through issues strategically, consider the external operating conditions for their hospice and build robust evidence to influence their senior leadership and board of trustees to agree to change.

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

The tools will help you to appreciate the 'bigger picture' for your organisation, or your client, and understand how your operational knowledge can bring great value to senior leaders.

#### **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 to learn how to collaborate in the process of developing 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,
- It is worth reminding yourself on the detail of a strategic conversation (Chapter Three).

**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?



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**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, which are usually internal factors that you have the power to influence. Opportunities and threats 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?

# 8 Voices from the Middle: a new centre of gravity

## 8.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, evidence was presented from a range of sources, that prove mid level managers and professionals are a key asset when navigating organisational change. Collaborative and distributed models of leadership have been recommended to help senior managers to grow the leadership capability in their organisations. The voices from the middle have a positive contribution to strategy formulation, change management and service development. The case study findings provided substantial evidence that the development of mid level leadership capability is crucial to organisations facing economic, social and political challenge. Traditional models of leadership, especially a ‘command and control’ approach inhibit the contribution of middle managers and close down their voices.

The prevailing assumptions about the image and contribution of middle managers are flawed and deeply damaging, especially in service orientated organisations where significant operational expertise is with the front line and the middle. The traditional models of leadership do not serve organisations with a social mission but erode flexibility and adaptability to successfully manage new or unpredictable change.

In practice, middle managers have the ability to operate as organisational strategists, change agents and innovators. In their unique position, they are closer to the values and culture of their organisations. Their collective knowledge translates into social, intellectual and political value and makes their role and contribution vital to sustaining services. The challenges facing not for profit organisations now require a radical shift in the centre of gravity to the middle away from the top. This shift has an implication for senior managers and their attitudes towards leadership. Clearly, an assumption that leadership is the responsibility of one person is not feasible in a fast paced, changing service environment. New styles of leadership, which are more collaborative and distributed, ensure vital information is circulated between levels and across different parts of the organisation.

The purpose of this final chapter is to consolidate the major themes of this book and formulate some conclusions about mid level leadership development. The story running through this book is about inspirational mid level managers and professionals who have both demonstrated their capability and found a stronger voice. Chapter One provided a backstory to a development approach called ‘Leading from the Middle’. Chapter Two explained why the voices from the middle are crucial to not for profit organisations. Chapter Three created a powerful argument for developing mid level leadership capability. Chapter Four outlined the design of a systems approach to leadership development. Chapters Five, Six and Seven provided substantial case study evidence that mid level managers and professionals have a major contribution to make to organisational performance and sustainability.

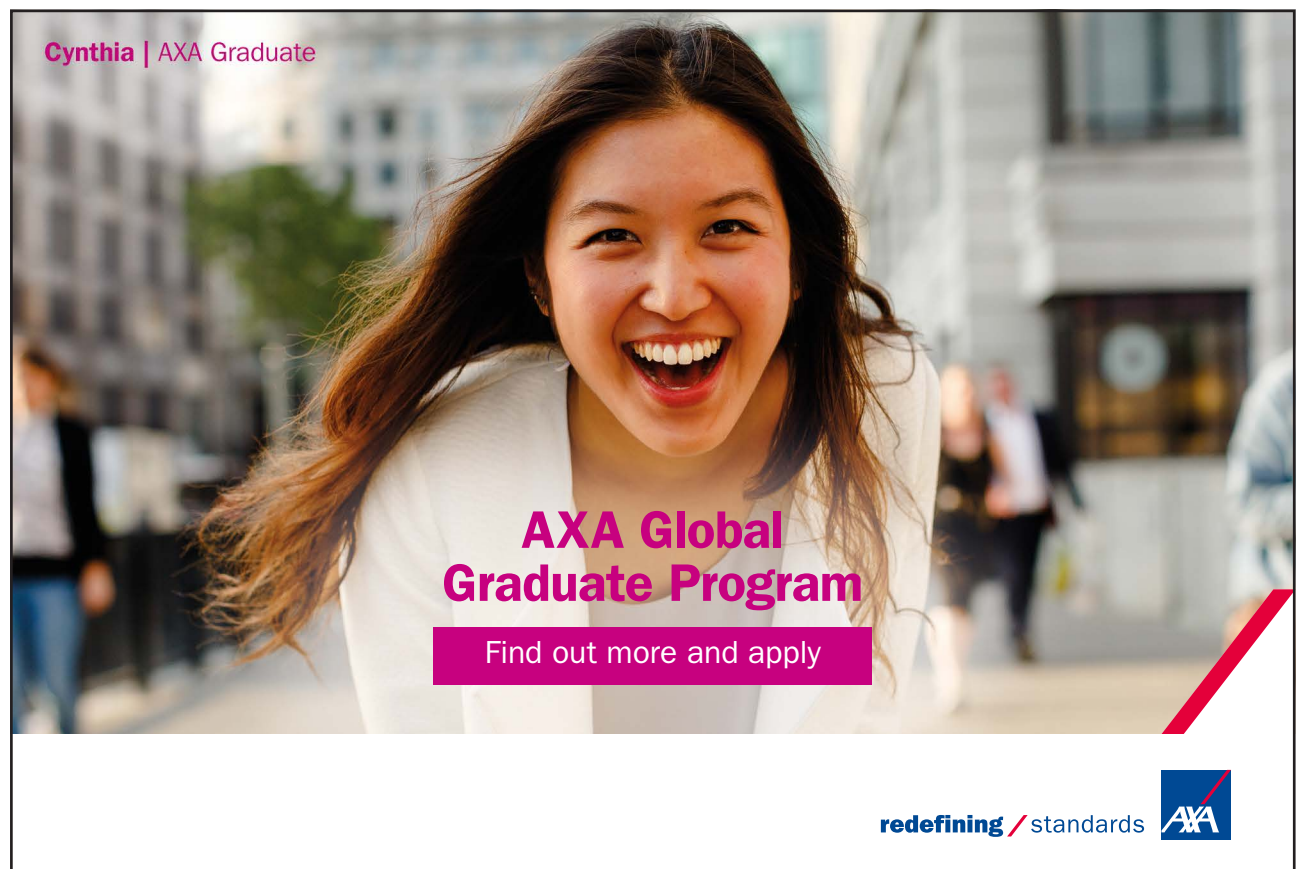
A final chapter learning activity is included to enable the reader to reflect on their personal learning and development.

## 8.2 Chapter learning objectives

- To summarise the operational and cultural priorities for not for profit organisations,
- To reflect on the important themes from literature on middle managers,
- To consider the impact of traditional models of leadership on organisational cultures,
- To emphasise the styles of leadership which are more appropriate to organisations with a social mission,
- To summarise the impact evidence for developing mid level leadership capability,
- To highlight a cultural shift from ‘middle manager’ to ‘mid level leader’

## 8.3 Chapter learning outcomes

- To reflect on the contribution of theory and practice to a clearer understanding of mid level leadership capability,
- To appreciate models of leadership that support empowerment, at the frontline and in the middle of the organisation,
- To understand new approaches to leadership development that engage both middle and senior managers,
- To reflect on Chapter One’s learning activity and reset personal development goals.



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**Chapter guide**

This chapter will cover the following topics:

- A new landscape for middle managers,
- Assumptions and their impact,
- Developing the middle,
- Leader or leadership,
- 'Voices from the middle.'

## 8.4 A new landscape for middle managers

Chapter Two explored the not for profit context behind this study of middle managers' influence. Current economic, social and political pressures bring an ideal opportunity to rethink attitudes towards leadership styles in these organisations. The austerity measures imposed by the UK government will continue to impact the quality of services and bring fresh challenges to those engaged in front line service provision. In the case study organisations, it was clear that the demand for service was both increasing in scale and complexity of need. What was also revealed was the unique nature of their clear social missions and inspirational service values. Ironically, professionals in these organisations were culturally suspicious of profit motives and yet find they are facing an increasingly commercial future. New sources of income have become mission critical and now feature strongly in strategic plans. The complexity of multiple agendas, stakeholders and bottom lines is pushing the not for profit sector towards a crisis of identity.

In the case studies, the social mission shaped individual behaviour and cultural norms. The collective passion, to provide excellent service and care, frequently transcended individual priorities. Cultural norms of this quality are a major asset to an organisation and need to be preserved, despite external economic pressures. Mid level managers and professionals are key to the preservation of the social mission because of their proximity to the cultural and operational realities. As funding cuts force tough decisions, people in the middle are ideally placed to lead others through change. Their leadership capability and confidence is key to supporting front line professionals to innovate and develop new approaches. To do this, professionals in the middle need to be more actively engaged in strategic formulation and given greater autonomy in operational decision-making.

The challenge for senior managers is to rethink their leadership role and acknowledge their contribution is externally focussed. Clearly, it is not feasible for senior managers to intervene in operational issues when the service environment is complex. A 'top down' leadership culture keeps senior managers focussed on internal activities and in danger of excessive control of the work of midlevel staff. The growing diversity of service provision means that senior managers need to adopt a more distributed approach to their authority. The practical benefits of distributed leadership were observed, in the case studies, when senior managers stepped back from the operational detail of team business projects and learned to facilitate and coach others to reach their own solutions.

There is political pressure on not for profit organisations to cooperate and this can be seen in the rise of partnerships and collaborative working. New forms of integrated service provision are developing where not for profit, public and private sector providers work together. The result is a clear imperative for collaborative leadership between organisations and across professional groups. Collaborative service provision brings multiple stakeholders together and creates complex relationships, which are both informal and formal. New collaborative working across different organisations will increasingly be matched with demands for highly professional and transparent governance. In the future, the commercial decisions made by both executive and non-executive leaders will have a major impact on the preservation and sustainability of their social mission. In the future, a fine balance between healthy competition and healthy collaboration will present profound challenges to leaders at all levels.

Middle managers have a key role to play in the future. They represent the possibility of a new centre of gravity for not for profit organisations. Their expert operational knowledge, service orientation and social values can help senior managers strike a healthy balance of social value and economic return. Without the influence of middle managers, there is danger that vital knowledge and practice is left out of strategic decisions. Both literature and case study findings indicate that a common denominator for service improvement is the quality of strategic conversation between different levels of management.

#### 8.4.1 Voices from the middle

Chapter Three revealed flawed assumptions about mid level capability and performance. Negative attitudes and behaviours were frequently attributed to their position in the organisation. It was clear that outmoded perceptions of middle managers have remained in organisational cultures and which bear no relationship to current external challenges. Attitudes of senior managers towards their mid level staff appear to be complicated by previous experiences of change and, in particular, organisational restructures. Overall, middle manager behaviour is seen as supervisory, reactive and typical of a hierarchical model. Strategic leadership was perceived to be the remit and responsibility of senior managers.

The case study findings prove the capability of middle managers to think strategically, manage change and adopt innovative models of service. In short, contrary to the notion that they are 'stuck', middle managers are in a unique position which allows them to operate as intermediaries between strategy and operations. This intermediary role was demonstrated in all the case studies when teams of mid level managers and professionals carried out collaborative research and delivered strategic options and solutions to complex problems.

Both literature and case study evidence proves that middle managers have the ability to lead their services. Both middle and senior managers need some freedom from the traditional power dynamics, communication channels and hierarchical structures. Only a radical and inclusive approach to leadership development will make a significant difference to the performance of not for profit organisations.



### 8.4.2 Developing the middle

The development of middle managers cannot be done in isolation from organisational dynamics or priorities. The case studies provided evidence that a systems approach ensures close alignment with organisational priorities. The social missions of the case study organisations provided an excellent focus for the development of middle managers. The practical application of their learning engaged a wider group of stakeholders in conversations about leadership and organisational culture. There were tangible outcomes, from team projects, that helped to shape strategy and improve services. The collective knowledge and creativity of the middle managers opened up the possibility of transforming the organisational response to external pressures. Collaborative working on their 'Leading from the Middle' programmes became a beacon for more extensive collaboration across professional groups both internally and externally. As a result of collaborative working, the social and political skills associated with partnership and alliances were appreciated as crucial to new models of service provision and delivery.

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Senior managers engaged with this learning and realised that their leadership role was evolving as the operating environment became complex and political. In the strategic conversations between different levels, new models of leadership were tested and new dynamics created. This is a very important aspect of leadership development. Distributed and collaborative styles of leadership will remain a theoretical proposition unless there are low risk opportunities to practice new behaviours back in the working environment. There are major implications of shared power and distributed authority for all stakeholders. When middle managers are developed in isolation from the practical reality of their organisational experiences, there is little hope of sustainable change in attitudes and behaviour.

In 2007, a systems approach called 'Leading from the Middle' was adopted in a UK Housing Association (Chapter One and Chapter Five). By 2010, impact evidence indicated that a 'Leading from the Middle' approach had embedded in the organisational culture with senior managers operating as individual and team coaches (Chapter Five). In 2015 two major evaluation projects delivered impact evidence to prove the value of developing the middle (Chapter Six and Chapter Seven). The major conclusions, from all these case studies, are that leadership development must have a clear alignment to strategic priorities and the active involvement of senior managers and board members.

#### 8.4.3 How middle managers can be heard

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 appear to come from the past. In all case studies, team projects were designed into the development initiatives. It was important to create a mechanism where middle managers could share their ideas and views and in a constructive manner. Teams had the freedom to scope a research project on a key organisational issue. Senior managers were involved in this scoping to bring a strategic perspective. The outcomes of the research gave middle managers a new voice and new message. The old dynamic was changed.

There is an opportunity for middle managers to improve their role and image by delivering evidence of their capability. Collaborative working and research both deliver measurable impact. 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 collaborative leadership is taken seriously. This cannot work unless there is a radical rethink of what leadership means to all levels in the organisation. The case study research indicates deep contradictions between the intellectual messages about leadership and the practical reality.

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. With a heroic model of leadership there is a worrying compliance between the leader and their followers and the result is very little distribution of authority to frontline staff.

Some practical ways for middle managers to be heard is to find evidence to support ideas and innovations. The case studies proved that Action Research conducted in small multi disciplinary teams could bring innovation solutions and challenge assumptions. The learning reflections of project teams revealed that challenging assumptions (rather than individuals) is a more powerful method of influence. The evidence generated through collaborative research brought change for all stakeholders and improved the quality of dialogue across their organisations.

Collaborative working is powerful especially between professional groups in not for profit organisations. Evaluation findings, from all the case studies consistently focus on human relationships as the major foundation to greater collaboration. Respect, listening and trust were cited consistently as essential components of collaborative leadership. The voices from the middle articulated powerful but practical messages about leadership and human motivation. In Chapter Seven, the message of 'Ubuntu' indicated a commitment to collaborative working. Overall, the case study findings concur with literature findings that mid level managers and professionals are capable of being intermediaries of change and facilitators of excellent frontline performance. In the future, integrated service provision will be directed from external commissioners and sanctioned internally by senior executives and trustees. The people, who understand the practical reality of this direction, are in the middle of the organisation. Collaboration across services and professional groups will prove very difficult without a fundamental change to leadership styles and behaviours.

#### 8.4.4 Leaders or leadership

New pressures facing not for profit organisations bring a timely challenge to thinking about leadership. It is clear from the contextual, theoretical and practical evidence in this book, that leadership and governance have reached a tipping point. A traditional 'top down' leadership culture brings ineffective communication channels and misguided attitudes to power and control. A reliance on heroic leaders and charismatic individuals is already presenting a problem for some not for profit and charitable organisations. A cultural deference to individuals with status and power could bring a slow demise for those organisations that cannot raise income levels or adapt to commercial pressures. The social mission is not the remit of one person or small elite group. The social mission is a collective responsibility, which must not be abdicated when operating conditions become tighter.

In practical terms, it is possible for a highly charismatic person to lead an organisation to success. What happens when this individual leaves the organisation? The danger is that followers have accepted their version of the mission. In practice, the social mission is complex and heterogeneous, just as the society it represents. The leadership of a social mission is a collaborative effort, which builds and sustains relationships between diverse ideas and individuals. Compliance is no longer towards an individual leader but to the social mission of the organisation. Leadership is, therefore, a social process that ensures a diverse group of people accomplish a shared purpose and this can happen at all levels. It is clear that the mid level managers and professionals have the potential to be the new centre of gravity. A transformation of the role and contribution of the middle will bring more voices to champion the social mission and sustain the service values.

The final message of this book is leadership and change. Organisational change is not effected with a 'big bang' message or 'top down' directive. That is a negative form of compliance. Change is fundamentally a human process. In the case studies, change was a shared moment initiated freely by the people involved because they believed in something that was important to them. The contribution of mid level managers and professionals is critical to the future. Their leadership potential is the vital axis that will preserve the social value and, at the same time, facilitate a healthy response to economic sustainability.

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**Voices from the Middle****Why are the voices important? (Chapter Two)**

- Economic pressures are impacting service provision and quality,
- Innovation and new models of service provision will be needed,
- The cost of delivering social mission is rising,
- The need for alternative income streams is driving a commercial agenda,
- Multiple stakeholders and new partnership will need to be collaborative,
- Leadership and governance are under greater scrutiny.

**What can the voices bring? (Chapter Three)**

- Operational expertise to strategic decisions,
- The customer's voice and perspective,
- Knowledge which challenges flawed assumptions,
- Cultural and operational implications of strategic decisions,
- Innovative ideas and practices for service improvement,
- A reminder of the social values and service orientation,
- Experience of leading service professionals.

**How can these voices be developed? (Chapter Four)**

- A systems approach to leadership development,
- Active involvement of senior managers as coaches,
- Engagement of trustees and board members in projects,
- Clear alignment of learning to strategic priorities,
- Practical application of learning to both strategic and operational issues,
- Collaborative ethos and team development,
- Meaningful practical team projects.

**What are the key messages from the voices? (Chapter Five, Six and Seven)**

- Greater involvement in strategic planning,
- More emphasis on reflection and thinking,
- Greater emphasis on human motivation,
- Listening, honesty and respect are key,
- Power of team work and collaboration,
- Social mission is a binding message,
- Change is about people and organisation,
- Importance of shared values to the future.

**What will inhibit these voices?**

- Top down management styles,
- Politics, mistrust and power struggles,
- Assumptions about middle managers,
- Lack of authority at midlevel and frontline,
- Lack of clear mission and timely communications,
- Directive leadership style,
- Board members over involved in operational issues,
- Lack of transparency around key decisions.

**What will encourage these voices?**

- Distributed of leadership to appropriate levels,
- Collaborative working across the organisation,
- Senior managers take a collaborative stance with external stakeholders,
- Board members act as ambassadors and champions,
- Social mission shapes all leadership behaviours,
- Social values and culture are recognised and appreciated,
- Organisational cultures that promote respect,
- High performance teamwork is encouraged.

**8.5 Reflection and learning**

- What are the messages, from both theory and practice, which have helped you to appreciate the capability of middle managers?
- What are the models of leadership that support the empowerment of frontline staff and middle managers?
- What is involved in a radical approach to leadership development that promotes learning at all levels?
- What are your reflections about the 'Blind Spot of Leadership' (Chapter One) after reading this book?

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**Chapter Eight: Learning activity****Personal Development Plan**

At this stage of the book, the reader is invited to think about their personal development. The study of previous chapters will have stimulated your thoughts about your own leadership. The following prompt questions are to help you to think more deeply about leadership and check the assumptions that inhibit your self-belief and confidence.

The questions will help middle managers and mid level professionals to reflect on their current role and identity. Senior managers will also benefit by reflecting on their personal style and its impact on others. Human Resources professionals and Organisation Development specialists may find this learning activity a tool for coaching sessions.

**This is an opportunity to 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 a 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?

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