

## Clinical leadership

### About leading

Leading is a journey, a voyage of self-discovery. As with all things in life – quality improvement, education, physiology – it is critical to develop your leadership through feedback. Do not expect to be an effective leader just because someone has appointed you head of service or similar. Leadership develops over time through practice, testing out different approaches in different settings, and reviewing what works (or not). You can read about leadership, which might be useful to gain some initial insights. There are also courses you can go on, but ultimately it's about living leadership in the real world. You will need to be brave, willing to make mistakes and learn from them.

### First know yourself

You will find it hard to lead if you are not self-aware. You may wish to undertake some form of self-evaluation to work out what makes you tick and what your strengths and weaknesses are. There is a wide range of tools you might find helpful, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or Belbin Team Roles. Be aware that there are a lot of companies out there trying to make a profit out of these tools – you should be able to get access free of charge, at least for starters. Ask your organisation development team if they can help.

When you complete one of these personality inventories, you will be asked to self-assess and also gain perspectives from colleagues with whom you work. You should try to get feedback from a wide range of people, not just the folk that you think might be kind! Be brave and seek out perspectives from those who might be critical – you might be surprised! You will also learn more about how you are perceived – what is in your head might not be what other people think.

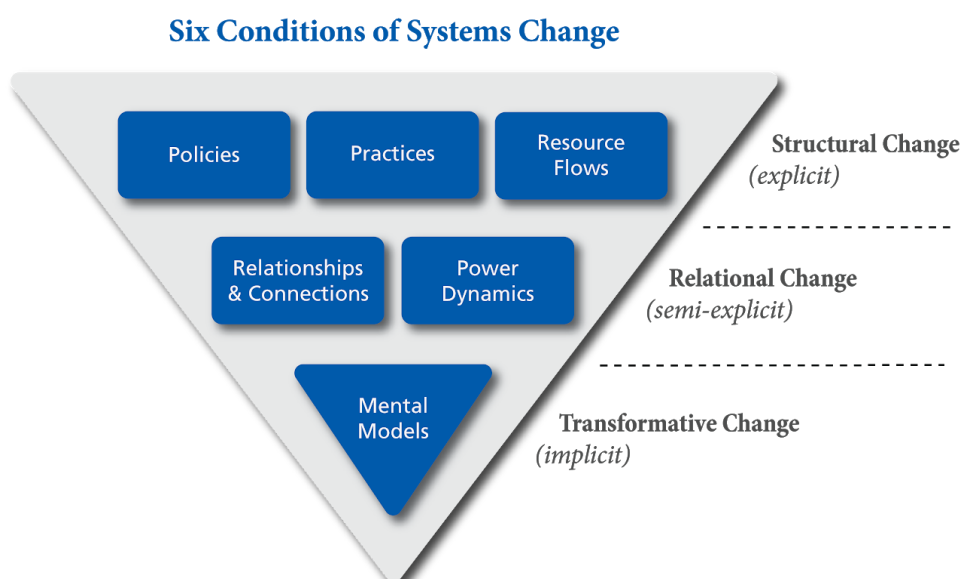
Whichever personality inventory you use, remember that these are just guides to your preferred role/style, as well as the roles that you prefer not to adopt. In reality, you will need to use different leadership styles in different settings. It is about developing an awareness of how you are behaving in a given situation, and being able to recognise when you are not making progress and to try a different approach.

### People and vision

Successful leaders are authentic, open, honest and transparent. They are also reliable – they do what they say they are going to do. These characteristics help develop trust, which is critical if people are to come with you on a journey. You will only bring people with you if they can understand and get behind a vision. The vision should not just be your vision (although that might be what motivates you internally), but a vision that is developed by your team. A good approach to developing a shared common vision is to undertake a group activity in which people can privately write down what they perceive the problems to be with your service, and suggest solutions. All these different ideas can then be themed together, and eventually, an overall vision will emerge, which will have a sense of collective ownership. Not everybody will get what they want all of the time, but they will have been heard, and that is important.

A good way of structuring the team's thoughts is to use a driver diagram, which will contain the big ideas, as well as the smaller ideas that will form Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. Some will be impactful and feasible and will be tested earlier on, others less feasible or impactful, but will get addressed over time. You will need to meet briefly but regularly – say every two weeks – to review how you are progressing. All of these conversations and interactions are about building the team and building trust within the team. Only when there is trust will you be able to have open and honest discussions about what is working, or not (Figure 1).

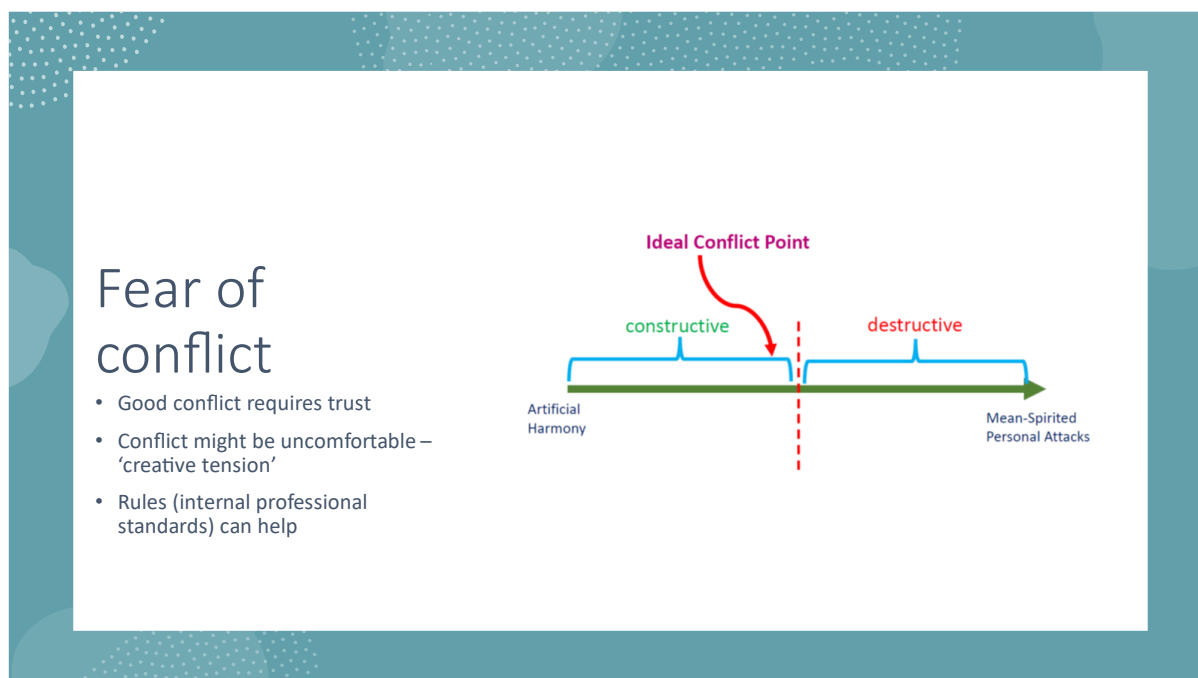
Figure 1 Increasing trust leading to mature conversations



## Trust

As above, trust needs to be earned – but it can also be built, sometimes very quickly. There are lots of team exercises that you can undertake to help build trust. One example comes from Lencioni, who speaks of common vs earned trust. Common trust is the day-to-day trust that we take for granted, such as obeying the lights at a road crossing. Vulnerability-based trust is earned and given, typically with the leader going first and admitting their vulnerability (doesn't matter about the specifics, but be brave and honest). Vulnerability-based trust develops the belief that people can take risks, ask for help, admit mistakes, confront or hold each other to account without fear of retaliation, humiliation or resentment. This allows for mature critical conversations and for the team to exploit 'creative tension' (Figure 2).

Figure 2 'Creative tension'



A team that is at this stage of maturity will be able to have robust discussions and disagree, but still commit to a joint endeavour - team goals trump personal goals. Internal disagreements are welcome, but be consistent externally.

Identifying a clinical lead for the project is crucial, part of their role will be engaging clinicians and encouraging them to be involved in the project's success.

As the clinical lead you should be involved throughout the process. Your role is to demonstrate the benefits of the improvement for patients, other staff and stakeholders as well as the organisation. Clinical leads should be well informed as a key part of the project team and champion the change communicating the project aim through their networks.

### Top tips

- Get fully involved in the project, make sure you understand it and promote it to others.
- Regularly attend project meetings or even chair them. Make sure meetings are aligned to your schedule.
- Ensure the project team schedule project meetings to fit into your job plan, avoiding clinic schedules, ward rounds etc.
- Attend learning events with the wider team.
- Get involved in reviewing data, developing best practice processes etc.

- Share progress with peers and influence others to get on board with the change
- Take personal responsibility to help break down any barriers and make time to help ensure the change is successful
- Where possible negotiate time in your job plan to lead the project
- Utilise project support to help with admin tasks

### Summary

Leadership is a process and takes time and energy. Know yourself, get to know others. Develop trust and a shared common vision. Review constantly, seek out feedback and different perspectives. Be brave and good luck!



**Professor Simon Conroy, Clinical Lead, NHS Elect**