



Bridging Boundaries

Lessons from Leaders

Executive Summary



Authored by:

**Sharon King and
Larry Peterson
Starfield Consulting Ltd.
(905) 844-9518
info@starfield.ca**



Executive Summary

This report synthesizes lessons from 40 successful leaders of complex change initiatives in the government and health care sectors. Leaders who are truly successful in these complex transformational initiatives are relatively rare, but they do exist. These leaders have found new behaviours and perspectives that enable results in initiatives with a myriad of stakeholders all with their own processes and cultures. Their lessons provide a guide to other leaders based on real-life examples. The participants in this study achieved some remarkable results such as:

- reducing the number of people waiting for beds in the Emergency Department by 70%;



- leading an inter-jurisdictional integration project that saved hundreds of millions of dollars annually in land development, simultaneously increasing economic activities and doubling the amount of land used for parks and protected areas; and
- integrating systems and the associated business processes of 22 different organizations.

The leaders in our interviews intentionally or intuitively embraced and implemented behaviours and perspectives that fulfilled their leadership responsibilities and created the conditions for other key stakeholders to carry out theirs.

As their vision of their initiatives became the norm, the leaders were rewarded with a sense of accomplishment. One leader spoke of his “legacy” to the health care system.

Leaders focused on instilling belief and

Successful leaders focused on instilling belief and confidence in success, within an initiative, with outside stakeholders, and within themselves. They intuitively understood that their own confidence in the initiative would affect both their ability to deliver and their ability to inspire confidence in others. Personal confidence helped create environments in which stakeholders would take real risks and commit the resources needed to achieve meaningful results.

confidence ... and

then living up to that

confidence



The individuals interviewed had a clear understanding or intuition of their roles as transformational leaders. They focused on:

- strategically building momentum;
- creating a living vision; and
- nurturing collaboration and initiative.

Strategically Building Momentum

The first goal identified by these successful leaders was to build momentum; to get results. They believed that early results created the conditions for alignment to follow. They developed their own vision and sense of direction and clarified what was for them the “inflexible core” – those aspects of the solution that were inviolate, those that would compromise the integrity of the whole initiative if sacrificed.

Beyond this core, they were then able to let go of other aspects of the vision and strategy -- not only turning over elements of the process to others, but also committing to adhere to group decisions where they had released control.

Leaders identified what was for them the “inflexible core” and then let go of other aspects of the vision and strategy

Several leaders stated that time was the biggest enemy of change. The participants quickly began developing strategies for how to deliver meaningful results fast in order to overcome initial project inertia. Thus, they focused their groups towards making a significant and demon-



strable difference; working to move from theoretical benefits to practical results.

Momentum is defined as the product of velocity and mass. This relationship was a critical part of the balance our leaders sought to achieve in creating momentum. Without a critical mass of appropriate stakeholders engaged, speed can alienate key partners or stifle the necessary learning opportunities to engage more stakeholder support.

This inherent conflict requires an ability to balance the two elements. For many interviewees, this meant moving forward, at the appropriate time with those who were ready to go, even with a small number of organizations to build momentum. Momentum can shift the perspective of the community, making others willing to join.

The leaders in our study maintained their speed by:

- setting priorities and protecting their team's strategic focus;
- finding ways around bureaucratic processes;
- executing requirements that were "good enough";
- creating flexibility around resource allocation; and
- capitalizing on the momentum, and exploiting the energy that was created when teams saw their work copied or cited.

Throughout, they balanced speed with ensuring the appropriate stakeholders were engaged.



Creating a Living Vision

The majority of participants mentioned the critical role of “vision”. The leaders took personal responsibility for developing a shared vision with key stakeholders. They understood that a truly shared vision provided the community with a compelling reason for the effort required to achieve something important.

Leaders ensured that the initiative was based on a fundamentally sound idea and included the “core” elements mentioned above. Next, they examined, refined and tested the idea with others until they were confident that the idea was practical for a critical mass of stakeholders.

They then engaged the community in dynamic and interactive processes that resulted in a truly shared vision. The result was that each partner grew to understand the vision, and could articulate and stand behind the vision.

***...they engaged the
community in dynamic
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The leaders carried the banner of the initiative forward throughout the project, constantly reinforcing the importance and inspiring engagement. They evolved the vision as the context changed and as the initiative began to deliver. One leader compared a vision to a mirage, beginning as a fuzzy image in the distance, but gradually gaining clarity and detail as stakeholders became involved.



Nurturing Collaboration and Initiative

With clear momentum-building strategies, and a vision owned and supported by the community, the leaders focused their attention on creating an environment where stakeholders were willing to take real risks. In order to take risks, stakeholders had to perceive the benefits as greater than the risks involved, had to trust in the achievability of the vision, and had to trust in the leader and the change process.

Leaders used a number of approaches to develop trust. They implemented transparent processes with both clear objectives and clearly defined non-negotiable parameters, ensuring there was real room for shared decision-making. They ensured their own personal credibility by exhibiting their conviction and by following through on commitments. Even with the need for speedy results, they erred on the side of early and meaningful inclusion when deciding who to involve. They shared responsibility and rewards – asking stakeholders to demonstrate their commitment by investing their own resources and credibility – and then sharing both the organizational and personal benefits from the results achieved.

They also emphasized the importance of appropriate governance structures and accountability processes. These structures needed to reflect both the formal and informal accountabilities required for success. They found ways to both evolve and improve existing structures and to go around them when necessary.



Leadership Strategies for Success in Horizontal Initiatives

The successful leaders in this report challenge current leaders to adopt new behaviours and perspectives. They suggest leaders focus their efforts on developing strategies for engaging energy and building momentum with the community. They advise that these approaches are more effective than the traditional approach of working with small teams on the details of an ideal solution that will then be “rolled out” to the larger community.

The leaders in this study either intentionally or intuitively used more organic than mechanistic models for delivering results. They spoke of accessing the energy and drive created when people are voluntarily engaged in something they care about and see as important for their organizations. When that passion is engaged and success seems likely, people’s excitement grows and with that excitement, their willingness to take action and find ways around barriers. This in turn creates more energy, which enables more performance in less time.

A copy of the complete report can be downloaded at www.starfield.ca.