



The role of leader is transforming.

Our ever-changing environment means that organisations are adapting to be more agile, innovative, and customer focused. Moving to deeper levels of agility is calling on us to lead “horizontally.” The leadership of the past has been characterised by pyramids of power, fortified silos, internal competition, and achievement at any cost. But, it’s being supplanted with flatter models of team-based organisation that encourage collaboration, allow talent to flourish, and enable people to pursue a true sense of purpose.



Horizontal Leadership

Horizontal Leadership

Horizontal Leadership is about leading across an organisation, rather than top down through vertical power. In practice, Horizontal Leadership looks like partnering, collaborating, sharing, coaching, empowering, and influencing. It's breaking down internal silos and leading across teams, divisions, functions, and geographies to allow new, creative ideas to spring from all parts of the organisation.

Among a long list of benefits, Horizontal Leadership:

- Optimises project delivery through deep levels of ownership and accountability
- Empowers and unlocks potential – people have the freedom to step up, grow and innovate
- Activates thinking for considered, strategic decision making
- Enables the organisation to better anticipate, respond, and adapt to change
- Enhances problem-solving – through collaboration, diversity of ideas, and sharing resources



In our work at Performance Frontiers supporting large transformations, we have identified 6 key levers that unlock Horizontal Leadership success. We call these the 6 movements of Horizontal Leadership.

Traditional Leadership

Horizontal Leadership

Vertical Hierarchy or Siloed Thinking

Top-down, ego-centric: serving myself or my own team or function's success

Whole System Thinking

End-to-end, eco-centric: serving our whole organisation, with our customer at the centre

Fixed Mindset

Protecting the status quo, closed, fearing change

Growth Mindset

Learning and improvement-driven, curious, change = opportunity

Transactional Relationships

"Only if I get something in return" mistrust or little confidence in others, one way communication

Mutually Engaging Partnerships

"We're responsible for each other's success", trust, purposeful dialogue

Controlling

"Do, because I said so", micro-management, reactive

Influencing and Enabling

"Do, because you believe in it", empowerment and enablement, inspiring through purpose

Competition

"Us versus them", achieve outcomes at any cost

Collaboration and Co-authorship

"We're in it together", achieve purposeful outcomes together, commitment and accountability

Information as Power

Withholding information to ensure status and to use for leverage

Transparency

Distributing and sharing information intentionally to help the system see and know itself

Movement 1:

Vertical Hierarchy or Siloed Thinking

Top-down, ego-centric: serving myself or my own team or function's success

Whole System Thinking

End-to-end, eco-centric: serving our whole organisation, with customer at the centre

Traditionally, we viewed organisations quite like machines. There were separate parts and functions; a centralised source of power; decisions were made at the top and filtered down the chain of command; employees were just cogs in the machine.

Today, however, the complexity and speed of change in our environment has necessitated a new model – one that can adapt, evolve, and grow. One that is alive. Today's organisations are living ecosystems.

Leadership is no longer about simply executing your own strategy, and achieving your own goals by drawing the straightest line from point A to B. Your new priority is to seek outcomes that are in the best interest of the entire organisation, your customer, and your surrounding community (ie 'whole-systems thinking').

Ask:

- **What are the needs and priorities of others?**
- **How do we impact each other?**
- **How can we support our whole system?**

Movement 2:

Fixed Mindset

Protecting the status quo: closed, fearing change

Growth Mindset

Learning and improvement driven: curious, change = opportunity

If we accept that organisations are living ecosystems, then every team member plays a key role in contributing to a thriving system. And here, mindset is everything. Our mindsets are the subconscious drivers behind every decision we make.

In her seminal work on mindsets and motivation, Carol Dweck identified two mindsets we tend to hold about the capabilities of ourselves and others: the Fixed Mindset and the Growth Mindset. If you have a Fixed Mindset, you believe your abilities and qualities are "carved in stone." Failure is feared. Self-preservation is your goal. On the other hand, a Growth Mindset means you see qualities and capabilities as things you can develop. Success comes as a result of learning, development, and grit. As such, improvement is your goal, and failure is seen as an opportunity to learn.

If you embrace a Growth Mindset in your leadership, you will see abundance and possibility in your whole system and are more likely to engage across the organisation. You will see any change, challenge, and failure as opportunities to learn, innovate, and grow.

Ask:

- **What are some basic beliefs I hold about my abilities and those of others?**
- **How can I better practise a Growth Mindset?**
- **How can I coach others to be more growth focused?**





Movement 3:

Transactional Relationships

“Only if I get something in return”: mistrust or little confidence in others, one-way communication

Mutually Engaging Partnerships

“We’re responsible for each other’s success”: trust, purposeful dialogue

In a connected ecosystem, we must break down silos and share knowledge and resources across boundaries, working together to achieve greater outcomes. Therefore, effective Horizontal Leadership involves shifting from transactional relationships (where each party is in it for themselves) to partnering relationships (concerned with mutual outcomes).

A partnership is defined as a relationship where both parties feel responsible for the success of whatever project or process they are jointly engaged in. Partnering with others optimises the creation of value and enables us to achieve outcomes that we wouldn’t be able to accomplish on our own.

You can grow partnerships and lead the development of partnering cultures by cultivating empathy and generosity. Strengthen these qualities by investing in partners when you don’t need anything in return. Do what’s within your power to understand and support the needs of those within your network. However, be sure to balance your selflessness with a clear awareness of boundaries.

Ask:

- Who can I partner with to create or add value?
- How can I develop an astute understanding of my partner’s needs and motivations?
- How can I contribute to their success?





Movement 4:

Controlling

“Do, because I said so”: micro-management, reactive

Influencing and Enabling

“Do because you believe in it”: empowerment and enablement, inspiring through purpose

Once upon a time, those with positions held power. Nowadays, those who can influence have the power. Influencing is to effect or change an outcome in an indirect, but usually significant, way. Influencing allows you to motivate others without using authority as the key driver. It is, therefore, one of the key skills required when shifting from a vertical to a horizontal approach to leadership.



Ask:

- **How can I enhance my relational influence across the system?**
- **How do I communicate with conviction, clarity, and curiosity?**
- **What stories can I tell to communicate the key messages?**

Movement 5:

Competition

“Us versus them”: achieve outcomes at any cost

Collaboration and Co-authorship

“We’re in it together”: achieve purposeful outcomes together, commitment and accountability

Within a connected ecosystem, collaboration is your operating mantra. Inspiring ideas can spring from all parts of agile organisations, so collaboration is key to surfacing these ideas and bringing them to life. To collaborate well, you must shift from a mindset of competition and winning (often at the expense of others) to a mindset of co-authorship.

As you are now all part of the one team, seek to understand the goals of other departments, divisions, and functions, and then find the intersection with your own goals.

Understand that great value can be found in conflict. It increases authenticity, enables you

to make more informed decisions, and provokes new ideas and innovative thinking. Suspend your judgement, let diverse views emerge, and ask curious questions. Leverage commonalities to explore possibilities and solutions that benefit both parties.



Ask:

- **Who needs to be involved?**
- **How can we identify our shared goal/s?**
- **What are our ways of working?**
- **How will we work constructively through conflict?**



Movement 6:

Information as Power

Withholding information to ensure status and use for leverage

Transparency

Distributing and sharing information intentionally to help the system see and know itself

Trust underpins Horizontal Leadership. It is a vote of confidence in a relationship. A key way to build trust is to shift from viewing information as power to leading a culture of transparency.

Information as power is knowing something that others don't and withholding it, diluting it, muddying the waters with misinformation to maintain your position, or even going so far as to leverage information against others to actively weaken their position. This behaviour breeds a culture of competition, mistrust, and fear.

Transparency, however, is a complete absence of secrecy. It is acting in a way where all can see and understand your actions. A culture of openness and transparency ensures everyone across the system is always operating from the clearest picture possible.

Ask:

- What is the transparency and clarity others need from me?
- What do I need to pay attention to in my actions and behaviours to invoke trust and reliability?
- How will I ensure others can see and understand my actions?



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