

Five attributes of effective leadership within the SFPC programme

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Executive Summary

Leadership has a huge influence on the successful implementation of any innovation. This learning report describes five attributes of effective leadership, which were gathered through interviews with leaders in local authorities that are currently successfully implementing with fidelity one of the three innovations: No Wrong Door, Family Safeguarding or Family Valued. The implementation of these innovations in these adopting authorities will be challenged as the leaders that introduced these innovations move on to new roles in their careers.

The content described in this report aims to answer the following three key questions:

1. What are the attributes of leadership, and the contexts for leadership, most associated with successful implementation of:
 - Family Safeguarding;
 - Family Valued;
 - No Wrong Door?
2. How can we best support local authorities faced with a change of leaders in key roles?
3. How can we best support existing leaders with tools for self-reflection and coaching?

This review has found five key attributes of successful SFPC leadership.

1. Values driven leadership
2. Leadership that changes how decisions are made in the interests of families
3. Leadership that changes practice and culture
4. Leadership that creates successful partnerships
5. Leadership that secures buy in from corporate leaders and politicians



Leadership and change that is driven by values

The first attribute, and by far the most important, is values-driven leadership. The leaders we spoke to all shared two values in particular: firstly a strong respect for the worth and dignity of all children, young people and families; and secondly a strong passion for social justice. In interviews, these were often described by leaders as a desire to stand up for the rights of children, young people and families and to create equal opportunities for them. Many of them described personal or professional experiences of injustice or inequality that motivated them to work and lead in *a different way* and created a determination to '*do the right thing*'. As leaders they choose to nurture these values in their staff and organisation, and develop practice that is equally guided by these values.

Changing how decisions are made in the interest of families

The second attribute is that these leaders are able to change how decisions are made in the interest of children, young people and families. This involves being brutally honest in confronting the reality that children, young people and families face, encouraging diverse perspectives and utilising a collaborative approach in making those decisions. This creates a safe environment of shared responsibility for decisions. Practitioners feel more supported in their decisions, empowered to learn when things go wrong, and empowered to challenge decisions openly. Leaders say they are prepared to 'own risk' at the highest level in the organisation - and shoulder responsibility and accountability.

Leadership that changes practice and culture

The third of the key attributes is that these leaders change practice and culture in their organisations. They do this by creating a shared vision of the change, which allows each individual in the organisation to know their individual role in achieving the desired outcome. These leaders are aware that alongside formal change activities, practitioners need time to become comfortable with change, and support to build up their confidence in implementing these changes. To do this, leaders model the change, becoming a consistent reference point for practitioners and allowing the new practices to become embedded over time. Leaders know that *successful* change cannot be imposed so they create an enabling environment for change - where practitioners feel safe and supported to adopt new processes and practices and where challenge is welcome.

Leadership that creates successful partnerships

The fourth key attribute is that leaders create successful partnerships. The first step in doing so is 'translating' the new model for partners - that is, helping partners to see their role in the innovation. Leaders focus heavily on building one-to-one relationships, to gain a thorough understanding of partners' motivations. They are clear on the values that drive each partner. As a result, they are able to communicate a shared goal for the partnership, initiating a collective ownership of the changes. In order to sustain change, leaders share data and stories of success. This serves to remind partners of why they became and continue to be involved in this change. This 'human' approach to outcomes allows each partner individually, and the partnership as a whole, to be connected to and feel touched by the impact being made.

Securing buy-in from corporate leaders & politicians

The last attribute is that leaders are adept at securing buy-in from political and corporate leaders. This ensures that the changes are not aligned to specific political party promises or fleeting corporate plans. Additionally, leaders invest in learning for politicians and corporate leaders, ensuring they have an in-depth understanding of why the change is needed and the impact of this change for children, young people and families in the local area. This ensures ongoing support, thereby 'future-proofing' the innovation.

Collectively, these five attributes describe leadership which is most associated with successful implementation of Family Safeguarding, No Wrong Door and Family Valued.

Two recommendations have been made from these findings. The first recommendation is that these five attributes are carefully considered and communicated throughout the recruitment, advertisement and selection of new leaders. The second recommendation is that these five attributes form part of ongoing leadership development, self-reflection and leadership coaching for leaders in children's social care.

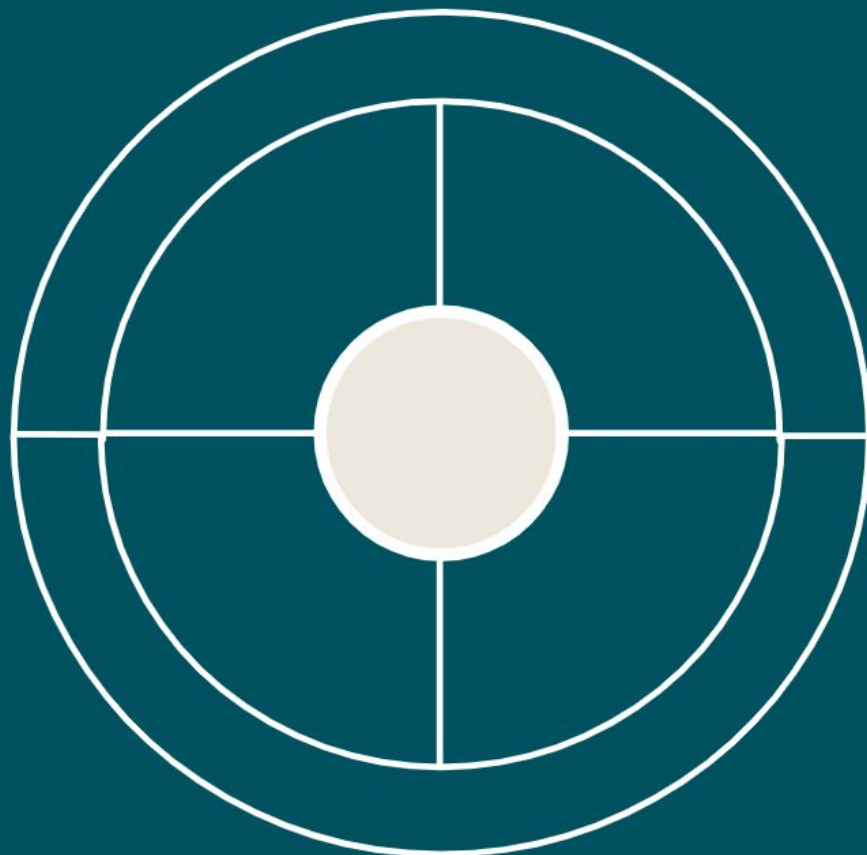


Matthew Horne
Deputy Chief Executive (UK)



Jahaan Abdurahman
Innovation Consultant (UK)

Leadership and change that is driven by values



How do leaders bring their values to their leadership?

Values driven leadership is the most important leadership attribute identified through this review, as this attribute forms the foundation of the four remaining leadership attributes.

- Leaders bring their personal values to work
- Leaders respect the worth and dignity of all children, young people and families
- Leaders are passionate about social justice
- Leaders values and experiences create purpose
- Leaders embody these values
- Values are at the heart of leadership

Leaders bring their personal values to work

The leaders we interviewed described how their personal values informed and shaped their identity and purpose as a leader and social worker. Their values created a powerful foundation for their work and career. Implementing one of the three innovations was about leading change in an organisation that aligned with their values as a leader and social worker.

“I often saw young people just being tipped out into accommodation at 16. Without a great deal of care as to whether they're going to succeed or fail. Really, that sort of handoff, we've done our job, it's just over to somebody else now. And so lots of those young people fail. And it became a bit of a personal crusade...”

Leaders respect the worth and dignity of all children, young people and families

- All the leaders we spoke to had a fierce belief in people and were passionate about children, young people and families.
- They believe that children and young people deserve the best upbringing that they can have. They believe wholeheartedly that the experience of every child and young person is significant - they know that these experiences will shape the lives of children and young people for years to come.
- Leaders have a deep desire to stand up for children, young people and families, to ensure that their rights are respected and that they are truly supported.
- Ultimately, leaders are driven by the wish to make a difference to the lives of children, young people and families that will have a long-lasting, positive impact.

Leaders' values and experiences create purpose

Leaders are passionate about social justice

- The leaders we spoke to have a strong commitment to social justice and equality. They have a very strong sense of fairness, which guides their decisions and behaviours.
- Leaders believe that the children, young people and families that they work with deserve the same opportunities as everyone else. They are devoted to creating those opportunities.

“I believe there’s something that is deeply wrong about one person being judged better than another, and I have a sense of trying to right that wrong.”

- Often, leaders have witnessed situations that have not been consistent with their values. For example, they might have observed families living in poverty in their local community when they were growing up or worked on cases in their early career with children and young people who were unable to access the help that they needed.
- Having a reference point of situations which were not consistent with their values creates a sense of drive or purpose in these leaders. Many leaders describe a desire to work in a different way, that will achieve different outcomes for children, young people and families. This purpose ‘lights a fire’ in them.
- Through experiencing situations that challenged their deeply held values and beliefs, these leaders became determined to correct injustices, act differently and always try to ‘do the right thing’ for children. We often heard these leaders ask themselves whether the decision they were making would be good enough for their own child.

- Leaders described how common it is in the sector to work under bureaucratic conditions, which place a large emphasis on compliance. This means that there can sometimes be a preoccupation with performance indicators, inspections and balancing budgets. Leaders described how they wanted staff to make decisions that were the best for children, rather than for financial reasons, or hitting targets or for fear of Ofsted.
- In working on No Wrong Door, Family Valued and Family Safeguarding, these leaders have found work that strongly aligns with their moral purpose and where they are guided by practices, models and systems which allow them to always 'do the right thing' for the children, young people and families they work with.

“It's a role where I actually feel I can just continuously be myself... So it's a role where I feel as a practitioner, and then for a lot of my career as a leader and a senior manager, I've been able to operate with authenticity.”

“I worked in residential care and took a child to a residential school. Very streetwise young man, great personality. I took him to this huge historic building, but it was a horrible looking place. Dull. Quite overwhelming. And I left with him literally crying his eyes out. And as I drove away, I thought ‘I'd never, ever do that for my child, I'd never do that’, but I did as a professional. I never challenged it. And that sort of stuck with me as a value that I thought, as I get further up the chain, I can challenge some of those things that feel wrong.”

Leaders embody these values

- When doing purpose driven work on these innovations, leaders are able to see how their personal values can be enacted through their work.
- With the core values of caring for others and believing in fairness for all, leaders experience a high level of alignment between their personal values and the values underpinning the innovation. That makes it simple and seamless for leaders to behave in ways which are consistent with both their own personal values and the values underpinning the innovation.
- As a result, leaders are able to readily embody the values of the innovation.
- For example, this is often seen in the value of 'doing with, not to', where leaders will embody this value by including practitioners in organisational change or decision making, demonstrating that their input is valued. In other words, their leadership style embodies the value of 'doing with, not to'.

“There is the principle of working with, so if we're asking social workers and practitioners to work with families, then they should expect that they're worked with from an organisational perspective as well.”

- Through this approach, leaders display the behaviour they expect practitioners to display with children, young people and families.
- That is to say, leaders acknowledge that how they treat practitioners is how practitioners will treat children, young people and families. As a result, leaders are diligent in operating in a way which is consistent with their personal values and the values of the innovation - they embody these important values.

“I do think that if I treat my senior leadership team with respect and I am available to them emotionally and to listen to them, that models a behaviour and facilitates them to work in a similar way with their managers, which in turn facilitates how they work with children and families.”

Values are at the heart of leadership

- Leaders believe that if the correct values are nurtured in practitioners, the correct practice will follow. This mirrors the way in which they work - they are values and purpose driven in their work. This approach increases the likelihood that practitioners will enable positive outcomes for children, young people and families through the work that they do.
- As a result, leaders build practice in their organisation that is guided by values. More specifically, they explicitly highlight and emphasise the values related to the innovation.
- Actively using these values enables decision making at all levels in the organisation to be consistent - these decisions are value-led. This enables distributed leadership. This concept is discussed in more detail in the next section.

“Everything needs to follow from and come back to the [programme values]. If we're doing something that's not contributing to those things, then why are we doing it really? We should be doing it differently.”

- Leaders acknowledge the importance of distributed leadership. They work in ways which allow each individual in the organisation to understand their individual role in achieving the desired outcomes.

“It's about really building in every stage of our system, that those values are embedded into that”

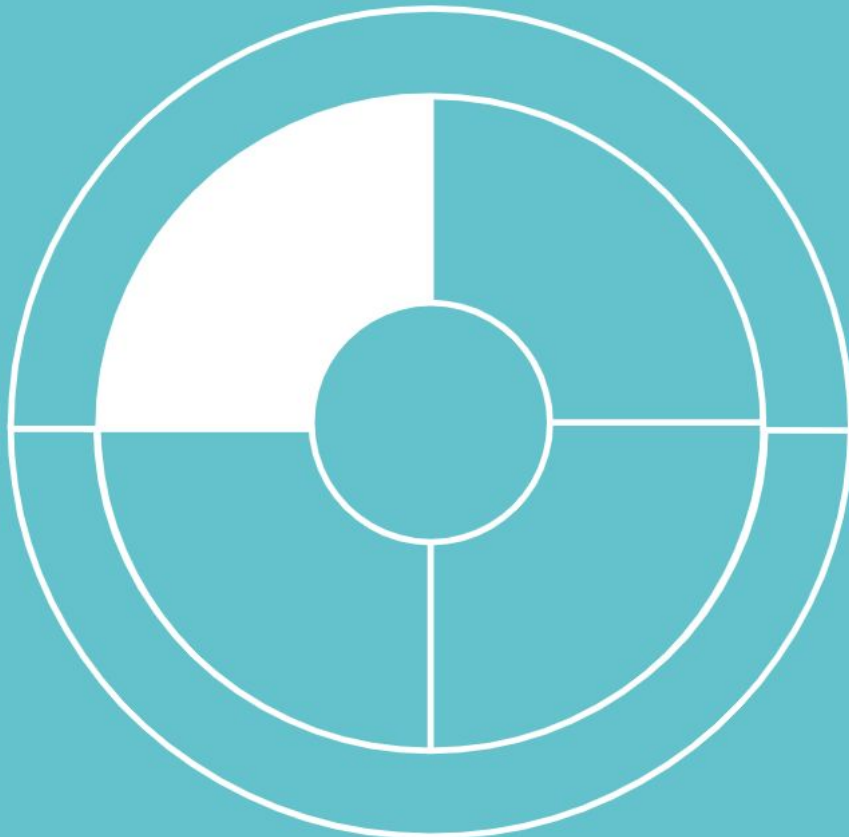
“I try to never, ever lose sight of children and young people, in terms of my conversations about impact, so bring everything back to the reason why we exist to do the job.”

- Linking decision making and daily work to the values of the innovation pushes each individual to do their best work. This is important in the context of wanting the *best* outcomes for children, young people and families and accounts for the high level of commitment required to persist in an often challenging career.
- Specific details on how leaders do this is discussed in the 'How do leaders change practice and culture?' section.

“These are your children, you don't have two children or three children or six children, you have 512 children, how would you care for them? Would you buy them rubbish furniture? No, you wouldn't.”

Embedding change:

Leadership that changes how decisions are made in the interest of families



How do leaders make decisions in the interest of children and families?

Leaders we spoke to described how they consciously changed how decisions are made in the interests of children and families, how they took responsibility for decisions, and how they made it safe for their colleagues to make difficult decisions, in situations of uncertainty.

- Leaders confront the likelihood of harm to children and families
- Leaders 'forensically' break down the risk of harm
- Leaders encourage different perspectives
- Leaders favour a collaborative approach to making decisions
- Leaders create high support environments
- Leaders enable safe environments by managing ownership of risk
- Leaders create opportunities for learning and challenge within the safe environment

Leaders confront the likelihood of harm to children and families

- Leaders know that ignoring or avoiding concerns about harm won't make it go away. As a result, leaders cultivate a healthy, curious and confident approach to discussing concerns and the likelihood of harm.
- This involves being 'brutally' honest about the reality which the child, young person or family face. Often, this involves inviting families to openly share the reality that they face, whilst leaders and practitioners listen carefully.
- Leaders believe that reducing harm for children requires brave, courageous conversations - which are done by breaking problems, issues and concerns down and taking a collaborative approach to decision making.

“And at the same time it's being risk aware, not risk averse. You've got to confront it head on and then you've got a fighting chance.”

Leaders 'forensically' break down the likelihood of harm

- Leaders believe that knowing all of the facts surrounding an unsafe situation is imperative to responding effectively. Their first step in the process of managing difficult decisions is to 'forensically' break down the situation.
- Leaders believe that gathering more information on the likelihood of harm involved enables more options to be considered, with more clarity, in deciding how to manage it.
- Once again, families often play an active part in building a picture of their current situation for practitioners.

“Not knowing what the risks are is a really unsafe way of approaching risk. People might not have understood risk, acknowledged risk, or might not have shared risks in the past. Whereas, I think a safe, contemporary way of operating is to really understand what you are dealing with, and then put something together that’s quite forensic in it’s detail and consideration and thoughtfulness.”

Leaders encourage different perspectives

- When dealing with unsafe situations, leaders encourage many diverse perspectives to be heard.
- As a result, they are not dissuaded by ‘disagreement’ but rather welcome as many different views as possible so that they can understand the fears, anxieties and concerns of everyone in the room.
- Leaders approach different perspectives on the likelihood for harm with curiosity and an open mind to what they can learn that will provide a full understanding of the situation at hand.

- This approach is closely related to systemic leadership theories, where the leader is considered part of a wider system - in this case, those in the wider system are closely consulted to provide a wider perspective than one leader is able to provide. This wider system includes the children, young people and families themselves, where possible.

“I call it 'confront the brutal facts', we're going to be dead honest with each other. And then we're going to have a plan.”

Leaders favour a collaborative approach to decision making

- This collaborative approach means that no one person is believed to have more expertise or power when making decisions in the interest of children, young people and families. Everyone contributes equally in understanding the reality of the situation facing the child, young person or family involved, until an agreement on how to manage it can be reached.
- Leaders do this by honouring the expertise and insight which every unique point of view provides. They believe that everyone holds a part of the picture which makes up the whole view.

“I think conversation is key... No one knows best. I might know a bit, everyone knows a bit and the whole helps. I encourage a conversation, a dialogue, I want people to come and tell me if they disagree with something.”

- This approach fosters opportunities for distributed leadership, where each individual has the ability to contribute to important decisions, irrespective of their level, role or status. This is often seen in practice in teams within these innovations, where those usually considered outside the scope of making decisions for children, young people and families are often brought into collaborative decision making - this might be the loved ones or even the families themselves. In these situations, the children, young people and families are considered key contributors to the decisions being made, where possible.

“I would always want to understand what the potential risks and vulnerabilities and uncertainties might be. I would always want to do that collectively with other people involved and who know the young person. And I'd want, in that partnership, to have some really tough and brave conversations.”

“

“The worst thing you can do is close someone’s view down. You must allow partners and people involved with the young person to express the risk and fears they have. Once they're out there and on the table, you can deal with anything.”

Leaders create high support environments

Leaders enable safe environments by managing ownership of risk

- As part of a collaborative approach to making decisions, leaders believe that responsibility is shared, rather than held by one individual. Leaders work hard to communicate a collective ownership of difficult decisions to practitioners.
- Leaders act as a 'shield' for individuals in their organisation, by 'owning' decisions at the highest level - this means that no one practitioner is asked to make difficult decisions alone, or held solely responsible for those decisions.

"I like being in this position in the organisation that is privileged to be able to hold the risk and create an environment where practitioners feel safe. Because I think an unsafe environment doesn't enable people to take safe risks."

- When practitioners feel comfortable and confident in the collaborative approach to making difficult decisions, and feel supported by their leaders, they are functioning in a safe environment. Leaders know that these safe environments enable practitioners to make safe decisions.

"This is about me being the lead for that risk and in supporting. So I'm hoping that social workers feel that. And the team managers feel that and the service managers feel that they are not on their own with this risk, that it is owned at the highest level, because these are our most vulnerable children."

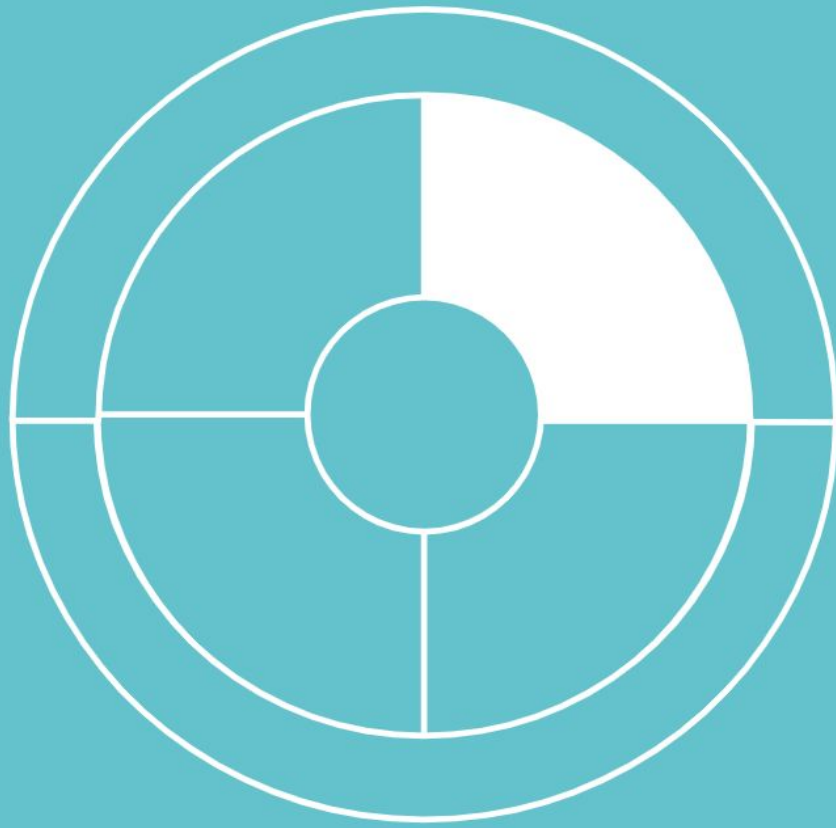
Leaders create opportunities for learning and challenge within the safe environment

- A safe environment for a practitioner involves knowing that they will be supported when things go wrong. The approach to rectifying a negative outcome involves predominantly learning from the experience to enable practitioners to make different decisions in the interest of children, young people and families in the future.
- A safe environment for a practitioner also allows challenge, where necessary. This means allowing practitioners to raise concerns openly and question decisions candidly, without the usual constraints of hierarchy - the most important consideration in situations where challenges are brought is reaching the best outcome for the child, young person or family.

“Staff get very fearful that something will happen and they will be blamed. It's the nature of the beast. It's unfortunately what we do...Historically, the staff were frightened to make a decision. Because if the decision went wrong, they'd be worried about being blamed. And that's worrying for staff, but it's about when staff make those decisions, support them, and say, 'Yep, you did it. It could have gone wrong, but it worked.' 'Yeah, you did it, it went wrong. How do we learn from it?'”

Embedding change:

Leadership that changes practice and culture



How do leaders change practice and culture?

Alongside changes to how decisions are made in the interest of children, young people and families, leaders need to make substantial changes to practice and culture in order to successfully implement an innovation. As a result, leaders are highly skilled in change.

- Change skills are core leadership skills
- Leaders know that change takes time
- Leaders are consistent over time
- Leaders create an enabling environment

Change skills are core leadership skills

- Leaders consider change skills to be core to their role. They use these skills to create and communicate a shared vision for everyone in the organisation. A clear vision allows each individual in the organisation to know their role in achieving the desired outcomes.
- Introducing multidisciplinary team working is common in these innovations. This change involves a practical and structural change to the way that team members work daily, as well as a significant element of cultural change. In order to successfully implement a change such as this, the first, and often more important step is to clearly communicate a positive and inspiring vision of multidisciplinary working, followed by breaking this vision down into each team member's role in implementing this vision, and building strong working relationships.
- Taking this approach is intrinsically linked to distributed leadership, as it both enables distributed leadership and reinforces distributed leadership. That is to say that once every individual is aware of the part they play in the change, they are empowered to make decisions which are consistent with the new system.

“I can give a narrative around a compelling vision. So I can be clear about where we're going, and I want to lead and create, alongside people, a movement for change... I want to kind of create the climate and the conditions for things to feel that they can change.”

Leaders know that change takes time

- Leaders understand that change activities, such as learning and development, are only part of the change process. Alongside these formal activities, practitioners need time to gradually increase their comfort with the change and support in building their confidence in using new ways of working.

“[It’s] really thinking about how we could give social workers permission to work differently. Working differently can be unnerving, so we were encouraging our social workers to be brave, and to embrace a completely different way of working”

- Established ways of working often appear ‘safer’ and easier for staff members. However, these approaches might not always enable decision making that is in the best interest of children, young people and families - as we have seen with tragic consequences in historic cases of extra-familial harm. This is a change which requires time to adjust to, where practitioners are offered the opportunity to focus on the harm faced by the child, young person or family, instead of taking the safest or easiest route for themselves or the organisation.
- In other words, the practitioners are encouraged to make the best decisions for their children, young people and families, knowing that other benefits will follow once the best decisions for children, young people and families are made.
- This is particularly important in Children’s Social Care, where the impact of inadequate ways of working can be severe (as discussed in the ‘How do leaders make decisions in the interest of children and families?’ section), and as a result, caution is common when approaching organisational change.

- This leadership approach to change is often observed with cultural changes. Cultural change is considered one of the most difficult organisational changes to implement, as culture is deeply embedded in an organisation and often internalised by team members as a set of beliefs and values. Examples of cultural change required to implement these innovations include involving children, young people and families in collaboratively agreeing the support they require.

“I see, every day, somebody literally retreating back to the way that they used to work. And you have to keep pulling them back out of it, keep pulling them back to how they work and eventually, drip by drip, people then stay in that space.”

“

“What we haven't wanted to do is just to change our practice overnight, we need for it to be a safe system, we need social workers and the core group of professionals that are working to meet that child's needs to feel comfortable with the level of plan that is being developed.”

Leaders are consistent over time

- Where change takes time, leaders must demonstrate consistency in their approach and behaviours, which provides a consistent reference point for practitioners. This consistency embeds change over time. Practitioners become familiar with the new approach or behaviour, gaining comfort and confidence.
- This also allows for team members to obtain clarification where they might be uncertain about the change.

“We've got a very clear vision. That narrative is really important, we keep coming back to that constantly”

- Practitioners see the change modelled by leaders, providing them with ongoing learning opportunities, which strengthens their ability to implement these new practices.

Leaders create an enabling environment

- In exactly the same way that leaders create a high-support environment where practitioners are supported to make decisions in the interest of children, young people and families, leaders create an enabling environment which encourages change to be adopted over time.
- Leaders recognise that they cannot impose change, but they can create an environment where practitioners are receptive to change over time. That is to say that they enable change through the environment they create.

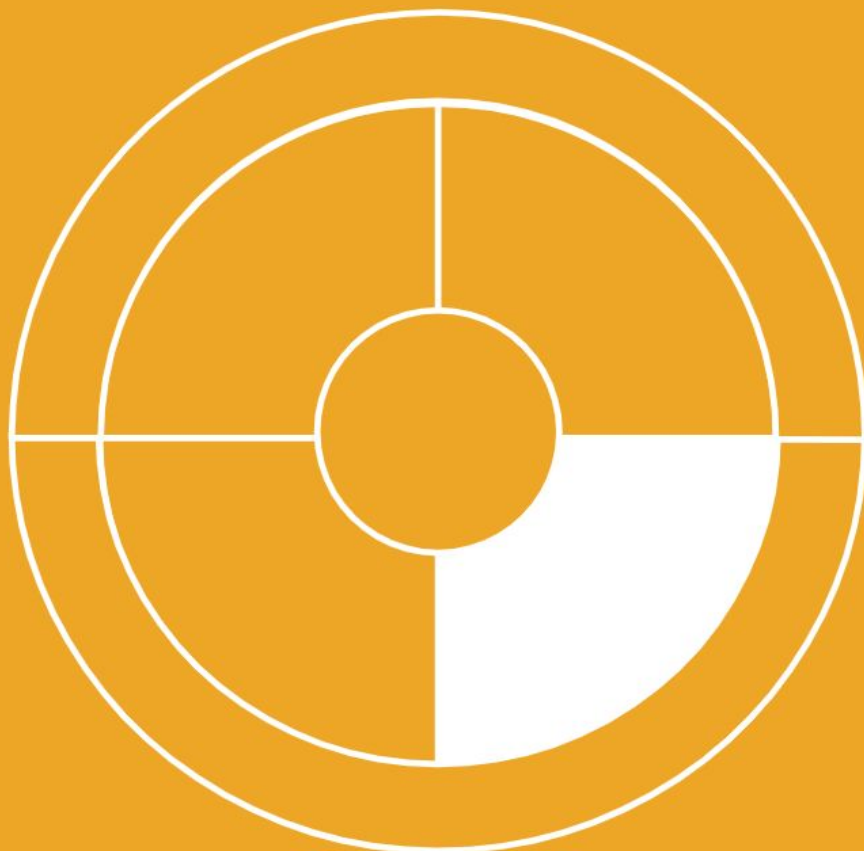
“We had to think of lots of different creative ways in which we could help social workers understand that this was something that they had control of, but equally something that we were there to support them with.”

- An enabling environment has the same features of a high-support environment - one in which collective ownership of organisational risk leads practitioners to feel safe and supported, and where challenge is welcome in order to reach the best outcome for children, young people and families.

“What they felt was that there was clear communication. They felt that they had the support of their managers in asking for help and seeking guidance. Where there was a need for additional training, whether that was collectively or individually that was made available to them. It wasn't just like, 'This is what we're doing now. Get on with it.' There was a supported and gradual change in the way in which we implemented [the innovation].”

Scaling and sustaining change:

Leadership that creates successful partnerships



How do leaders create successful partnerships?

Leaders know that they cannot realise the full value of their innovation without building successful relationships with their partners. As such, it becomes a core feature of leadership, specifically for leaders who are responsible for building partner relationships.

- Leaders mobilise their partners as 'champions' of the innovation
- Leaders build individual partner relationships
- Leaders build a partnership 'team'
- Leaders bring outcomes for children and families to life
- Leaders are skilled in storytelling
- Leaders connect outcomes back to important values
- Leaders clearly articulate the benefits to everyone involved
- Leaders sustain change by continually sharing the impact story

Leaders mobilise their partners as 'champions'

- In exactly the same way that leaders communicate a clear vision to their team, they are adept at articulating the vision for their innovation to every partner in turn. This requires 'translating' the model - changing the focus from Children's Social Care to the partner's specific focus when explaining the model. This is done predominantly through adapting the language used to describe the model and the language to describe the outcomes.
- By doing this, leaders help each partner see their specific role in the innovation.

"To get the real buy-in of partners we've almost had to really slow it back down and work through with the partners the language, what this means for them, translating it into outcomes that are meaningful for the individual partners and the partnership as a whole."

Leaders build individual partner relationships

- Leaders mobilise their partners as 'champions' through one-to-one relationships with each partner. They invest time in building and maintaining those individual relationships. This involves understanding each partner's motivations, challenges and desires. In other words, leaders maintain clarity on the values that drive each partner.
- Leaders clearly articulate the benefit to each partner, including the outcomes for them individually and for the partnership as a whole.
- By taking this approach, leaders are able to demonstrate to partners how the partnership as a whole, through working effectively together, can make a substantially bigger difference than each partner working in isolation.

“We're very good at working with people outside of [usual meetings], recognizing that actually, most work gets done in one-to-one relationships.”

- In most Local Authorities, this looks like each partner being able to impact the lives of children, young people and families in small ways, but a cohesive partnership being able to completely transform the support which is offered to children, young people and families, substantially improving the outcomes for those children, young people and families.

Leaders build a partnership ‘team’

- Through these actions, leaders are able to create an informal ‘team’ of partners - this is different to a group of partners acting independently *for the best interests of their services*. Instead, this ‘team’ of partners has a *shared goal* and takes collective ownership and responsibility for the programme.
- With this collective ownership and responsibility, leaders are able to emphasise and embed shared values across the partnership ‘team’. In many cases, partners already share similar values so leaders are able to build the connection between those values and the outcomes which the partnership ‘team’ can achieve.

“And their focus is about positive outcomes for children and we haven't had to teach that, they've had that from day one. And that has helped, that has helped to keep them inspired by the work.”

- With this shared vision in mind, change across a whole system is possible. For example, aligning procedures and practices across a number of partner organisations can be challenging - but with a shared vision, partners are able to see that this alignment will produce far-reaching, positive outcomes for children, young people and families throughout the local area.
- These actions by leaders create partners that are truly passionate about the changes being made. These partners have a 'flame' lit inside them, guaranteeing that they champion the programme in their individual areas of work and throughout their organisations.
- Eventually, partners are able to facilitate value led practice in the partner organisation. By communicating and championing the shared values of the partnership 'team', they allow workers in their services to be led by these shared values in their day-to-day work. Over time, this enables change across the whole system.

“So we've got a Detective Chief Inspector, who is committed, deeply committed to [the innovation]. And we had one police officer after another who just found it impossible to work in the culture. But he got this kind of flame inside him, he knew that this would work. And eventually we found the right [police officer].”

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“It's about really getting them to understand their role in the programme. It's more than turning up and commanding resources and bringing resources to the table, it's understanding how you lead your organisation so that practitioners in your organisation can operate in a culture that enables a team to wrap around the child, young person or family”

Leaders bring outcomes for children and families to life

- In value and purpose driven work, it's important to continually return to the outcomes which you hope to achieve. Leaders know that this is critical for partners, so that partners are able to confirm that their efforts are contributing to better outcomes for children, young people and families. Not only does this fulfil formal reporting requirements, but it provides a source of constant inspiration and motivation for this value and purpose driven work.

Leaders are skilled in storytelling

- Leaders bring outcomes to life by using data and stories to evidence the expected or actual impact. This allows data around outcomes to be supported by stories of positive change for children and families. For example, data might include the number of visits made to young people, children and families, but stories include an in-depth case study of their experiences.

“You might have visits completed, but are they meaningful and impactful visits? And I think that's where you kind of pull away from the data and you do more qualitative work.”

- These qualitative measures confirm the fidelity of the quantitative data - that is to say that the numbers which are shared are proven to reflect high quality services, which results in *real* change for children and families.

“You can count the number of times the police get involved, you can count the number of times children go missing, count the number of times you have the go meet with their families, count the number of times people engage with them, but then that's got to be offset against the quality of what's going on.”

Leaders connect outcomes back to important values

- Another benefit in using stories to communicate outcomes is that it connects to the personal and professional values of stakeholders, partners and practitioners - this 'human' approach allows them to connect with the positive outcomes for children and families, leaving them 'touched' by the stories of impact.
- This approach serves to remind stakeholders, partners and practitioners why they entered this field of work, it serves to remind them of their 'why'. This powerful prompt reinforces the commitment required to these new ways of working.

“It's the sense of being touched by really what it means and the real impact of what you can achieve from working differently together.”

Leaders clearly articulate the benefits to everyone involved

- Leaders articulate the benefits for partners individually and the outcomes for the partnership as a whole - leaders are careful in articulating both of these, separately.
- Leaders are also careful to articulate the benefits to others in the system, who have a vested interest in the success of the innovation.
- This approach allows the data and stories to 'speak for themselves', in motivating partners to become or stay involved in the innovation.

“Getting that strategic buy-in, and then being able to demonstrate [success] through the changes that we've made, so the stability of staff, decreased agency use, less numbers of children on the Child Protection Plan. And to do that confidently has, over the last four years, really strengthened the view of the council that this is the way that an effective Children's Services needs to work.”

Leaders sustain change by continually sharing the impact story

- Leaders know that for change to be sustained, impact must be evidenced at all levels.
- Leaders continually share this 'win-win' narrative. This ensures that any challenges facing the partnership, such as changes in leadership across the partnership, do not derail the work that each partner and the partnership as a whole are doing.

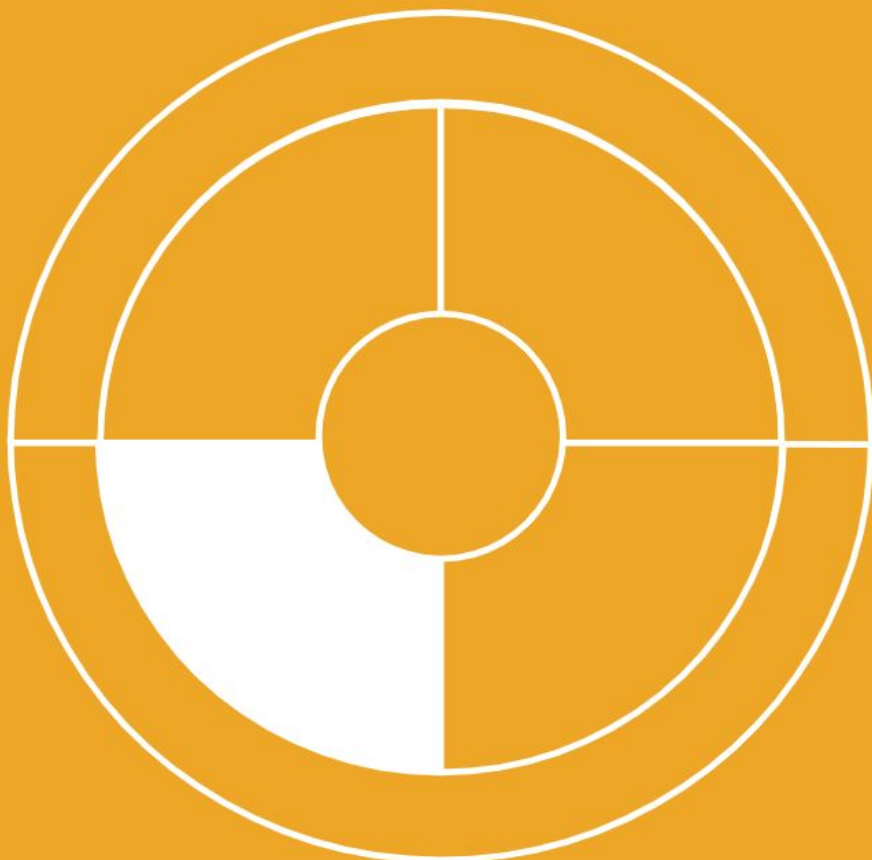
“There is something about the win-win approach, that they can really start to see the benefits for them... money is tight so that win-win approach of benefitting everybody and being able to evidence that is fundamental..”

- This is of particular importance in proactively shielding the partnership from the negative impact of leadership changes. Although changes in leadership often cannot be avoided, being skilled in sharing and highlighting the positive impact which the changes are having is precautionary.

“Some of the changes in leadership over time meant you had to keep telling the story... that narrative around the win-win.”

Scaling and sustaining change:

Leadership that secures buy-in from corporate leaders and politicians



How do leaders work with corporate leaders and politicians?

In order to successfully implement these changes, leaders also need to secure buy-in from a number of powerful stakeholders within the Local Authority. These corporate and political leaders, include the Chief Executive, Finance Director, procurement leads and HR leads and elected Cabinet members, council leader and other politicians, including in the opposition group.

- Leaders create shared political ownership
- Leaders invest in learning for politicians

Leaders create shared corporate & political ownership

- Leaders 'future proof' their innovations by ensuring that there is shared corporate and political ownership. This involves briefing the opposition and all relevant corporate departments on the changes being made, to ensure that the changes are not perceived as aligned to a specific party or department.
- Over time, this ensures that Children's Social Care is not used as 'political football' - where parties or departments align their outcomes with those of Children's Social Care, imposing changes that are politically or strategically beneficial. Instead, a culture of Children's Social Care being 'off limits' is created over time - building a shared perspective on outcomes for children and families being the only priority across the Local Authority.
- As part of this skill, leaders are astute at identifying stakeholders throughout the Local Authority who are crucial to the long-term success of the innovation.

Leaders invest in learning for politicians

- Leaders encourage politicians to learn more about the services, especially where gaps in knowledge exist due to differing professional backgrounds.
- Where feasible, leaders might even encourage proximity to practice through initiatives like shadowing of practitioners. This gives politicians a practical understanding of how positive outcomes for children and families are achieved.
- Leaders continually invest in learning for corporate leaders and politicians, as they understand that this will ensure ongoing support for the innovation.

“We briefed the opposition on the changes that we were making as we didn't want it to be seen as aligned to a specific party”

“

“We've got shared political ownership across the spectrum, and also a real commitment... So they don't use Children's Services as a political football and there's quite a strong consensus across the parties that that's not the way to behave and operate.”

Conclusion

The qualitative content described in the report aimed to answer three key questions.

The first, and primary, question aimed to understand the attributes of leadership, and contexts for leadership, most associated with successful implementation of Family Safeguarding, Family Valued and No Wrong Door. The findings have provided five key attributes of leadership most associated with successful implementation of Family Safeguarding, Family Valued and No Wrong Door. Those attributes are: leadership and change that is driven by values, changing how decisions are made in the interest of children, young people and families, changing practice and culture in their organisations, creating successful partnerships and securing buy-in from the wider authorising system. The behaviours and skills associated with each of these five key leadership attributes are discussed in this report.

The second question focused on how this information can be used to support adopting authorities who are faced with a change in key leadership roles. In response, this report proposes that adopting authorities incorporate these five key leadership attributes into their recruitment, advertising and selection process. In order to do so, adopting authorities are encouraged to use the reflective questions in the Workbooks that will provide guidance on how these findings can be adapted to a local context.

The third question considers how existing leaders can be best supported with tools for self-reflection and coaching. In response, this report provides self-reflection questions which can be used by leaders to understand these five leadership attributes in context of their own leadership. The tool also includes a leadership profile template, which can be completed by leaders once they have reflected on their leadership, and a self-reflection workbook for further exploration.

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Applying the five leadership attributes

Introduction

This paper has provided an analysis of the attributes of leaders that have successfully implemented Family Safeguarding, No Wrong Door and Family Valued.

Five key attributes were identified and discussed in detail:

1. Leadership and change which is driven by values
2. Making decisions in the interests of children, young people and families
3. Changing practice and culture
4. Creating successful partnerships
5. Securing buy in from corporate and political leaders

This information can be used to support leadership succession or leadership development. Where organisations face issues of leadership succession, the information provided in the following sections on attracting, recruiting and selecting leaders is relevant. Where leaders are already in place, the section on developing leaders can be used by leaders for self-reflection.

1

Attracting, recruiting and selecting leaders

Where organisations intend to recruit new leaders, it is important that they provide an accurate reflection of the values, practices and culture of the innovation, in order to attract leaders with the best fit for the role.

Values attract the right leaders

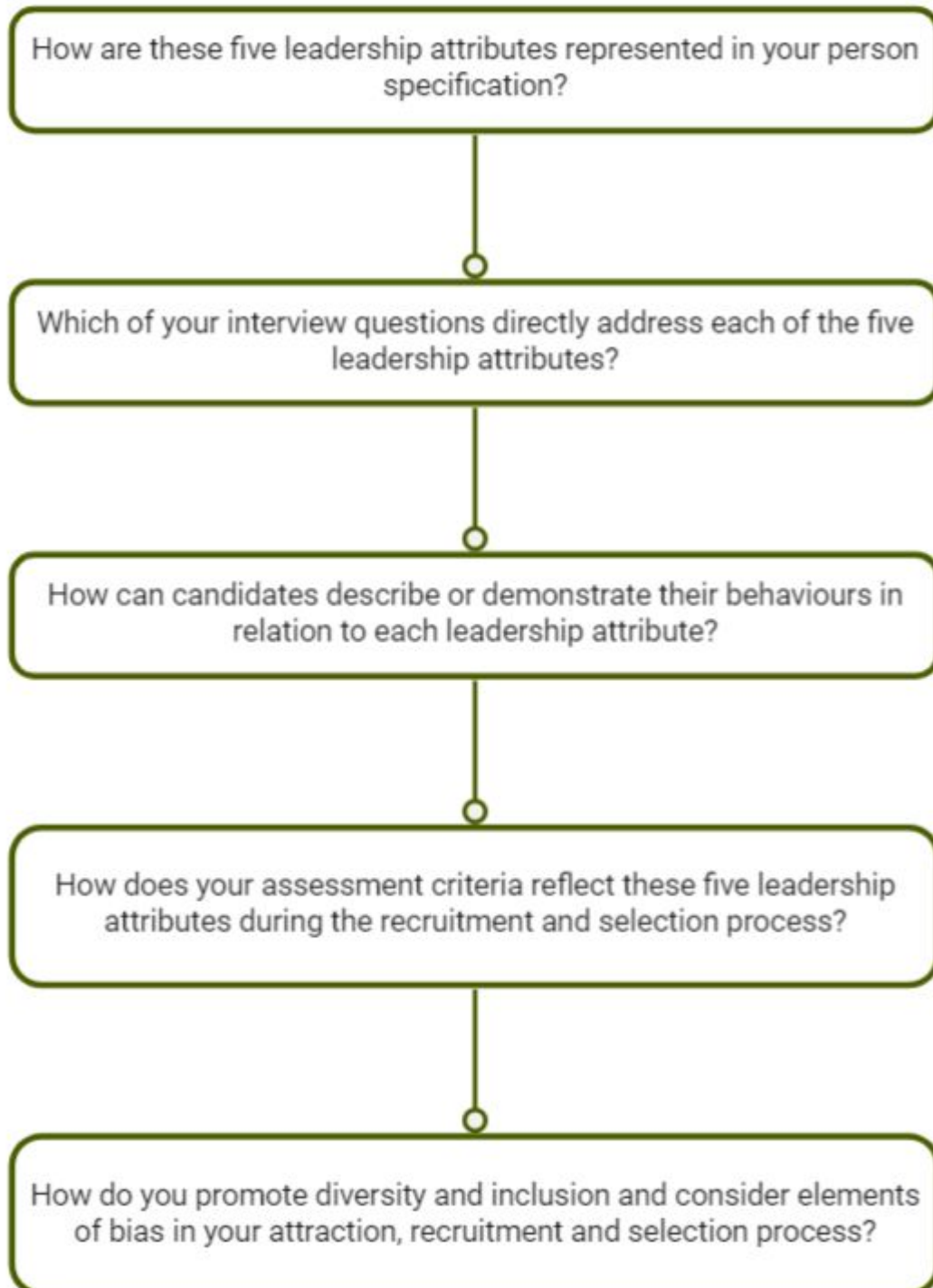
- Clearly communicating the values behind the innovation whilst recruiting for leadership positions allows applicants to self-assess for organisational fit. Leaders who share similar values and are seeking a purpose-led career are more likely to apply for leadership positions on these innovations.
- These leaders are more likely to have a greater organisational fit as their purpose - the foundation of their approach to their work - is closely aligned to those of other leaders in the system.

Selecting outstanding leaders also requires value fit

- Good leaders are found through an assessment of the relevant skills, knowledge and qualifications. The findings in this report show that great leaders also require value fit - an assessment of whether their values are consistent with those of the innovation and whether they are purpose-led and value-led in their behaviour.
- In order to apply these attributes of leadership in your organisation, value fit is important to consider during the attraction, recruitment and selection of new leaders.

Reflective questions for organisations recruiting new leaders

To consider how these leadership attributes can best be adapted to your organisational setting, the following questions can be used:



Helpful resources for applying these attributes

Research and best practice on value-based recruitment and updating your attraction, recruitment and selection processes are widely available. In the below section, we have highlighted noteworthy resources which might be helpful in applying these attributes.

- NHS employers provide an [introduction to value-based recruitment](#), as well as helpful case studies. They recommend consulting [Health Education England's \(HEE\) National VBR Framework](#) for case studies, tools and resources on assessing candidates' values.
- The National Skills Academy for Social Care provides a handy [online toolkit](#) for value based recruitment, as well as resources to support [the attraction of candidates](#) based on their values and helpful [examples of interview questions](#) when assessing for values.
- Skills for Care offer [guidance on the application and selection process](#) using values based recruitment and often provide [workshops and seminars](#) on the topic. Their [publication](#) on the secrets of success to recruitment and retention in adult social care provides research and guidance on value based recruitment.
- King's College London offers a [research report](#) on recruitment and retention in adult social care, including the benefits of value based recruitment.

2 Developing leaders

The five leadership attributes apply equally to the development of those working towards leadership roles or already in leadership roles. These findings can be used by leaders or aspiring leaders to self-assess their alignment with each attribute and identify areas for leadership development.

Using this tool and reflecting on your answers with a coach or mentor can help you to gain perspective and think deeply on what your answers are telling you about strengths and potential areas for development.

Reflecting on your leadership attributes

- In order to reflect on your leadership attributes, answer the following questions honestly, using the guidance on ratings to select a numerical rating from 1-5 for each question. Do not spend too long answering any one question.
- You might find the process of reflecting on these questions informative and interesting, but you might equally find it confronting. This might be due to thinking about your leadership in a different light or from a new perspective - although this can prove uncomfortable at first, it can be catalytic in your leadership journey.
- If you'd like to spend more time reflecting on your leadership attributes, consider using the self-reflection workbook, where you will find additional questions on each of the attributes for your reflection.
- Adding your leadership attributes to the leadership profile in the next section provides a quick reference point for you to return to and supports you in visualising what you want your leadership to look like in the future.
- You might also choose to use these questions as a 360 degree feedback tool, by slightly adapting each question to ask your team members and colleagues for feedback on your leadership attributes.

How much are you living our and honouring your values through your work?

For example, a rating of 5 might sound like: *"In my job, I feel that I am able to live out and honour my values every day and I don't feel that I need to compromise them to do my job. This means that my choices and the way I behave in my work are aligned to my personal values and I encourage my team members to do the same".*

Your score:

How well have you changed decision-making in your organisation, so that decisions are made in the best interest of the children, young people and families?

For example, a rating of 5 might sound like: *'I am relentless in trying to make decisions in the best interest of every child and family that we work with. I know that there is the potential for negative outcomes so I always bring in other perspectives, or the families themselves when possible, to make collaborative and informed decisions.'* or *'I always let my team know that they will be supported in their decisions to get the best outcomes for the children and families they work with.'*

Your score:

How successful have you been in changing culture and practice in your team and organisation?

For example, a rating of 5 might sound like: *'I use all my change skills to support my team. This includes communicating a shared vision, modelling the change and creating an enabling environment for my team to adopt the change.'*

Your score:

How much buy-in have you secured from partners?

For example, a rating of 5 might sound like: *'I know what drives each of my partners and I use this to steer all our conversations. I constantly refer back to this when telling them about the progress we're making.'*

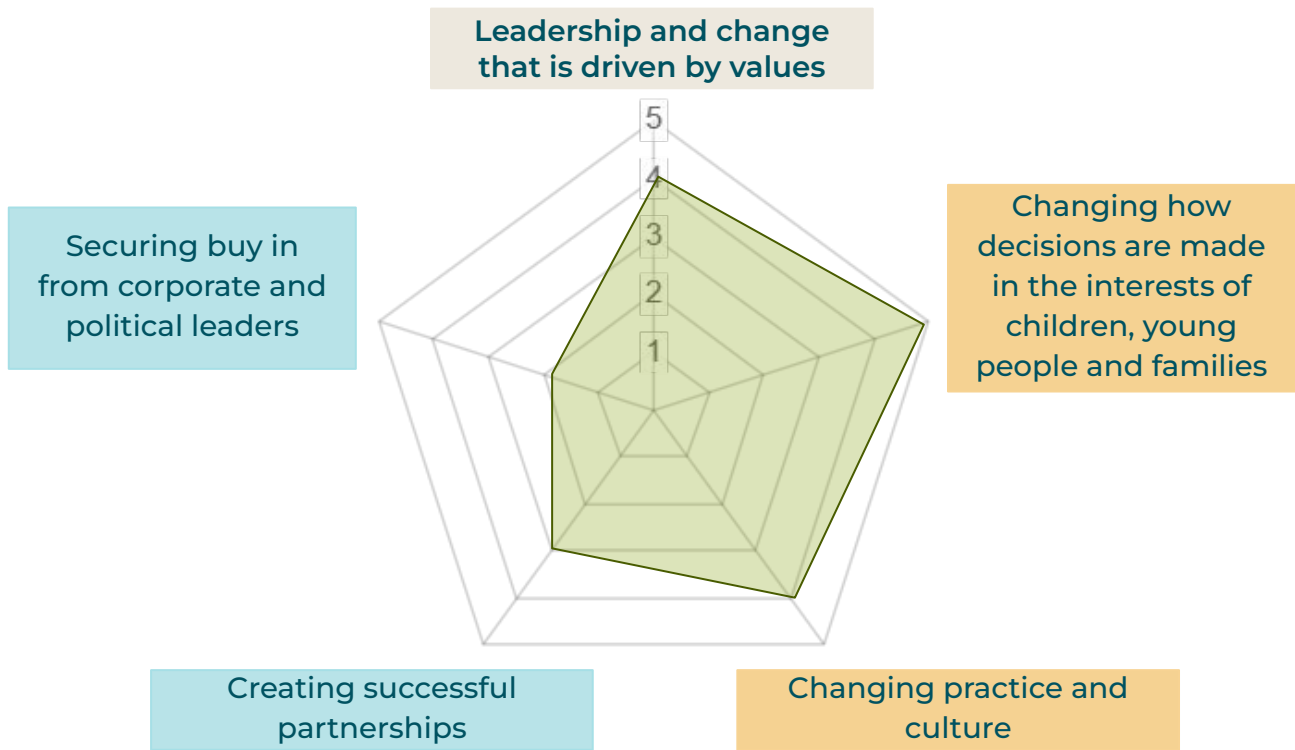
Your score:

How much do you build shared corporate and political ownership by engaging corporate and political leaders?

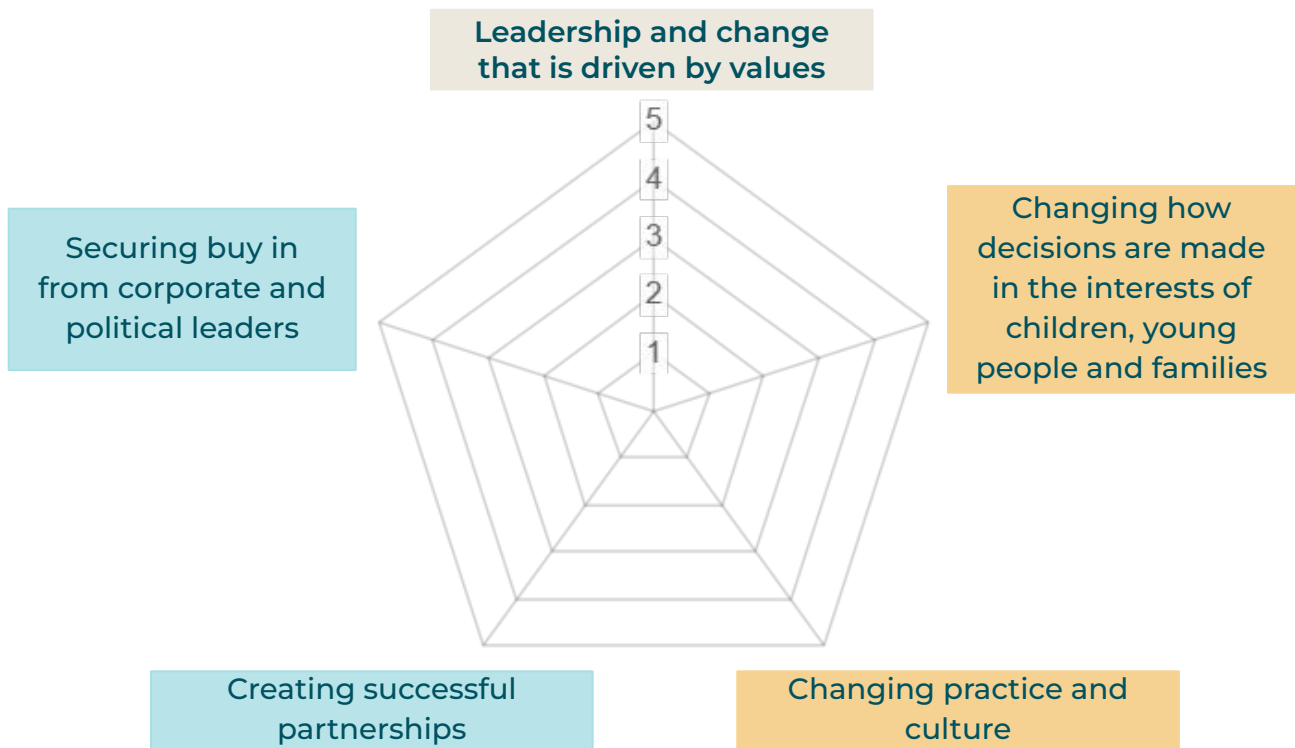
For example, a rating of 5 might sound like: *'I've worked with leaders from all parts of the council and across the political spectrum to make sure they know they have shared ownership of what we're doing. I even encourage them to shadow my team to learn more.'*

Your score:

Example Leadership Profile:



Your Leadership Profile:



Workbook 2:

Your self-reflection workbook

Leadership and change that is driven by values

How are you living out and honouring your values through your work?

How do your personal values align with those of the work you are doing?

How closely are the choices you make in your role aligned with your values?

How do your actions as a leader reflect your values?

Making decisions in the interest of children, young people and families

How do you change decision making in your organisation, so that decisions are consistently in the best interest of the children, young people and families?

How do you encourage and incorporate diverse perspectives on the realities facing the children and families you work with?

How do you collaborate with others, including families themselves, to make decisions in the interest of the children and families you work with?

How do you signal your support to practitioners in the decisions they make?

How do you communicate a collective ownership of difficult decisions, instead of difficult decisions being held by one team member?

How do you empower practitioners to learn from their decision?

**How do you encourage and enable practitioners to challenge decisions?
How often do practitioners challenge decisions in your organisation?**

Changing practice and culture

How do you support your team in adopting changes to culture and practice?

How have you created and communicated a shared vision for change in your organisation?

How do you support practitioners in building their comfort and confidence in changes over time?

How do you model the change required through your own choices and behaviours?

How do you encourage and enable practitioners to challenge change? How often do practitioners challenge change in your organisation?

Creating successful partnerships

How do you secure buy-in from partners?

How do you support each of your partners in understanding their role in implementing the new model and the potential to benefit them?

How do you create and maintain one-to-one relationships with each of your partners?

How do you use data and stories to bring outcomes for children and families to life?

Securing buy in from corporate leaders and politicians

How do you build shared corporate and political ownership by involving all corporate and political leaders in the model?

How do you invest in learning for corporate and political leaders to better understand the innovation?

Literature Review & Methodology

Before undertaking this review an extensive literature review was completed. The below sections summarise the relevant findings from the literature review, highlighting the case that existed for further information to be gathered on the attributes associated with successful SFPC leadership.

A number of relevant research areas were considered for the literature review, including general management and leadership theories, social work leadership standards, leadership and innovation research and existing evaluations of CSC innovations. Despite these findings offering some contextual insight into the attributes associated with successful SFPC leadership, they don't offer a full picture, as they lack specificity.

Management and leadership theories

There are a huge amount of generic management and leadership theories and related research. Although these offer some relevance to Children's Social Care leadership of innovations, they don't offer a full picture. As a result, their applicability is limited.

Theories of note are systemic leadership theory (Collier & Esteban, 2000) and distributed leadership theory (Harris, 2009; Bolden, 2011).

Systemic leadership theory emphasises the organisational factors that have an impact on practice and delivery of leadership - in other words, it emphasises the organisational context for leadership. This decouples leadership from traditional, individual-focused leadership theory, instead highlighting leadership in relation to the whole system, which includes organisational context (Collier & Esteban, 2000).

Distributed leadership theory emphasises leadership that is dissociated from organisational role. This means that the actions of each individual at every level of responsibility is important. Instead of a leader-follower relationship, this theory stresses leadership as a group quality (Harris, 2009). This leads to dispersed decision making across an organisation, which requires a group approach to organisational strategy, with an accentuation of shared meaning and engagement (Bolden, 2011).

Generic management and leadership research has evolved to produce tools for leadership development. Once again, although these are well established in leadership and management fields, they have varied levels of applicability to Children's Social Care innovation scenarios.

A tool of note is the TLQ360, which features four key areas of leadership. Within these four key areas of leadership, there are a number of identified characteristics which are relevant. In the area of leading and developing individuals, encouraging change is a characteristic of note. Similarly, within leading and developing the organisation, supporting a developmental culture and focussing team effort stand out as relevant characteristics. In the third key area of leadership, leading the way forward, building a shared vision and facilitating change sensitively seem particularly pertinent. Lastly, personal qualities and values note that being honest and consistent and acting with integrity are fundamental - both of which have particular suitability for Children's Social Care leadership of innovations.

These general management and leadership theories offer contextual insight into the attributes of successful SFPC leadership but are not specific enough to offer full relevance to this cohort of leaders.

Social Work Leadership Standards

Leadership in social work has evolved as a field of research over the last two decades. Through this research, a number of social work leadership standards have emerged. These standards are not developed with reference to innovations in social work and, as such, have limited relevance.

Of particular consideration is Ofsted leadership standards (Ofsted 2015, 2020, 2022). These emphasise elements of strategic leadership, such as meaningfully engaging politicians and providing a clear line of accountability, as well as placing importance on the quality of local partnerships; embedding a learning culture, which involves 'having a grip' on practice and ensuring that practice is consistently informed and improved by feedback; managing performance effectively; and completing workforce managing activities, such as monitoring workloads and working conditions and managing change carefully.

These social work leadership standards offer more specificity in referring to leaders in CSC. As a result, they provide a clear indication of the behaviours and skills expected of CSC leaders. In order to build on these standards, the behaviours and skills specific to *innovation* in CSC should be considered.

Leadership of innovation research

To provide more insights on leadership attributes specific to innovation in CSC, research on leadership of innovations were reviewed.

Most research concerning leadership of innovation focuses heavily on change management techniques and processes (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007; Harrison, 2005). This area of theory and research is uniquely positioned to explain a core function of leadership in implementing Strengthening Families Protecting Children innovations. However, it should be noted that this is not the only function of leadership on the SFPC programme. As such, this research does not offer a full picture of the attributes associated with successful SFPC leadership.

Change management literature asserts that the success of change depends on whether softer 'human' issues are considered and how these are integrated with 'hard' structures and systems (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004). With the pace of change in a modern world, and more specifically, in public sector environments, it is now generally accepted that there is no 'refreezing' part of a change process, where a social care organisation will stabilise completely, given social economic and policy shifts in social care. As a result, organisations must be more creative, flexible, adaptable, fluid and responsive (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007). Notable theories of change describe eight steps to managing change successfully, of which forming a guiding coalition, creating and communicating a vision and empowering people to act are highly applicable (Kotter, 1996).

Existing evaluations

The published evaluations of existing innovations in Children's Social Care innovation offer the most applicable findings related to successful SFPC leadership (Forrester et al., 2017; Cameron et al., 2016; Rodger et al., 2020). These evaluations focussed predominantly on elements of implementation not related to leadership. However, the few observations relevant to leadership note that better results were achieved through stable leadership, where changes in leadership during the implementation period were limited (Rodger et al., 2020). In addition, it was noted that a sense of ownership and passionate belief in the reforms by the leadership team were crucial to success (Forrester et al., 2017). These changes were then communicated as a set of values to the rest of the organisation, with a clear endorsement of the new model from senior leadership being a differentiating factor (Rodger et al., 2020).

These findings, although limited to only the most noteworthy points, are highly applicable to understanding leadership of innovations in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme.

The case for a leadership framework

These theories and research findings have begun to provide an outline of the leadership attributes most associated with successful implementation of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children innovations and have established the clear connection between leadership and successful implementation. However, these findings lack the specificity to be fully relevant. This means that where adopting authorities are challenged with issues of leadership succession or leadership development, no clear guidelines exist. As a consequence of this, the leadership skills and qualities associated with successful implementation can be variable between adopting authorities.

As a result, there is a clear need for the framework detailed in this report. The following sections detail the key questions and methodology which were used in this review.

Key questions

This review aimed to answer the following three key questions.

1. What are the attributes of leadership, and the contexts for leadership, most associated with successful implementation of:
 - Family Safeguarding;
 - Family Valued;
 - No Wrong Door?
2. How can we best support local authorities faced with a change of leaders in key roles?
3. How can we best support existing leaders with tools for self-reflection and coaching?

Methodology

Putting together this leadership framework involved running structured interviews with 16 leaders from adopting local authorities across the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme, and conversations with leaders from the original innovator authorities. Amongst the interviewees, each innovation and each level of leadership on the programme was represented. This included leaders in Director of Children's Services, Programme Manager, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, Executive Director, Practice Lead and other roles. Each interview was then coded for themes informed by the literature review, producing over 200 individual quotes which have informed the findings described in this report.

The key attributes of leadership detailed in the body of this report are most associated with successful implementation of Family Safeguarding, No Wrong Door and Family Valued as part of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. The level of successful implementation of each innovation was informed by judgements made by the original innovators and the SFPC programme team, which have yet to be validated by the independent evaluation. The content in this report will be revised once that evaluation is available.

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