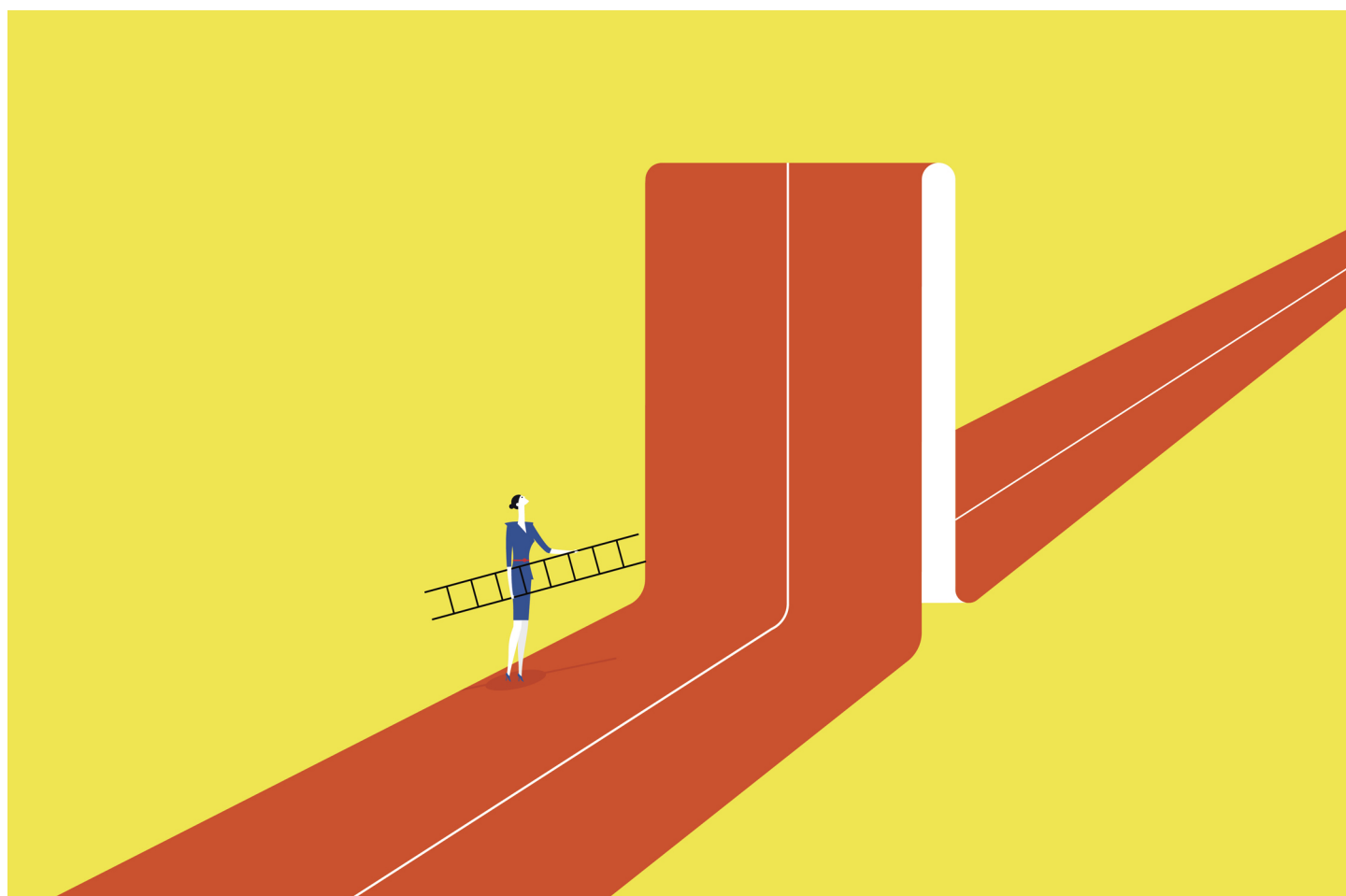# Leadership challenges in turbulent times

About this free course

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course
B329 *Leadership in a changing world*.

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University –

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the free course, *Leadership challenges in turbulent times*. The global financial crisis, Brexit, the election of Trump, artificial intelligence and robots, internet of things, the rise of the power of countries such as China and India, international migrations, climate change, the Arab Spring, the crisis of the European Union and the rise of populism across all of the political spectrum are only a few examples of very different, but disruptive events that have happened in the last ten years of human history. And more will come.

In this course, you will explore leadership in these turbulent times as the world continues to change in disruptive ways. Here, disruptive means a change to something new, which is not incremental or minor.

For successful leadership in any domain – business, public sphere, civil society – you need to understand and adapt to the changing world that brings many challenges. Successful leadership requires you to reconsider what it means to lead in turbulent and precarious times.

In this short course you will have the opportunity to understand and explain how leadership changes in accordance to the needs of turbulent environments. You will also explore the leadership challenges that can affect leadership effectiveness and you will seek ways to face these challenges successfully.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course B329 *Leadership in a changing world*.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course you should be able to:

- understand the concept of leadership and re-evaluate your perception of leadership
- explore and analyse different leadership challenges, and apply different ways to deal with leadership challenges
- evaluate the relationship between leadership and collaboration and examine ways to achieve win/win outcomes in leadership through collaboration.

1 Dealing with leadership challenges

One of the few things that leadership researchers agree on is that a core skill of leaders and of leadership practice is to solve problems (e.g. Grint, 2008; Mumford et al, 2000; Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004). Problems can come in the form of opportunities as well as obstacles, so in this course the term 'challenges' will be used to reflect the complex and interrelated problems that leaders often face in turbulent, changing times.

Figure 1 Overcoming challenges

A leadership challenge is a situation that leaders may face at any level (within a team, organisation and/or society) and in any sector (business, public sphere, civil society) where it is required to provide meaningful direction and mobilise action to achieve a given purpose. Meaningful direction refers to something that makes sense to people and/or an organisation, while action could take different forms such as active endeavours but also resistance.

Leaders may face a wide range of challenges and there are therefore different ways to deal with these challenges. In this section you will be introduced to three steps that help determine the challenge and how it will be addressed.

The first step is to identify the challenges that need to be addressed by the organisation, network or movement. The second step is to prioritise which of the challenges to tackle and the third step is to consider the nature of the challenge and what approach to take to address it.

1.1 Step 1: The challenges leaders and organisations face

To resolve leadership challenges, the first step for leaders is to identify those challenges facing the organisation. As this course focuses on leadership in turbulent times these challenges will have been caused by turbulence and emerging organisational and societal needs. The concept of turbulence refers to 'situations where events, demands, and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways' (Ansell and Trondal, 2018, p. 43).

Within an organisational context, turbulence may be external and/or internal:

- External – turbulent environments. Turbulence may be produced by factors external to organisations such as legal rulings, accidents, rapid technological change, wars, protests or partisan conflict.
- Internal – turbulent organisations. Turbulence may be embedded into organisations and institutions through factional conflict, staff turnover, conflicting rules, internal reform or complex operations.

(Ansell and Trondal, 2018)

Given the nature and depth of change, uncertainty and interdependence in the present day – whether as a condition or as a dysfunction – turbulence is hardly limited to single crises or events. Turbulence might be a normal and enduring, yet unrecognised, permanent feature of contemporary business, politics and civil society.

Figure 2 Leaders face numerous challenges. The first step is identifying those challenges

You will now look at how to identify the leadership challenges being faced using Family for Every Child (commonly known as 'Family'), a global network of organisations whose aim is to improve the lives of vulnerable children, as a case study.

Activity 1 Identifying leadership challenges

Allow 30 minutes

Watch Amanda Griffith, Chief Executive Officer of Family for Every Child, explain the type of challenges that Family faces.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1

Based on the challenges Amanda Griffith addresses in the video, drag and drop each to the examples which illustrates the particular challenge.

Violence in the home

The need to access education or work

Problems such as drug and alcohol misuse in the home

Prevent unnecessary loss of family care

Offer a high quality alternative when family care is not available

Offer a protective environment for children

Children who live on the streets

Children involved in domestic labour

Children who are trafficked

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Children having to leave home

Children having to leave home

Children having to leave home

Create a system of holistic care for children

Create a system of holistic care for children

Create a system of holistic care for children

Children completely outside of any form of care

Children completely outside of any form of care

Children completely outside any form of care

Feedback

The first set of challenges mentioned is caused by children having to leave home. Amanda mentions violence in the home, the need to access education or work and also problems such as drug and alcohol misuse in the home.

She then talks about the challenges of where children are cared for if they are not living at home. She mentions orphanages but points out that many children in them are not orphans and such institutions do not exist in many parts of the world.

Then she mentions foster care and adoption and states that in many countries this is a small part of care. Most of the care carried out is what is called 'kinship care' offered by grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives.

Her third set of challenges are connected to children and young people who are outside any of these forms of adult care and include children who are trafficked, live on the streets, are involved in domestic labour or completely outside of any form of care.

The overarching challenge facing Family is to help create a system of care for children that includes the informal kinship care and the care offered by the State and to do so in a way that offers a protective environment for children, prevents unnecessary loss of family care and offers a high quality alternative when family care is not available.

The challenges facing Family for Every Child are complex and inter-related. In the video, Amanda Griffith describes three connected challenges – addressing the reasons why children leave their family home; addressing the alternatives to family care, particularly kinship care; and then addressing the needs of children who have no form of care and are among the most vulnerable in the world. These are all part of a challenge to create an integrated system of formal and informal care that protects all children. Amanda mentions that there is different provision in different countries so one of the other challenges they face is finding approaches and offering advice that is relevant in different countries.

Family for Every Child is a civil society organisation, and specifically a charity, so its purpose is to tackle the complex issues facing children across the world. However, these complex challenges are not particular to charities and organisations with a social purpose. Most businesses, large and small, face inter-connected challenges.

These include, for example, what the next innovation or change that will affect the businesses and markets they work in is, how turbulence and change will affect those markets, what and who the new markets and customers to target will be, how existing customers will be kept satisfied, and what skills and people they will need to meet all these needs. On top of this there will be issues about environmental sustainability, social responsibility and regulation that all create new challenges.

So the first step is to identify these challenges. The second step is to prioritise which ones to deal with.

1.2 Step 2: Prioritising leadership challenges

As you saw in th previous section, the first step can lead to a long list of complex challenges facing the organisation. All organisations have limits on their resources in terms of money, materials, equipment and people. Often organisations, such as Family, which address some of the most serious challenges facing society, have very limited resources. They therefore need to prioritise their challenges.

Figure 3 How do you prioritise challenges?

What you can afford to do is clearly one of the ways to prioritise, but this rarely solves the issue of which particular challenge to prioritise. Leaders therefore need other frames that will help them prioritise. The next activity will help you identify how an organisation approaches prioritisation.

Activity 2 Setting priorities
Allow 30 minutes

Watch Amanda Griffith, Chief Executive Officer of Family for Every Child, explain Family's approach to prioritisation.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 2

Note down the approaches Amanda talks about in the text box below.

Provide your answer...

Feedback

Amanda begins by saying there is a need to focus on the area where you can affect change. Family is an organisation which works directly with practitioners, that is the people who work directly with children. So in terms of their focus, it is on supporting practitioners.

The next thing they do is look at the drivers that are leading to the challenge they are facing. Amanda talks about a revolving door where many of the solutions to challenges are short-term, for example getting children off the street, only for them to be back on the street in a short time. She stresses the importance of identifying the drivers that cause the situation in the first place, which results in this revolving door scenario, and says that these are often complex.

This is a general approach to addressing the challenges the organisation wishes to tackle. They then begin to prioritise between the different challenges. The first point Amanda mentions is those challenges that are core to their identity and values. This is where she talks about prioritising challenges that are slightly disruptive, which challenge the traditional way of doing things and are often taboo issues that other agencies do not tackle. Here, she also talks about capturing knowledge that often resides in individual organisations at local level but is not shared. So the organisation seeks challenges where they are able to bring new knowledge and/or challenges that other organisations are not addressing.

This activity has provided some useful criteria for prioritising challenges:

- they should be aligned to the focus of the organisation and how it can affect change
- the drivers that create the challenge should be addressed

- addressing the challenge should add value to the wider system in which the organisation operates
- addressing the challenge should be clearly linked to the organisation's identity and values.

1.3 Step 3: Types of leadership challenges: tame, wicked and critical challenges

You may have come across the idea of tame, wicked and critical challenges before. The terminology 'challenges' is used here to emphasise that leaders can face opportunities as well as problems. In both instances you need to be able to categorise the challenge to know how it can be tackled most effectively.

Figure 4 Tame, critical and wicked challenges

Tame challenges are solvable, they are likely to have been solved by someone before. They can be complicated but they have a solution. They are the sort of challenges that need a technical, scientific or highly skilled response. Keith Grint, Emeritus Professor of Public Leadership at Warwick University, gives the examples of: timetabling the railways, building a nuclear plant, training the army, planned heart surgery or wage negotiations (Grint, 2010, p. 169). His advice to leaders facing tame challenges is to find an individual or group who have successfully solved the challenge before and delegate the task to them.

Wicked challenges are not just complicated but complex. They are normally caused by many different factors in the environment. There is no clear relationship between cause and effect but many different elements lead to the problematic situation. Because of this the challenges are uncertain and may never be fully solved – for example, high levels of crime are caused by a complex interaction between culture, societal pressures, economic policies, housing, criminal justice policies, education, social care and health and well-being. Tackling one of these issues will not solve the challenge of high crime rates and it is questionable whether it will ever be solved in terms of a society achieving a zero crime rate.

Grint says these challenges need to be addressed collaboratively. He makes the point that, in business, people often want leaders who quickly come to a decision about a course of action. But, according to Grint, wicked challenges require the transfer of authority from individual to collective because only collective engagement can hope to address the challenge.

> The uncertainty involved in Wicked Challenges imply that leadership, as I am defining it, is not a science but an art – the art of engaging a community in facing up to complex collective problems.

(Grint, 2010, p. 171)

One of the key skills of addressing these types of challenges is to be able to ask the 'right' questions, not give the right answers. By this he means open, probing questions that get to the heart of the issues and encourage people to work together on possible solutions.

Grint's third category is critical challenges. Critical challenges are crises. They need urgent action. The leader acts as a commander and dictates the response to the situation. Authoritarian leaders can create a sense of crisis so that their solution will be readily accepted by their followers.

The following activity will help you explore the difference between tame, wicked and critical challenges.

Activity 3 Categorising leadership challenges
Allow 45 minutes

Read the brief description of each of the challenges below and, in the second column decide whether it is a tame, wicked or critical challenge.

The challenges Family faces have been included in the activity as examples.

> Interactive content is not available in this format.

Feedback

Challenge 1: responding to the challenge of flooding is a critical challenge as the urgency of the issue dictates what can be done about it. The leader or leaders need to take command and dictate the response to the challenge. However, you might remember Amanda's advice in Video 2 about identifying the drivers of the challenge. In this case, responding to the immediate challenge is likely to create a revolving door where the challenge re-occurs in the future, so there is almost certainly a tame or wicked challenge affecting the crisis.

Challenge 2: Family's challenge in creating an organisation that works remotely is a tame challenge even though it is complex. There are other organisations that have successfully addressed this challenge. So the response should be to delegate responding to the challenge to an individual or group who can find out how other organisations have approached the challenge.

Challenge 3: how to develop international guidance on preventing sexual violence to boys is a wicked challenge because the challenge has largely been ignored and there are complex drivers within societies that create the challenge. You may think parts of the challenge are more tame because there are organisations that are already tackling this issue. You might also remember Amanda's advice in Video 2 about understanding the drivers of the situation. This challenge would require a collaborative approach involving different groups with an expertise and interest in the challenge. The main task for the leader is to ask questions about the challenge rather than to come up with solutions.

Challenge 4: using virtual reality as part of a university course is a tame challenge as other universities in other parts of the world have solved the challenge. The approach would be to delegate the challenge to a group or individual and task them with contacting other universities who have dealt with the challenge.

Challenge 5: the organisation that has lost one of its main contracts and will not be able to pay its staff in three months time faces a critical challenge. Action needs to be taken now so staff can be paid and the leader needs to act decisively. However, as with Challenge 1, there is almost certainly an underlying driver that caused this situation

which may be a tame challenge, if other organisations have already solved it, or a wicked challenge.

In this section you have learned how to deal with different leadership challenges. However, when looking at leadership challenges in turbulent contexts, you cannot ignore the role of diversity and inclusiveness. It is this that you will look at next.

2 Recognising inclusiveness and diversity

Diversity refers to demographic differences among members (McGrath et al., 1995), identity differences among group members in relation to other groups (Cox, 1993), as well as to differences in perspectives resulting in potential behavioural differences among cultural groups.

As the UK Home Office (2018) states, 'Diversity is about recognising the value of difference'. These can be observable and non-observable differences. As Frances Milliken and Luis Martins (1996), two academic researchers, explain, gender, race, ethnicity and age are some observable differences while cultural, cognitive and technical differences are non-observable.
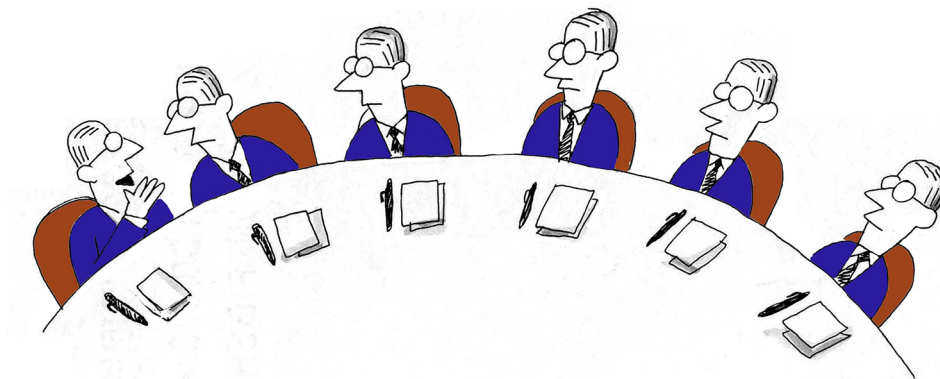
"Diversity is good. Pass it down."

Figure 5 Differences amongst team members can bring informational diversity to an organisation

Although this exploration of diversity is enlightening, it highlights mostly the need to observe differences among people. Michalle E. Mor Barak (2017), an academic researcher, emphasises the need to utilise differences. Diversity allows you to embrace and use the different ideas, perspectives, expertises, life experiences and cultural backgrounds that people bring in a task, team, organisation or community. It is about empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different.

Teams can be beneficial because members' different knowledge base, perfectives, expertise and backgrounds bring informational diversity. Societies, organisations and teams, however, often fail to fully unitise informational diversity because of issues with team formation and information exchange. More particularly, instead of harnessing the benefits of diverse teams by including individuals with different expertise, opinions and viewpoints, societies, organisations and teams tend to select team members based on similarity and proximity. But this should not surprise us, as Barak (2017) explains, our natural inclinations when choosing teammates hinders our ability to harness the benefits of diversity.

2.1 Exploring inclusiveness

People are often too busy thinking about their own point of view that they cannot see the point of view of others. People also tend to *judge* the ideas of others rather than trying to *understand* them. As Barak (2017) explains, we have difficulty accepting that others may achieve the same result in a different or a better way.

Figure 6 Diversity can help to find creative solutions to problems

However, having a variety of different people from various backgrounds together is important in order to find and implement creative solutions to problems. Thinking outside the 'box' and interacting with diverse people improves people's ability to work in a diverse and turbulent environment, characterised by different styles, personalities and cultures. You will explore this more in the activity below.

Activity 4 Looking beyond the dots
Allow 35 minutes
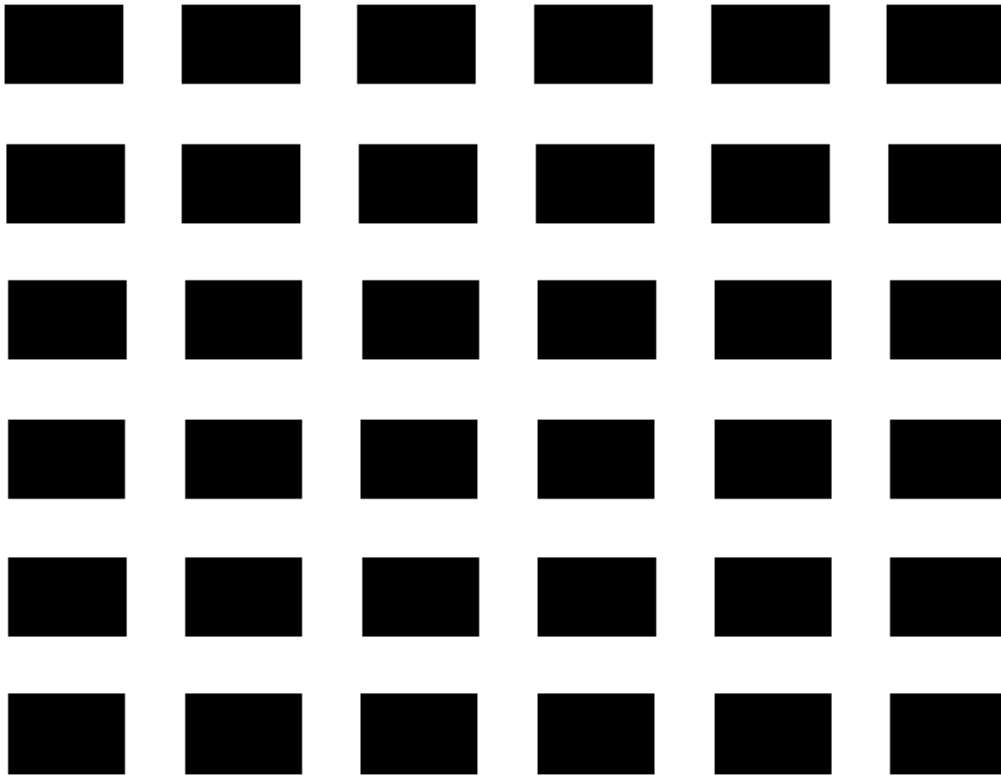
Look at the Herman Grid below.

Figure 7 Herman Grid

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Feedback

The aim of this activity is to highlight that first impressions are not always true. The dots that you may think you see in the Herman Grid are an illusion, artefacts of the human visual system. In reality, the dots do not exist.

In a similar way, in your daily life you may have to go beyond the boundaries, beyond the expected or the obvious in order to be able to interact with people from different backgrounds, ethnicities or cultures. This is actually quite common in today's world, which is characterised by diversity. You must therefore be ready to go beyond first impressions and look more deeply to understand and value diversity.

Making the most of diversity in staff and people is usually called inclusiveness. It increases the depth and range of behaviours, capabilities and skills that an organisation or a society can use in order to respond to the needs of a turbulent environment. In fact, a leader who is able to manage and engage a company's heterogeneous workforce can obtain a unique competitive advantage and deal with leadership challenges more effectively. As you will see in the next activity, an organisation becomes an inclusive workplace when it accepts and makes use of the diversity of its workforce.

Activity 5 Exploring inclusiveness in leadership
Allow 20 minutes

Watch the video at the link below on 'global inclusion' by Ernest Gundling, co-founder and managing partner at Aperian Global. You should open the video in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished. **Video 3**

What does Gundling mean by 'global inclusion'? Select all that apply.

☐ To include people of different race and gender

☐ To work together with people from different functions and generations

☐ To be ready to cross the barriers

☐ To find ways to include people from an expert area to help in other areas

☐ To invite the unexpected

☐ To look for new sources of information

Feedback

All the answers are relevant in the way that Gundling addresses global inclusion. In this video, Gundling discusses global inclusion, which he says not only refers to race and gender, but to areas such as functional and generational differences. For example, being a technical expert doesn't mean you don't have an opinion on marketing, sales or other areas that you don't have a strong knowledge or engagement with. In this example you need to be ready to cross the barriers and find ways to include technical experts to help the company in other areas too.

Gundling also offers some strategies that leaders can use for inclusion, such as to look for new sources of information, challenge their assumptions, ask people to think about their network so as to expand it, and invite the unexpected.

Barak (2017) defines an inclusive workplace as one that:

- **Values and utilises the differences of the individual and groups**.

  Ultimately, it will aim to modify the organisational values and norms to accommodate its employees.

- **Works with the surrounding community and contributes to the community.**

  The organisation acknowledges that it does not have responsibility only to its stakeholders but to the wider society.

- **Works with individuals, groups and organisations from a variety of national and cultural backgrounds.**

  The organisation seeks to develop international collaborations so as to further expand the possibility for diversity.

- **Seeks ways to support disadvantaged groups.**

  The organisation will seek to hire and train people that are perceived as belonging to disadvantageous groups.

You will probably notice that Barak goes a step further than Gundling – who speaks about internal inclusion – and also presents the importance of external inclusion.

In order for a leader to achieve inclusion in a global and turbulent environment, they need to look at both internal and external inclusion. They need to find ways and practices to accept, welcome and equally treat groups or individuals that are coming from different

backgrounds, and at the same time respond to the needs of their community or organisation.

Being aware of the challenges and advantages of diversity and inclusiveness, you will next explore how leaders can lead beyond established boundaries and bring diverse people together, aiming for inclusion and better appreciation of leadership challenges.

2.2 Harnessing diversity

In their article, 'Great leaders who make the mix work ' (2013), Boris Groysberg, an academic researcher, and Katherine Connolly, a research associate in the organisational behaviour unit at Harvard Business School (HBS), discuss the importance of diversity and inclusivity.

Figure 8 Diversity and inclusion within the workplace

Groysberg and Connolly explain that diversity should be perceived as an investment in the most important assets of the organisation's balance sheet, the people. Diversity is about investing in people. Diversity is necessary because it allows an organisation to stay competitive, to seek the best possible ideas and solutions and continue to innovate and grow. Moreover, by harnessing diversity employees feel valued and, therefore, are more willing to support the aims of the organisation, serve the customers and work together.

At the same time, diversity may create dissent and challenge people's way of thinking, getting them into deep inquiry or breakthrough.

Groysberg and Connolly present eight organisational practices that seem to be effective at harnessing diversity:

1. **Measure diversity and inclusion**: be aware of the level of diversity in the organisation. Collect data to measure what you are doing well and what can be improved in order to make the organisation a more diverse place.
2. **Hold managers accountable**: diversity and inclusion should be among the goals of the organisation. For example, incorporate them as part of the manager's professional development, ask them to get involved or offer them training.

3. **Support flexible work arrangements**: offer benefits that help employees balance professional and personal commitments, provide greater flexibility of working hours, allow transitional periods, offer childcare support etc.

4. **Recruit and promote from diverse pools of candidates**: searching for talent at the hiring stage is the starting point but it is also very important to maintain this talent afterwards.

5. **Provide leadership education**: provide leadership development opportunities for everyone in the organisation and seek to support less advantageous or represented groups. Offer diversity training and opportunities for external education and development.

6. **Sponsor employee resource groups and mentoring programs**: offer less structural approaches to professional development through resource groups, networks, mentoring programs etc.

7. **Offer quality role models**: a varied array of leaders indicates that an organisation is committed to diversity and offers role models to identify with.

8. **Make the position of the chief diversity officer count**: create a chief diversity and inclusion officer position and ask for the CEO to maximise its effectiveness.

(Groysberg and Connolly, 2013)

So far you have seen how to deal with leadership challenges in turbulent times by following a three step process and making use of inclusiveness and diversity.

You will now focus on how to navigate through leadership challenges and achieve positive outcomes through collaboration. To put this differently, you will address the question – how does leadership help individuals, teams and organisations collaborate to achieve good outcomes for all – a positive-sum outcome? The idea of 'better together' is one that many would agree with in principle, but in practice achieving good outcomes for all – or the common good - is by no means easy.

3 Leadership as a positive-sum game

In order for leadership to be able to achieve a positive outcome for all the stakeholders involved (positive-sum game), the idea of 'better together' and the meaning of collaboration becomes central.

Figure 9 Leadership as a game

The concept of collaboration is explored in many different fields. Disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science and management all focus on collaboration, but interpret the term differently and from different perspectives (i.e. corporate, institutional, social, economic, political etc). For instance, in biology, living organisms collaborating means maximising the long-term opportunities for their genes. In contrast, technological studies view collaboration in terms of collaborative software packages that facilitate action-oriented teams working together over geographic distances by providing tools which promote communication, cooperation and problem solving.

In music, collaboration may describe the participation of many people in one concert, album or performance. In research, collaboration can be defined as researchers working together to produce new scientific knowledge.

In organisational literature, 'collaboration is treated as a broad concept in scope and, not surprisingly, even the most basic terminology – such as "partnership", "alliance", and "collaboration"– is subject to a wide variety of interpretations, and while many authors create specific definitions for their own purposes, there is no consistency of usage across the field' (Huxham and Vangen, 2001, p. 1).

All these interpretations demonstrate that there is not one accepted definition of collaboration. Instead, as Christina S. Beck (2006, p. 200), an academic researcher, said 'collaboration can mean everything from simply sharing information/opinion or 'working together' to striving to arrive at win/win outcomes of conflict, to a specific means of regarding relational partners in interaction'.

A more simple definition of collaboration given by the Oxford Dictionary, however, is: 'collaboration is the act of working together with another person or group of people to create or produce something.'

It may be logical to assume that, to some degree, everyone wants to be collaborative and be able to work with other people, but sometimes this may be difficult. This is a skill that is not easily taught. In schools, teachers often assign group tasks, but students usually do not get guidance on how to work together and quite often a few members of the group do

all of the work. Some people are naturals at collaborating, but others have to make an effort to leave their ego on the side and collaborate.

3.1 Leadership games

Game theorists claim that they can predict human behaviour and the outcomes of that behaviour by determining the rules of social games. They divide the games of social life into three categories – positive-sum, negative-sum and zero-sum.

Business and management writers have applied the idea of these three types of games to organisational life. The metaphor of game-playing can provide useful insight into leadership behaviours and their intended outcomes.

Box 1 Positive-sum game, zero-sum game and negative-sum game

Positive-sum game

Positive-sum leadership games achieve good outcomes for all – a win/win scenario that increases resources for all players.

Examples:

- Ben spots an opportunity to tender for a new project. He calls round his contacts to propose that they develop a joint bid.
- Yin leads employment negotiations, determined to achieve a salary raise for workers *and* increased productivity for the employer.

Zero-sum game

Zero-sum leadership games ensure that one individual, group, team, or organisation wins at the expense of others – a win/lose scenario in which resources remain the same but are transferred from one party to another.

Examples:

- Sadie's department has high ambitions. In the annual budget negotiations she argues that only her department can achieve the organisation's targets. She leaves the negotiations with a promotion, and a higher budget settlement. Her fellow-department heads are disgruntled to lose out in the budget settlement, but acknowledge that Sadie made a reasonable case.
- Paolo negotiates more space for his growing sales team at the expense of the training team who lose their break-out room.

Negative-sum game

Negative-sum leadership games are games of survival played out in a fiercely competitive environment where the total resource is decreasing – in this scenario even the winner only just survives; the loser is in serious trouble and may not survive at all.

Example:

- Josef leads the contract negotiations for his small cleaning company. He is shocked to find that the overall value of the contract has reduced by 30%. He meets behind the scenes with the contract holder and convinces him to award his

company 70% of the total contract, even though it was previously shared 50/50 with a competitor organisation. Both have lost out, but at least Josef's organisation has lost out slightly less than it would have done now that it has a bigger share of the contract.

These different kinds of games emerge in leadership behaviours, but also through the ways that people talk about leadership. Different situations require leaders to bring forward different aspects of their leadership, engaging in different games. You will look at this more in the following activity.

The strategies of different sports – team work, cooperation, competition, individualism, passing, holding back, supporting, encouraging, tricking – provide pictures or metaphors of leadership. The next activities will help you to begin to think about different leadership strategies through the metaphors of games and sports, addressing positive, negative, and zero-sum approaches to leadership.

Figure 10 Which game are your leaders playing?

Activity 6 What kind of games are they playing this week?
Allow 15 minutes

Consider the sports in the list below and drag each to either the 'Team sports' or Individual sports' column. Feel free to add sports that are not included in the text box below.

Now think of the organisation you are working for, or have worked for, or a team you are, or were, a member of. Which game or sport most resembles the leadership games played in your organisation/team?

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Feedback

Table 1 Team and individual sports

Team sports	Individual sports
Climbing	Boxing
Relay race	Darts
Hockey	Kungfu
Cricket	Bowling
Rugby	Chess
Basketball	Golf
Lacrosse	Wrestling
Football	Running

Some games involve teams, others are individualistic; some are games of strategy that take place over time, others involve a speedy race to the finishing point; some games require cooperation as well as competition.

Rowing and cycling, two sports Team GB has achieved success in recent years, illustrate well how competitive sports can be dependent on cooperation between team members, on and off the race course. A relay race also illustrates the importance of cooperation – not just in those short moments in which the baton is handed over, but in reality in the hours, weeks and months of working together to prepare for those moments. Climbing is the sport in which the individual is perhaps most evidently dependent on others, who literally provide the support to ensure that no one falls. In contrast, tennis, chess and boxing are more individualistic, with one person emerging as champion; however, even these games require teamwork behind the scenes.

You have started thinking of potential individual and team sports that take place in your organisation and you have probably started thinking of how these affect your work and your collaboration (or not) with others. You will now explore in more depth the leadership games that play in your organisation.

Activity 7 What kind of leadership games play at your organisation?
Allow 15 minutes

You will now return to the definitions of positive, negative, and zero-sum games. Are the leadership games in your organisation (mostly) positive, negative, or zero-sum games?

Select from the radio buttons below.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Feedback
Your answer to this question is likely to depend not only on the people engaged in leadership, but also on the organisational context. The situations that leaders experience will affect the skills, styles, identities or activities they use in different

organisational contexts. For example, in an organisation that is struggling against the odds to survive, leadership can become seriously, even ruthlessly, competitive as individuals struggle to maintain position. The game becomes a zero-sum one when individuals conclude that they can only maintain their position at the expense of others; and a negative-sum game when everyone loses out due to the breakdown of relationships and destructive behaviours that can take hold in such an environment.

Game-playing is a useful metaphor for understanding leadership behaviour and strategies, and the kind of objectives that those strategies achieve. It also gives an insight into how people talk about leadership. But, how can leadership increase the likelihood of positive-sum or win/win outcomes for all from collaborative working? You will look at this next.

3.2 Leadership for win/win outcomes

Win/win outcomes are hard to achieve from collaboration, even when leaders engage in activities that support collaboration - e.g. build trust; develop personal relationships; create a common vision and put people at the centre of the collaboration strategy. Even so, as a leadership strategy, collaboration holds huge potential for delivering something that individuals and organisations struggle to achieve alone.

Figure 11 Working together

In the next activity, you will explore collaborative leadership strategies for positive-sum outcomes.

Activity 8 Achieving win/win outcomes
Allow 30 minutes

1. Think about a recent time in which you, your team, or organisation collaborated with another individual, team, or organisation to achieve something new. Your example could come from your work or study experiences or from family life or your leisure time.

    For example, two community groups might collaborate to share the rental on a new building, so both improve the environment in which they operate. Teams from different organisations might partner in a bidding process in an attempt to develop a new project and increase resources for them both. Organisations might agree to share back-office functions in order to reduce overheads.

    Select in which of the boxes below you would position the outcomes of the example of collaboration that you have chosen.

Win/win	**Win/lose**
We achieved something new together, *and* something positive for each of us.	We achieved something new together, but at considerable cost to each of us.
- 'Collaborative advantage'	
Lose/win	**Lose/lose**
We achieved very little together in spite of best efforts, but there was some benefit to my team/organisation.	We achieved nothing new, in spite of committing time and other resources.
	- 'Collaborative inertia'

Figure 12 Possible outcomes

Feedback

A key challenge for leadership of teams and organisations is to identify strategies that increase the likelihood of achieving outcomes in the positive-sum or win/win box. You will reflect on possible strategies next.

2. With the advantage of hindsight, what kind of leadership practices might have helped to push the outcomes into the win/win box, or, if they are already in the win/win box, what practices might have increased the wins for all partners? Tick all of those that you consider might have made a difference. You can also add practices of your own to this list in the blank boxes.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Feedback

It is not at all easy to predict which leadership practices lead to win/win outcomes from collaboration, in fact, leaders will adapt a different style and relevant leadership practices based on the situation they experience.

For example, it isn't automatically true that listening more and shouting less will achieve better outcomes as there is sometimes a need for dissent and confrontation. However, it is difficult to achieve positive outcomes through collaboration without giving attention to growing and nurturing the relationships between collaboration partners.

Collaboration by no means leads to automatic win/win outcomes. For example, some years ago, Carol, part of the Business School at The Open University, was part of an interagency team developing family support programmes and activities in a locality where the data showed that children were achieving less than their peers in adjoining localities. All of the team members were middle managers with heavy responsibilities. Senior managers imposed high targets and introduced a process of performance management and accountability by which the team was to achieve those targets. After the initial pilot period, Carol and the team held a launch event where they shared their accountability framework with senior managers and colleagues, and showed video evidence to demonstrate how families valued the interventions that had been set up. To the team's immense relief, the event went well, and senior managers were positive about what had been achieved through the process they had prescribed.

However, those managers were unaware that Carol and the team had in fact by-passed the prescribed performance management process, or at least moulded it to meet their own ends. They were able to do this because they had a history of working together, were able to speak honestly with one another, and spent time on building the relationships between group members in a context where they recognised that they each felt under enormous pressure to perform. They drank lots of coffee together, and got to know each other better over lunch, whilst also developing a shared plan of action. In other words, Carol and the team focused on relationships *and* on achieving outcomes, and on this occasion were able to develop both – a win/win solution all round.

Despite this example, there are other occasions when, in spite of best endeavours, working collaboratively means negotiating around tricky relationships, and being prepared for relationship breakdowns in order to achieve the aims of the organisation – possibly at a cost to your partners. In these difficult contexts, the best outcome would be that the organisation would 'win' and the partners would not lose too much in the process.

Conclusion

In this free course, *Leadership challenges in turbulent times*, you have explored some of the challenges that surround leadership in a changing and complex world. More particularly, you have looked at how to deal with leadership challenges and how to make use of inclusivity and diversity. You have also discussed the meaning and importance of collaboration in general and in relation to leadership, exploring how leadership can achieve positive-sum outcomes in turbulent and precarious times through collaboration.

Key points

- A core skill of leaders and of leadership practice is to decide on which of the many challenges facing organisations and communities to focus on and to understand the nature of those leadership challenges.

- Since it is quite common to lead people from different backgrounds, ethnicities or cultures, leadership must be expressed through inclusion and diversity. Developing a culture of inclusiveness and harnessing diversity allows leaders to use differences and go beyond established boundaries to deal with leadership challenges.

- Collaboration is an important strategy for leadership as it enables leaders to bring people together and seek the best way to achieve aims or solutions to problems. Despite the different games at play in every organisation, community or team, leadership should aim to achieve positive-sum games (a win/win scenario that increases resources for all players) and this can be accomplished through collaboration.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course B329 *Leadership in a changing world*.

Glossary

Turbulence:

situations where events, demands and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways.

Diversity:

demographic differences among members; differences in perspectives resulting in potential behavioural differences among cultural groups; identity differences among group members in relation to other groups. In a leadership context, diversity is about recognising the value of difference, about embracing and using the different ideas, perspectives, expertises, life experiences and cultural backgrounds that people bring in a task, team, organisation or community.

Inclusiveness:

achieving good outcomes for all – a win/win scenario that increases resources for all members.

Zero-sum leadership:

ensuring that one individual, group, team, or organisation wins at the expense of others – a win/lose scenario in which resources remain the same but are transferred from one party to another.

Positive-sum leadership:

achieving good outcomes for all – a win/win scenario that increases resources for all members.

Negative-sum leadership:

ensuring survival in a fiercely competitive environment where the total resource is decreasing – in this scenario even the winner only just survives; the loser is in serious trouble and may not survive at all.

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Reiter-Palmon, R. and Illies, J. J. (2004) 'Leadership and creativity: Understanding leadership from a creative problem-solving perspective', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 55–77.

Further reading

If you would like to explore leadership challenges and the ideas of inclusiveness, diversity and leadership as a positive-sum game that we discussed in this course further, you may consider the following readings:

Bolden, R., Witzel, M. and Linacre, N. eds. (2016) *Leadership paradoxes: Rethinking leadership for an uncertain world*, London, Routledge.

Hollander, E. P. (2009) *Inclusive leadership: The essential leader-follower relationship*, New York: Routledge.

Jackson, B., and K. Parry (2018) *A very short fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about studying leadership*, 3rd edn. London, Sage.

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Vangen, S. and Huxham, C. (2003) 'Enacting leadership for colabrorative advantage: dilemmas of ideology and pragmatism in the activities of partnership managers', *British Journal of Management*, vol. 14(S), pp. 61–76.

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