



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Abuse  
Centre canadien de lutte  
contre les toxicomanies

Partnership. Knowledge. Change.  
Collaboration. Connaissance. Changement.

www.ccsa.ca • www.cclt.ca

# Systems Approach Workbook

## Leadership for a Systems Approach

October 2013

### ***Who should read this brief?***

- Leaders and decision makers, such as regional directors and program managers, in the substance use and related fields.
- Individuals at all system or organizational levels who are taking a leadership role in improving the accessibility, quality and range of substance use services and supports in Canada.

### ***Why is leadership relevant to the Systems Approach?***

- Effective leadership is vital for effective change and the implementation of innovation at any level in the system.
- This brief is part of the Systems Approach Workbook, which is intended to assist those using *A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* as a guiding framework for improving the accessibility, quality and range of services and supports for substance use in Canada.
- This brief outlines the key concepts, qualities, and approaches for effective leadership, including collaboration, emotional intelligence, and communication. It also provides links and references to tools available to support leadership development.

# **Systems Approach Workbook**

## **Leadership for a Systems Approach**

This document was published by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA).

Suggested citation: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. 2013. Systems Approach Workbook: Leadership for a systems approach, Ottawa: Author.

© Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2013.

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse  
500-75 Albert Street  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7  
Tel.: 613-235-4048  
Email: info@ccsa.ca

Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

This document can also be downloaded as a PDF at [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)

Ce document est également disponible en français sous le titre :

Manuel d'Approche systémique : Leadership pour un Approche systémique

ISBN 978-1-77178-044-5



# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
What is Leadership? .....	1
Why is Leadership Important? .....	1
What Makes a Good Leader? .....	1
<b>Leadership for a Systems Approach</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Introduction .....	2
Why is Leadership Important? .....	2
Canada’s Substance Use Treatment System.....	2
A Collaborative Approach for a Complex Context .....	3
Facilitative Leadership .....	4
Engagement .....	5
Leadership Styles.....	5
Personal Qualities that Enhance Leadership.....	6
Effective Approaches for Leaders .....	9
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Additional Resources</b> .....	<b>14</b>



# Executive Summary

## ***What is Leadership?***

Traditionally, leadership has meant being above others in a hierarchy, with an emphasis on individual contributions. Today, the traditional definition of leadership is evolving to reflect shared or facilitative models based on empowerment and collaboration, and focusing on the wisdom of the group. Good leadership is not measured by the achievements of the individual. Instead, it is demonstrated by the ability to create motivation and enthusiasm, and to harness the collective skills and energy of the whole for broader transformation.

## ***Why is Leadership Important?***

The *Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* (the Systems Approach report) recommends system-level changes to improve the accessibility, quality and range of substance use services and supports in Canada. Many of these changes involve breaking down silos that have traditionally separated system components within and outside of health services. Shifting toward a more client-centred, collaborative approach requires effective leadership throughout the system – no individual or single organization can do it alone. The engagement, relationships and collaboration that result from shared leadership models also contribute to sustainability through innovation, new practices and partnerships.

This brief provides an introduction to the concepts, ideas and actions that promote positive leadership practices needed to improve substance use services and supports in Canada.

## ***What Makes a Good Leader?***

There is no one perfect leadership style. The most important consideration in leadership is understanding and responding to the complexity and characteristics of the context. Generally, leadership styles rooted in coercive (demanding compliance) or pacesetter (high-performance standards) approaches are not well suited to high levels of complexity. Facilitative leadership provides the flexibility and collaboration required in a complex environment such as substance use treatment systems. Facilitative leadership is also an important component of collective impact, an approach through which leaders from diverse sectors work with a common agenda to address a social problem (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Skills and approaches that support a facilitative leadership style include:

- Applying evidence-based change management;
- Taking a strengths-based approach;
- Ensuring clear, effective communication;
- Seeking and responding to feedback (being flexible and adaptive to new ideas);
- Applying emotional intelligence and appreciative inquiry;
- Promoting collaboration, sharing leadership functions; and
- Understanding and working with resistance.



# Leadership for a Systems Approach

*To lead is not to influence others to do something they are not committed to, but rather to nurture a culture that motivates and even excites individuals to do what is required for the benefit of all. (Arthur F. Carmazzi, 2007)*

## Introduction

### Why is Leadership Important?

This brief, as part of the [Systems Approach Workbook](#), provides an overview of the concepts, qualities and approaches that contribute to leading and implementing effective and transformational system-level change and improvements within substance use and related services.

Historically, good leaders have been thought of as remarkable men and women who have engineered significant changes and advancements in fields such as politics, the military, science, theology and the arts. They have been admired as innovators and visionaries who inspired momentous shifts and left a lasting legacy of benefits to society. Within this context, we think of great leadership as almost the sole responsibility of heroic individuals.

Today's thinking about leadership has evolved from this model and shifted from the individual to the collective. It requires that leaders demonstrate the ability to inspire a shared vision, develop guiding principles and articulate values that engage and motivate others. Leaders also have a responsibility to create a trusting environment, especially through times of change. In today's complex human service systems, leadership is no longer about the power of an individual, but the empowerment of individuals throughout a project, organization or system.<sup>1</sup>

#### Systems Approach Guiding Concepts

- No wrong door
- Availability and accessibility
- Matching
- Choice and eligibility
- Flexibility
- Responsiveness
- Collaboration
- Coordination

### Canada's Substance Use Treatment System

The system of services and supports for substance use in Canada is currently fragmented. Recognizing this fragmentation, the Systems Approach report was developed to improve the accessibility, quality and range of substance use services and supports in Canada. The report recommends a transparent, system-level response that builds capacity across a broad continuum of services and supports. Developing this continuum means changes at all levels – from frontline service delivery to government funding structures to the public-at large. It means bringing together different partners including those in acute care, primary care, mental health, enforcement, community agencies and housing.

Collective impact refers to a structured process in which key actors from a range of sectors work together with a common agenda to address a social problem (Kania & Kramer, 2011). This approach recognizes that achieving an impact in a complex system requires c-ordinated changes throughout the system. Bringing together diverse sectors and jurisdictions requires effective leadership, but one

<sup>1</sup> CCSA's [Competencies for Canada's Substance Abuse Workforce](#) provide practical tools for identifying, developing and appraising competencies for leaders in the substance use and related professions.



person or even one organization, cannot lead these changes alone. Transforming Canada's treatment system requires a collaborative leadership approach.

## A Collaborative Approach for a Complex Context

*People are the heart and spirit of all that counts. Without people, there is no need for leaders.*  
(Max Depree, 1990)

Most people can identify the impact that strong leadership had on a successful project that they've been involved in or the impact that ineffective leadership had in derailing a project. Many factors combine to determine the success or failure of leadership, including context,<sup>2</sup> complexity,<sup>3</sup> the characteristics of the team<sup>4</sup> and communication.

One of the key contextual considerations for any leader is the complexity of the project, issue or change that he or she is facing. Leaders who are inclusive, foster participation and share responsibility are more likely to recognize and respond to emergent challenges, barriers and opportunities that surface within complex environments. Substance use and related issues such as mental health are inherently complex, involving many components that interact within a dynamic context, often with unpredictable results.

To move from a system composed of individual services to a system composed of a comprehensive continuum of services, leaders must be able to move beyond hierarchical management frameworks to more holistic, transparent and interconnected structures. This transition challenges today's leaders to use tact, diplomacy and influence as levers to effect a desirable environment where change can be made and service quality improved.

Engaging senior or executive leadership is also essential. Resourcing and sustainability for a change initiative are more successful with senior level buy-in. However, good leaders enable engagement and avoid a "top down" process in favour of a collaborative one that embraces the principle of client-centred care. Ideally, a service system will function through interactive partnerships that place the client experience at the centre.<sup>5</sup> It will provide the flexibility to be able to respond to the changing needs of individuals, families, communities and regions with a commitment to quality.<sup>6</sup> To achieve a dynamic service continuum, individuals and organizations must move from an internally focused orientation to an orientation towards shared responsibility. A systems approach is about how "we," as members of a larger system, function interdependently through collaboration, cooperation and commitment to meeting clients' needs.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Systems Approach Workbook includes a customizable Context Analysis Template on its [Tools and Templates](#) page.

<sup>3</sup> System complexity is determined by the level of agreement and certainty between cause and effect. In a complex system, however, the dynamic nature of the relationships between different system components means there are often many different perspectives and a high degree of uncertainty regarding the effect of a given action. [Systems Thinking and Complexity in Substance Use Systems](#) in the Systems Approach Workbook explores the issue of complexity in more detail, including its impact on change, project implementation and leadership.

<sup>4</sup> [Working with Teams](#) in the Systems Approach Workbook explores models and strategies for working with teams.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, CCSA's [Competencies for Canada's Substance Abuse Workforce](#) for information on operationalizing a Client Service Orientation.

<sup>6</sup> [Quality Improvement](#) in the Systems Approach Workbook explores the development and progress of quality improvement approaches in the substance use and other health fields.



## Facilitative Leadership

Facilitative leaders focus on the wisdom of the group rather than the individual and so create opportunities for group members to share their wisdom. Making the space and time to work with others often runs counter to the common practice of tightening timelines and streamlining processes when under pressure (Raelin, 2002). However, valuing and promoting the contribution of others' skills and abilities increases the capacity to accomplish the work at hand and helps to clarify the roles of all involved.

Often, in a shared leadership situation, the implementation of a new initiative will require multiple organizations to agree on a new course of action, or a change of practice. An example would be the use of a common intake process to connect clients to addictions, mental health, primary care and housing services. When most members of the group are somehow impacted by the proposed change, their input and active participation is critical. This requirement applies to everyone involved, including those who may be outside the organization or even the health system.

The [Tiered Model](#) presented in the Systems Approach report indicates the scope of partners that those leading change will want to consider when working at the system level. Examples include individuals with lived experience,<sup>7</sup> frontline service providers, researchers and policy makers, as well as partners from community organizations and organizations in sectors such as housing, primary health care, mental health and criminal justice.

Once identified, it is important to engage these participants and partners in ways that recognize and apply their knowledge and experience to improve the system. In some instances, co-leadership among participants is appropriate and desirable, depending on the diversity of the subject matter. For example, dealing with housing for clients with substance use and mental health issues is a multi-dimensional issue, and is of relevance to many providers, including municipalities. For this reason, the health sector should not be alone in leading discussion and planning processes.

Leaders using a shared leadership approach also appreciate and leverage the interdependent nature of organizations and structures. In their article, *Leadership in the Age of Complexity: From Hero to Host*, Wheatley and Frieze (2010) encourage the abandonment of the idea of “leader-as-hero” in favour of “leader-as-host.” They explain that leaders who host become curious and create the space to ask questions that are important to system development such as:

- Who is in this organization or community?
- What skills, knowledge, insights and capacities might they offer?
- What can we learn from them?

---

<sup>7</sup> [Valuing People with Lived Experience](#) in the Systems Approach Workbook can be used to support incorporating people with lived experience into system change, planning, delivery and evaluation.



### Case Study: Community Mobilization Prince Albert

Community Mobilization Prince Albert (CMPA) is an excellent example of collaborative leadership. The partnership brings together key stakeholders from education, health care, substance use, mental health, social services, First Nations, policing and community agencies, among others, to work collaboratively to reduce crime and victimization. One component of the model is “The Hub,” where frontline workers meet to discuss and mobilize immediate, integrated action regarding individual or family situations with elevated risk across multiple sectors. A second component is “The COR,” where representatives from various agencies focus on longer-term goals, research and system-level improvement. Leaders from each of the agencies and departments involved are willing to commit resources and share ownership for addressing the issues raised by frontline staff and the community.

Adapted from a model in Glasgow, Scotland, the partnership model has been recognized internationally and is spreading to projects in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario and the United States, among others.

Additional information is available on the CMPA website at <http://www.mobilizepa.ca/>.

## Engagement

Initiating change takes considerable commitment and motivation. Commitment and motivation are enhanced when participants believe their time and energy is valued and there is genuine opportunity to influence the process. Therefore leadership must find ways to engage others to participate in a meaningful way. (The [Additional Resources](#) section provides links to more information on these engagement activities.)

Many tools and methods of engagement have been developed in the knowledge exchange and education fields. These methods include Open Space Technology, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry and Reflective Learning Circles. Through these kinds of approaches and activities, as well as genuine requests for input and honest discussion, existing linkages and gaps can be explored that help frame a functional analysis of the system. These approaches are also useful beyond collecting information. When used effectively, they are excellent ways to build a sense of community and shared purpose through meaningful and interactive engagement.

Other engagement methodologies, such as those emerging from process improvement strategies (e.g., the Lean method<sup>8</sup>), also require participants to engage in a thoughtful, client-centred dialogue. Value stream mapping is particularly effective in ensuring all voices are heard, from clients, family-members and friends, to frontline staff and other organizations (NHS, 2008).

## Leadership Styles

When discussing frameworks or models for leadership, it is also important to consider what type of leadership style is best suited to support a facilitative, hosting approach. Goleman (2000) conducted a study that identified six common leadership styles that many of us can identify with:

1. Coercive: the leader demands compliance
2. Authoritative: the leader mobilizes people toward a vision

---

<sup>8</sup> [Quality Improvement](#) in the Systems Approach Workbook gives an overview of the Lean method and value stream mapping approaches.





3. Affiliative: the leader creates harmony and builds emotional bonds
4. Democratic: the leader forges consensus through participation
5. Pacesetting: the leader sets high standards for performance
6. Coaching: the leader develops people for the future

The outcomes of this study indicated that the Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic and Coaching styles contributed to a positive working environment and healthy job performance. Conversely, the Coercive and Pacesetting styles were seen to negatively affect the workplace. A Coercive style tended to foster resentment and resistance, while Pacesetting created feelings of being overwhelmed and “burnt out.”

Those leading change might want to take note of these styles and be mindful of approaches that foster resistance and frustration. This mindfulness can support the challenge often faced by change leaders in balancing effort spent on achievement of tasks with effort spent on creating a positive environment. The results of this study illustrate that there is no one right way to lead. There are, however, common attributes of good leadership as described more fully below.

### ***Personal Qualities that Enhance Leadership***

**Emotional intelligence:** The model introduced by Goleman (1998) focuses on Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership performance. Leading with EI means monitoring the oneself for personal reactions and responses, as well as attending to the reactions and responses of others. Such attention to one’s own internal climate and moderating its externalization appropriately in a leadership role requires patience and practice. EI is, however, an important skill in dealing with personal reactions that can be driven by passion for the field, stigma and lived experience.

Goleman outlines four main EI domains:

- Self-awareness: The ability to read one's emotions and recognize their impact while using “gut feelings” to guide decisions.
- Self-management: Involves controlling one's emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances.
- Social awareness: The ability to sense, understand and react to others' emotions, while comprehending social networks.
- Relationship management: The ability to inspire, influence and develop others while managing conflict.

**Encouraging:** Kouzes and Posner (2002) identify part of the leadership challenge as the ability to “encourage the heart.” This means supporting others in finding the ways and means to feel connected to the goals and commitments of a change initiative, and managing feelings of discouragement when the process slows or takes an unexpected detour. Strategies for encouragement include:<sup>9</sup>

- Taking a strengths-based approach vs. focusing on deficiencies;

---

<sup>9</sup> These strategies and others are outlined in the [Change Management modules](#) of the Systems Approach Workbook.



- Communicating and celebrating accomplishments along the way;
- Taking the individual considerations of those involved in the process into account and acknowledging individual contributions; and
- Supporting “early adopters” or those who are already in support of change to build interest and enthusiasm and form a distributed leadership network, or to become leaders throughout the system or organization that can be assigned critical tasks.

Encouraging the contributions of others means that reflection, divergent thinking and consultation are valued and promoted throughout the process.

**Committed:** Commitment is sometimes seen as creating a sense of urgency or an imperative for change. Kouzes and Posner (2002) talk about challenging the process or the status quo to change, grow, innovate and improve. They also stress that others must be enlisted to develop a shared vision that inspires participants by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams. Engaging people early in the process can strengthen commitment and provide a focal point that draws both participants and the initiative forward, again diversifying leadership throughout the organization. As with *encouragement*, taking individual considerations into account will play an important role.

For example, streamlining an intake and assessment process that facilitates ease of access has many benefits that will resonate more strongly with some than others, and can be emphasized accordingly:

- Frontline staff might feel a stronger commitment to the goal of improving their ability to identify and meet clients’ needs.
- Administrators might be more strongly influenced by reduced process and paperwork associated with a streamlined system.

**Curious:** Cultivating a curious mindset is essential to fostering a culture of collaboration through all stages of an initiative. Developing key questions to apply to the stages of systems change can promote reflection, exploration and evaluation over the course of an initiative. Questions play a foundational role in the “Action Learning” approach to leadership, for example (Marquardt, 2005). Quinn Patton (2011) also cites an inquiry framework of systems change set of questions that focus on cultivating an understanding of the following elements:

- Perspective: What are the different ways in which this situation can be understood?
- Boundaries: Who is being included, who is being excluded and at what cost?
- Interrelationships: What is the nature of the interrelationships within a situation?

When there is a high degree of uncertainty on how to proceed, a number of possible options or complexity at play, being curious will prevent barriers such as premature focus, biased positions and entrenched thinking. For example, a curious leader might ask broader questions such as, “How can we connect more people with our services?” rather than questions rooted in the status quo such as, “How can we streamline our telephone intake process?”

**Responsible:** The importance of creating a sense of shared responsibility amongst members of an organizational or systemic change initiative is vital; however leaders must also provide the resources needed to implement change. Within a systems framework, it is crucial for leaders to remove barriers and, when indicated, influence other levels of leadership or management to garner necessary support.



- The CMPA model described above, for example, creates an opportunity for a range of stakeholders to share ownership and responsibility for concerns such as street-involved alcoholics that have traditionally been addressed in enforcement, addiction or emergency services “silos.” Using shared COR resources to conduct research, CMPA leaders from enforcement, addiction, emergency and primary care agencies have been able to generate the data needed to support cross-sectoral investments in comprehensive outreach and case management. Stakeholders need to see the value in the project for them to share responsibility for achieving results and to communicate with staff in a way that generates shared ownership.

**Responsive:** Going full-speed ahead in spite of significant concerns or problems within the system is a guaranteed way to jeopardize the future of a process or a project. The impacts of change are unique to the individual, the organization and the broader system. Being responsive means being mindful of others’ concerns and perspectives. Leaders must recognize that more complex domains require experimental and exploratory management strategies. This recognition includes the ability to tolerate some failure, as well as to be open to the emergence of new ideas.

- For example, the manager who listens to frontline staff’s feedback about a new and unwieldy client intake procedure and works with them to improve the process is demonstrating responsiveness. This responsiveness results in an improved intake process that is more person-centred and efficient, yet still meets data collection requirements.

**Pragmatic:** Being pragmatic is defined as having a philosophical attitude whereby the validity of an idea is weighed by its practical consequences or “the proof is in the pudding.” This attitude makes pragmatism a very client-centred approach: the proof sought is improved client outcomes. From an organizational leadership perspective, being pragmatic emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in which change is occurring,<sup>10</sup> acknowledging differing perspectives and challenges within that context, and bringing them into some form of accord with one another and with the project goal. Pragmatism balances the ideal with the real, recognizing that realities in the substance use field such as stigma, limited resources, budget restraints, and shifting mandates and priorities must be factored into the course of an initiative and monitored.

- For example, plans to add addiction services to a community health centre might need to include education and awareness activities targeting other health services providers at the centre to ensure that addiction clients do not face discrimination.

**Transparent:** Demonstrating transparency builds credibility, sets a foundation for clear, honest communication and instils confidence. Being as candid as possible about what is happening in the workplace helps to avoid speculation and the tendency to fill in the gaps with interpretation. Workplace speculation or gossip can often be wildly inaccurate, counter-productive and detrimental to organizational functioning. A good communication strategy that includes a consideration of who the key stakeholders are, what their main concerns will be and the most effective methods to address their informational needs is helpful in facilitating transparency.

Transparency also means admitting to mistakes and miscalculations, so that the concept of failure is reframed as an important part of the development and learning process. Transparency includes being candid and identifying mistakes made by leaders.

---

<sup>10</sup> The Systems Approach Workbook [Context Analysis Template](#) is a tool for identifying barriers and opportunities in the current context.



## Effective Approaches for Leaders

*The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything.*

*(Bishop William Connor Magee, 1868)*

This section does not provide an exhaustive description of leadership approaches, but offers a summary of approaches that have proven useful to successful leaders, particularly in a climate of change.

**Appreciative inquiry:** Appreciative Inquiry is a systems-based approach to change that promotes innovation and creativity based on identifying and building on existing positive components (e.g., organizational successes, staff capabilities, shared vision, etc.). Problems are not ignored, but rather re-framed within this positive context that creates a more inviting and motivating setting for the change process (see Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Appreciative leaders recognize commitment to the way services have traditionally been provided and preserve the elements that are functioning well. Being aware and exercising sensitivity to past experiences, influences and the culture within organizations is an important part of promoting respect for others.

**Collaboration:** Collaborations can produce interesting and unexpected results. Consider for example the fresh and unique creations resulting from duets or productions that bring diverse musicians and other artists together. The same is true when building a culture of sharing and feedback for planning purposes. The ability to exchange and create knowledge is essential in leading organizational change and capitalizing on collective intelligence, creativity and innovation. Collaboration is also a necessary part of ensuring that systems-level responses to substance use reflect clients' cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary needs. Finally, collaboration allows parts of the system to leverage each others' strengths, resulting in improvements across the continuum.

For example, CMPA sees cases in which a client's various needs and risk factors have been presented to different agencies in isolation:

- A youth's infrequent binge drinking results in a trip to the emergency room and a referral to youth substance counselling via social services.
- Reports from the family indicate that this is rare and there are no other concerns.
- From the substance abuse lens, the issue therefore appears to be experimental drinking with relationship and parental skill development opportunities.

Traditionally, the story might end here. However, through collaboration and information-sharing between agencies, CMPA learns that this youth is truant, involved in criminal behaviour, has been reported missing in the past and has had more frequent substance use than reported. When agencies collaboratively offer support to the family, it becomes apparent that the family is struggling extensively with violence. Several agencies had worked with this youth, but none had the complete picture of the risk factors present, so the root problem was not revealed. Through a collaborative approach, the family can seek assistance for the full constellation of factors that led to the trip to the emergency room.

This example illustrates the importance of keeping in mind that the goal is not the creation of the resources or team itself, but rather the opportunities that collaboration among those resources can produce.



**Change management:** Taking an effective change management approach means recognizing that change is a process and involves taking a systematic and strategic approach throughout the various stages. Change management is essential to ensure that change is effective and sustainable. The [Systems Approach Change Management modules](#) outline leadership roles and responsibilities that evolve through the change management process.

Examples of leadership roles and responsibilities include:

- Prioritizing issues and problem areas;
- Developing and coordinating the implementation of strategic plans;
- Promoting capacity development at all levels;
- Coordinating communication and collaboration with partner and senior leadership;
- Problem solving;
- Coordinating evaluation; and
- Raising the profile of substance use as a health and social priority.

**Understanding resistance:** James O’Toole (1996) has identified 33 reasons for resisting change including: Short-term Thinking, Habit, Lack of Ripeness (readiness), Cynicism and Homeostasis. Appreciative leadership respects resistance as a normal response to change, rather than as a problematic trait at both individual and organizational levels. Resistance can, in fact, be beneficial:

- Resistance often brings forward valid and valuable concerns that can result in better solutions to problems, often through the engagement of those bringing forward issues;
- Respecting differences in perspectives and opinions creates the space for exploration and discovery, and might actually improve the originally proposed solution; or
- Working with those who are most vocal in their resistance sends a strong signal about leadership style: “winning them over” provides an opportunity to leverage their natural leadership skills for a distributed network of champions.

An example of beneficial resistance in the field can be found in the introduction of a new screening tool. Frontline providers could be resistant to implementing a lengthy screening process that takes up their own and their clients’ time. Further research by the project team could result in the discovery of an abbreviated tool with equal validity, resulting in increased efficiency and engagement.

**Ongoing feedback:** Gaining insights from staff, partners, colleagues and clients is critical to determining the efficacy of a systemic change initiative or improvement. The more immediate the feedback, the more valuable it will be from a developmental perspective, informing next steps in planning, implementing or sustaining the initiative. Leaders can create a culture where feedback is the norm by weaving it throughout planning and implementation. Encouraging both favourable and critical feedback ensures the quality of the end result.

- Leaders should build in time to regularly review indicators from both formal and informal evaluations, reflect on what has been tried and make ongoing course corrections, as needed. Data — once obtained — is also a valuable communication mechanism: sharing information on the system’s past or current performance often provides evidence that change is required.



- “Safe-fail” trials<sup>11</sup> are an example of real-time evaluation and feedback mechanisms that form an integral part of organizational development and change. Pilot testing or demonstration projects can serve as opportunities to adjust a new process and to examine whether the outcomes and results are what was expected.

Acknowledging feedback and communicating what action has or has not been taken as a result is important for both engagement and transparency.

**Mindful listening:** As a listener, it is quite natural to apply a personal filter of experience and perception to a given conversation. This filter can determine how conclusions are formulated based on individual, subjective experience. However, biased “sense making” and assumptions can create problems. Mindful listening involves being present, cultivating empathy and being attentive to our own personal filter.

Reflective practice is used by leaders as a means of developing an awareness of self and minimizing problems of bias and assumptions. To cultivate self-reflective skills leaders need:

- To analyse critically their thoughts, feelings, observations, behaviours and actions; and
- To be aware of perceptions, assumptions, biases and judgements.

For example, a newly integrated addictions and mental health division is led by a manager with a mental health background. Taking a reflective approach, the manager would consider how this background may influence her perceptions. This might include, for example, looking at how her experience with substance use as a component of concurrent disorders diagnoses might lead to a conservative view about the need for standalone substance use services.

**Effective communication:** Communication lies at the heart of any successful planning process. Whether considering how to speak effectively to an individual, to interface between services, to hold productive meetings or to develop a communication strategy,<sup>12</sup> a leader should demonstrate and model the basics of good communication. Systems Approach project partners span an array of organizations and programs from public health to law enforcement that are all connected differently to substance use services and that bring different mandates, philosophies and perspectives, which are often reflected in different styles of communication and language. (The [Additional Resources](#) section provides links to tools that can be used to analyze the ways in which people communicate, learn and process information.)

When leading such activities as group or team discussions, creating communication strategies or even developing a survey, leaders need to be aware of the various ways others process information and communicate. Differences occur at both individual and sectoral levels. For example, if leaders recognize the differences between more introverted or extraverted communicators when conducting a focus group, they can ensure they deliberately identify and elicit feedback from more introverted participants so that more outgoing communicators are not the sole contributors to the discussion. As another example, if there are law enforcement representatives on a committee, they might have set communication protocols to follow for organization-wide communication. More democratic and

---

<sup>11</sup> David Snowden explains “safe-fail probes” or trials as low-risk, quick experiments to test emerging possibilities or ideas. These probes must have observable outcomes and should be planned in a way that failure is an acceptable outcome that provides learning opportunities. See Snowden’s blog on [safe-fail probes](#) on the Cognitive Edge Network.

<sup>12</sup> The Systems Approach Workbook includes [tools for developing a Communications Strategy](#), including sample materials.



inclusive planning and consulting processes support engagement, foster a sense of team work and respect organizational differences in how communication is achieved.<sup>13</sup>

Other considerations for tailoring the style and manner of communication include whether someone is:

- A big picture thinker or a detail person;
- A sequential planner or more spontaneous in their approach; or
- A participant who prefers to plunge in and trust the process or someone who wants to start with the final outcome and move backwards through the stages methodically.

## Conclusion

Corporate, government and not-for-profit organizations are increasingly recognizing that traditional, authoritative, hierarchy-based leadership does not promote effective, sustainable change. Change at the system level or within a complex, multi-sector system such as substance abuse, requires diversified leadership and engagement throughout the organizations involved. Facilitative leadership supports the collective impact demonstrated, for example, in Prince Albert's CMPA initiative. By working with multiple sectors, the initiative has been able to develop comprehensive solutions to complex problems that individual agencies such as police, youth services, education and addiction treatment services had not been able to address alone.

This brief provides an introduction to the concepts, ideas and actions that promote positive leadership practices for improving services and supports for substance abuse in Canada. There is no one type of leadership style or approach that will suit all individuals and contexts, but rather a suite of qualities, attitudes and actions that optimize:

- **Engagement:** Engaging the organization, affiliated partners and the system as a whole through commitment, collaboration and shared leadership;
- **Appreciating the context:** Understanding and considering the current background or context by promoting strength-based, appreciative inquiry and strategic questioning;
- **Shared vision:** Building and sustaining a strong, shared vision and commitment for change by ensuring guiding values and principles are embedded in all aspects of the initiative;
- **Meaningful feedback:** Supporting learning and improvement through reflective practice and developmental evaluation throughout the stages of a project or initiative; and
- **Communication:** Communicating clearly and effectively by being aware of others, avoiding communication pitfalls and ensuring congruence between words and actions.

---

<sup>13</sup> The Systems Approach Workbook [Working with Teams](#) provides tips for working effectively with diverse teams.



## References

- Bushe, G. R. (2001). *Clear leadership: how outstanding leaders make themselves understood, cut through the mush, and help everyone get real at work*. Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Carmazzi, A.F. (2007). *The psychology of leadership (Part I): Understanding the influence of inspirational leaders*. Retrieved from [http://carmazzi.net/the\\_psychology\\_of\\_leadership\\_part1.html](http://carmazzi.net/the_psychology_of_leadership_part1.html).
- Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Depree, M. (1990). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Dell.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (2000). *Leadership that gets results*. Cambridge: Harvard Business Review.
- Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter, 2011. Retrieved from [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact).
- Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (2002). *Leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marquardt, M. J. (2005). *Leading with questions: How leaders find the right solutions by knowing what to ask*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement. (2008). *Quality and service improvement tools: Value stream mapping*. London: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.institute.nhs.uk/quality\\_and\\_service\\_improvement\\_tools/quality\\_and\\_service\\_improvement\\_tools/process\\_mapping\\_-\\_value\\_stream\\_mapping.html](http://www.institute.nhs.uk/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/process_mapping_-_value_stream_mapping.html).
- O'Toole, J. (1996). *Leading change: The argument for values based leadership*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Quinn Patton, M. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Raelin, J.A. (2002). I don't have time to think (vs. the art of reflective practice). *Reflections: The SoL Journal* 4(1): 66-79.
- Wheatley, M. Frieze, D. (2010). Leadership in the age of complexity: From hero to host. Retrieved from <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/Leadership-in-Age-of-Complexity.pdf>.





## Additional Resources

Links to external websites are provided for information purposes and do not imply endorsement or authorization by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA). CCSA has tried to provide links to open-access resources, but recognizes there are also many excellent fee-based materials available.

### Change Management

Change Management Learning Centre on-line tutorials: [www.change-management.com/tutorials.htm](http://www.change-management.com/tutorials.htm).

Systems Approach Workbook: <http://www.nts-snt.ca/Eng/Change-Management/Pages/Default.aspx>.

### Communication

Forbes: 10 Communication secrets of great leaders:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikemyatt/2012/04/04/10-communication-secrets-of-great-leaders/>.

Dr. Michael Hackman, Communicating for leadership success:

[http://www.executiveforum.com/PDFs/Hackman\\_Synopsis.pdf](http://www.executiveforum.com/PDFs/Hackman_Synopsis.pdf)

Harvard Business Review Insight Center, Tools for effective communication: <http://hbr.org/special-collections/insight/communication>

University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence, Effective communication: barriers and strategies: <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/communicating-students/telling/effective-communication-barriers-and-strategies>.

### Engagement Mechanisms

The art of powerful questions: <http://www.sparc.bc.ca/the-art-of-powerful-questions>.

Art of hosting: <http://www.artofhosting.org/home/>.

David Wilcox, The guide to effective participation:

[https://socialchange.healthspaces.ca/sites/socialchange.healthspaces.ca/files/resouces/documents/effective\\_\\_participation\\_guide.pdf](https://socialchange.healthspaces.ca/sites/socialchange.healthspaces.ca/files/resouces/documents/effective__participation_guide.pdf).

University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of Quality Improvement, Facilitator tool kit:

<http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>.

World Café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>.

### Leadership Skills and Characteristics

CCSA, Competencies for Canada's substance abuse workforce: Behavioural competencies:

<http://www.ccsa.ca/2010%20CCSA%20Documents/ccsa-011801-2010.pdf>.

Appreciative Inquiry Commons portal: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>.

Raelin, J.A. (2003). *Creating leaderful organizations: How to bring out leadership in everyone*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.