

EVE TURNER ASSOCIATES

Coaching, Supervision & Leadership Development

LEADERSHIP CIRCLES

INTRODUCTION

A Leadership Circle© consists of a group of leaders drawn from across a system who are brought together by trained facilitators, in a safe place, to develop shared purpose, understanding, improve current thinking/problem solving, build trust and develop their own and others leadership skills. The way a circle is initiated deliberately connects leaders from across a broad community and through the methodology used ensures everyone has an equal voice in problem solving.

This naturally develops leaders to move away from hierarchical, siloed leadership to shared leadership and joint problem solving. Before a circle is established, individual meetings are held with potential circle members and the facilitators, ensuring expectations are aligned and there is a true willingness to engage in what will become an egalitarian process. The first circles in any system start with a coalition of the willing and build outwards from there.

The coaching, facilitation and problem-solving skills developed by the leaders in the circles are then passed on using a multiplier effect. Members of the original circle go on to establish their own circle and those, in turn, establish their own, contributing to incremental, sustainable change.

THE AIM

The aim of Leadership Circles© is to embed common purpose/ understanding, leadership and leadership skills throughout a system. They broadly follow a six-session format, covering the following topics:

- *self as leader*
- *leading others*
- *leading across a whole system*



LEADERSHIP
CIRCLES

However, they are also constructed to remain flexible in terms of the conversation that needs to happen on the day, the number of sessions devoted to any of the 3 main topics, and the total number of circles held. In our experience some circles have covered one topic only but in depth, some have gone on to 20 or more sessions and some have continued to meet informally as a group, nominating facilitators and topics, long after the formal facilitated circle closed.

Leadership Circles© are led by trained and skilled facilitators in group coaching methods and who prepare for each circle, tailoring it to the participants' needs, using a toolkit of recognized models and methodologies. Ongoing supervision of the facilitators is provided.

The methodology has been proven in two completely different organizations to create sustainable change. The first organization developed to a point where over 50% of the personnel were actively involved on a weekly basis in group coaching and developing their own and others' leadership skills. The second, the University of Southampton, is now in its 6th generation of Leadership Circles©.

Developed by Janice Donaldson, a change and leadership expert, and Eve Turner, a master coach and senior leader, with a precursor having first been used by Janice in South Africa, Leadership Circles© have now been enhanced by a number of approaches including Nancy Kline's 'Time to Think'© process. This encourages focus on actively listening to each other, ensuring everyone's voice is equally valued and no one is interrupted; this allows members to draw widely on the expertise within the group to solve their own challenges. In line with the Kline process, circle members learn to think deeper and more intuitively to release their own solutions/different solutions and to work collaboratively. The art of self and group coaching is actively practiced for the duration of the circles.

**HOW
LEADERSHIP
CIRCLES©
DIFFER FROM**

Communities of practice

Defined as groups of people who “engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour... who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011).

Action learning sets

“Action learning sets – the means by which set members work out and pursue their own actions in the workplace and learn from that experience through the process of review, reflection and planning ahead” (Edmonstone, J, 2011).



Communities of practice and Action Learning Sets deal with specific common issues and group learning whereas Leadership Circles© aim to embed systemic and cultural change across a whole system. Additional differences are in the training of the facilitators, the method used and the way the circles are constructed developing common

purpose and shared leadership behaviours. Crucially the circle multiplication process embeds sustainable, replicable, leadership change across an entire system, at minimal continuing cost.

QUOTES

“It changes the way people are thinking and behaving and it slightly shocks them. It moves them out of their regular habits”.

Professor Peter Smith, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor International

“As a result of the Circles we are working much better as a team and it has had a profound effect on my working life.”

HR Deputy Director Sarah Hollowbread

[The impact was] *“Exceptionally positive and rewarding...it is an iterative process helping people to solve their own problems in their own way.”*

Professor of English, Ros King

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