LIBERATING LEADERSHIP

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE FROM THE COMMUNITY SECTOR

Liberate leadership, stimulate community, accelerate change

Liberating Leadership is an empowering and accessible new approach to leadership that will be a powerful resource for change in our communities.

Existing models of leadership, both in academic literature and in leadership training, do not work well for the community sector. They focus on the individual, and fail to reflect the values and perspectives of community groups.

Liberating Leadership is a ground-breaking practical approach that has been developed to recognise and support leadership in community groups and collective community activities.

It is about recognising and supporting leadership in networks and neighbourhoods, street events and sports clubs, parishes and partnerships, temples and tenants associations, festivals and fetes, music groups and mosques.

Contents

Leadership at the Grassroots

Community groups play key roles in society. They meet local needs often missed by others; they challenge unfairness and discrimination and bring people together to campaign for change. Many groups are passionate about their cause and want to make a difference.

The Community Sector Coalition believes in the diverse and highly effective leadership roles people already play in their communities and how they seek to bring about change. Through involvement in groups and community action, people bring a wealth of leadership skills and experiences which are often undervalued; they carry out leadership roles without enough recognition and support.

Grassroots groups form the majority of the third sector. Nearly 50% of registered charities have less than £10,000 income, according to Charity Commission figures. Approximately 70% of civil society organisations are unassociated community organisations – more than half a million grassroots groups. [1]

"The community sector is a powerful force – it is the cornerstone of sustainable renewal, it is at the heart of democratic life and needs to assert its innate leadership as never before"

Matthew Scott, CSC Director

[1] NCVO Almanac 2009 estimates 870,000 civil society organisations in the UK, of which approximately 600,000 are unassociated community organisations.

Challenge of Leadership

The main challenge for leadership in the community sector is how to start talking about it; raising the idea of developing leadership with people and groups who have difficulty with the concept, and do not recognise what they do as leadership.

This **lack of recognition** of leadership may affect individual activists, local groups or whole communities for several reasons. It may be because they perceive leadership as something someone else does, traditionally it is limited for example, to a group of elders. The term 'community leader' can be seen as elitist and suggests some individuals are superior, and they do not want to be called that. Many people don't think they can do leadership because they may lack confidence or be reluctant to see themselves as a leader.

In addition, there has been **experience of poor leadership:**

- Some people feel they have been let down in the past by leaders in their communities where, despite promises, they are still living in poverty and on the edge.

- Some people feel abused by leadership in their communities. Their experience is that leadership is done to them – that it is imposed from the outside, for example through regeneration programmes and projects set up and run by people outside local influence or control.

- Some people feel 'professionals' from larger voluntary organisations have more time and confidence to get onto boards and bodies that allocate resources and write policies that then do not fully recognise the needs of smaller, less vocal community groups.

The reluctance to value and recognise leadership in the community sector is partly due to widely held **negative perceptions** of leadership:

'Leaders are born not made': they have natural traits that most of us do not have - people we can admire but not be.

'Leaders need charisma': many famous leaders exemplify this - Nelson Mandela is regarded as a moral, inspiring and charismatic leader.

'Leaders are the top dog': they are the people in control, telling others what to do - it means being 'bossy' and running the show.

'I am the leader': the focus is on individuals. They could be inspiring, transformational and even empowering of others, but in the end this approach to leadership is based entirely in one person.

'It's the same as management': leadership and management are always mentioned together, they both involve working with people and achieving organisational goals, so what's the difference?

Burley Lodge Centre

Why is a new approach needed?

Existing models of leadership, both in academic literature and in leadership training, do not work well for the community sector. They focus on the individual and fail to reflect the values and perspectives of community groups.

Leadership is often dismissed as an irrelevance because community groups are:

- small in scale, being run mainly by volunteers.
- not structured or hierarchical.
- 'rooted' within the local community and accountable to them.
- motivated by 'making a difference' rather than running the group.
- mutual and collective activities where everyone is encouraged to contribute to activities and decision-making.

A fresh perspective

Liberating Leadership is an empowering and accessible new approach to leadership that will be a powerful resource for change in communities.

It challenges traditional perceptions of leadership, and draws on the Coalition's grassroots experience:

- **Leadership not leaders** – moving away from individuals (and issues of traits and charisma) towards a focus on the process and actions of leadership, and as roles that can be shared out.
- **Leadership without authority** – moving away from leadership through power (due to position in organisation or as an authority figure) towards leadership through influence.

Retford Action Centre

The new approach addresses themes relevant to the community sector:

- **the group** – leadership is based in the collective ownership and involvement of the group.
- **values** – the starting point is a set of principles that underpin leadership.
- **building strengths** – using and valuing people's existing skills, talents, abilities and experience, then helping to realise and release them.
- **empowerment** – leadership can be learnt and can empower people to achieve their full potential.
- **action** – leadership is a part of action to achieve real change in our lives and communities.

Key Influences

- current academic leadership theories.
- real grassroots experience of supporting groups.
- community development values and community empowerment (DICE, CDX 2008).
- 'Empowering Leadership in Communities' (bassac 2006).
- original concepts around community organising (Alinsky 1972).
- radical thinkers from the developing world such as Paulo Freire (Freire 1973).

Liberating Leadership: a new model

Liberating Leadership is a practical approach that will help to recognise and support leadership in groups and collective community activities.
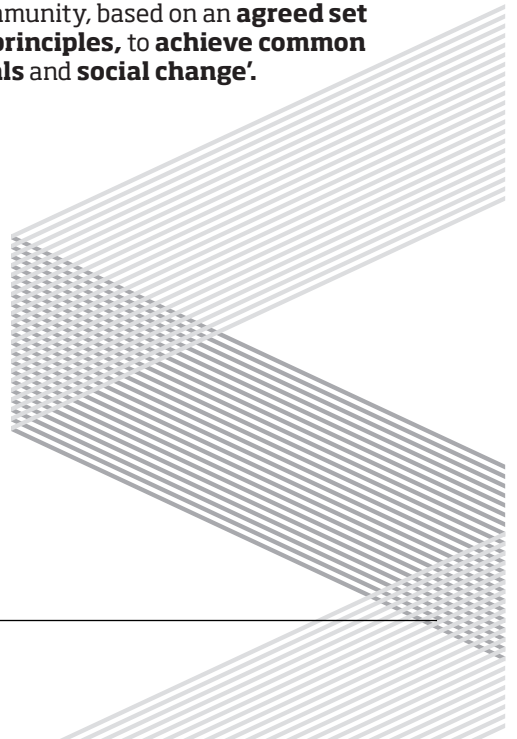
The model aims to describe the reality of leadership in a small community group through a combination of four essential elements. A group should use the model as a framework to guide their leadership decisions and development.

Importantly, the Liberating Leadership approach understands the need to turn the concepts contained in the model into practical action. Over 30 participatory exercises are available to introduce and apply the four essential elements. A community group should choose a selection of these tools that are relevant to their situation and needs.

An appreciation of current academic leadership theory is shown by the development and adaptation of existing definitions of leadership to support this new approach.

Liberating Leadership is

'a process of inspiring, supporting, **working with** and influencing others in a group, team, organisation or community, based on an **agreed set of principles,** to **achieve common goals** and **social change'.**
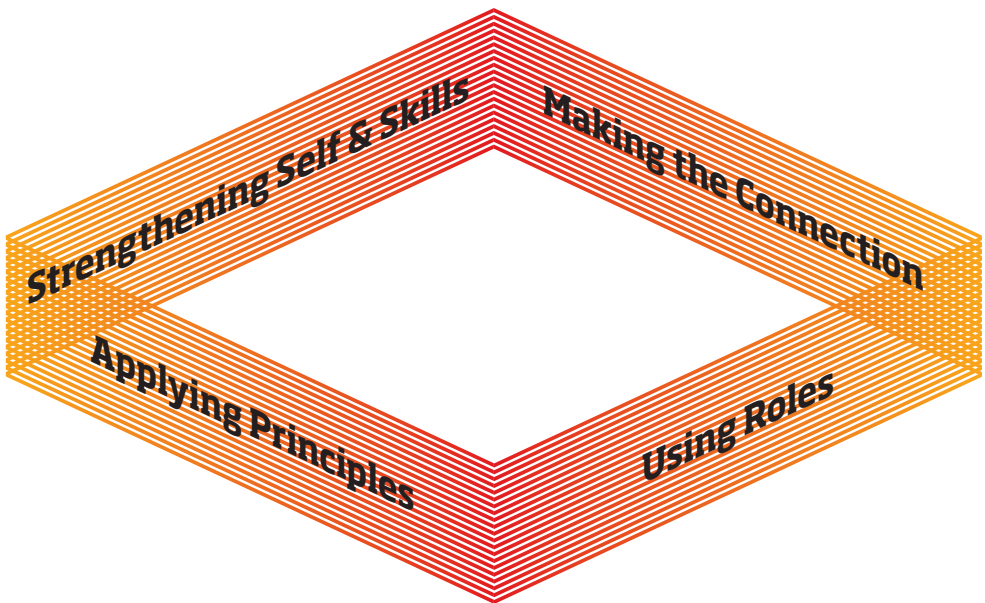
Essential Elements of Liberating Leadership

Each of the four elements is described separately on the following pages, though when the model is used in practice, the elements integrate into a combined approach.

A more detailed description of the four elements of the model and the related practical tools is contained in **Liberating Leadership: Practical Resources for Community Groups** (CSC, 2009).

This Toolkit was written by Steve Skinner and Guy Farrar, and edited by Hazel Capper, Leadership and Governance Programme Manager for Community Sector Coalition.

Applying Principles

Eight fundamental principles illustrate what leadership in the community sector really means – and provides a foundation for groups in their approach to leadership.

Drawn from the grassroots experience of groups, activists and leaders in the community sector, they reflect the sector's experience and values.

'Applying Principles' is also a broader statement about the importance of principles and values underpinning leadership in civil society.

The principles should promote leadership that is:

- owned by the group – where the group take the initiative of saying what sort of leadership they want, using the principles to help describe their requirements.
- focused on empowerment - a way of working where people in leadership roles involve other people in leadership and build up skills and confidence.
- challenging – where it questions traditional ideas of leadership and supports changes in groups and communities.

Applying Principles can be used by a community group:

- to explore values as a basis for motivation and action.
- to identify the type of leadership that they want.
- to explore how the principles work in different situations.
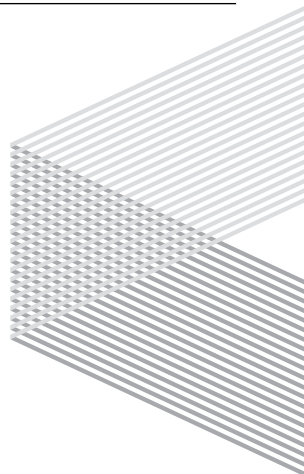- as a framework to guide their leadership.

Reflection

Can you describe the values that underpin your leadership? Are these similar to the Liberating Leadership principles?

Principle Leadership means:	What it involves:
Empowerment	
Being Participative	Involving people in decisions in the group or community
Being Accountable	Having representatives who are accountable to the group or community and report back appropriately
Enabling Others	Involving people in activities and roles so they can further develop their skills and confidence as leaders
Building a Vision	Involving groups and communities in seeing the way forward and the changes needed to get there
Taking Action for Change	
Tackling Exclusion	Supporting diversity and challenging attitudes and practices that discriminate against people
Building Bridges	Reaching out and building links and understanding between people from different groups, cultures and backgrounds
Taking a Stand	Standing up for our rights and campaigning for change
Acting with Enterprise	Developing new ideas, being adventurous and taking action based on a collective decision

Using Roles

Ten leadership roles – linked to the principles – describe through a set of tasks what 'doing' leadership actually involves.

Using Roles should help people in groups recognise and understand leadership – the roles reflect what people are already doing in groups but make it more explicit and open:

- Facilitator
- Representative
- Questioner
- Leadership Builder
- Bridge Builder
- Campaigner
- Catalyst
- Team Builder
- Entrepreneur
- Coordinator.

The roles are a direct way of getting the set of principles put into practice. They include internal roles such as team builder as well as external ones such as bridge builder. The set of leadership roles should not be a substitute for formal roles in organisations, but can help add greater clarity to leadership functions.

Using Roles can help community groups understand leadership and review how it really works in their groups by:

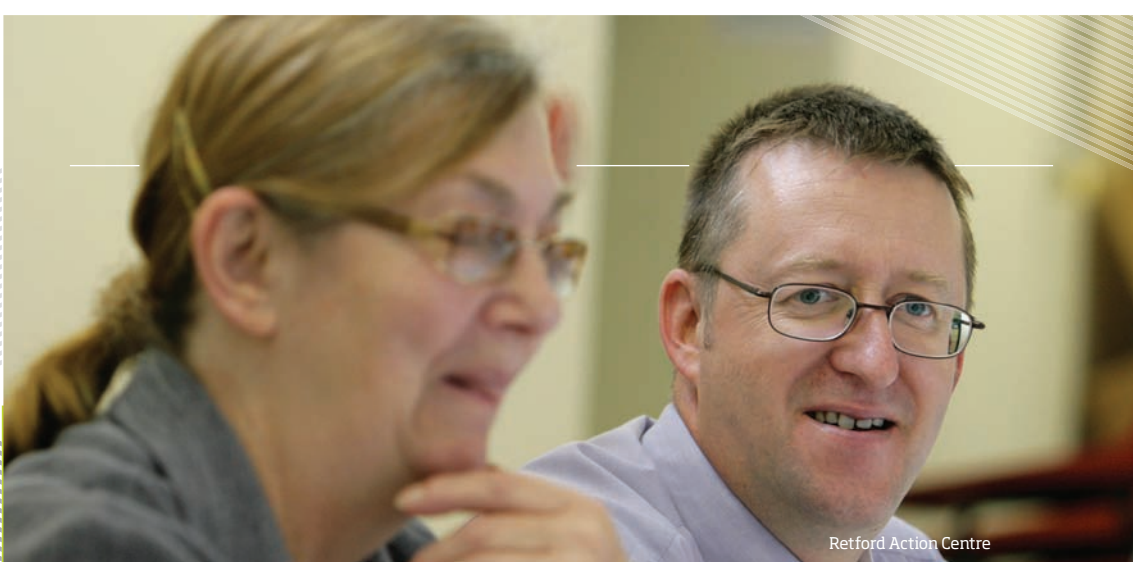- identifying the actual tasks needed to fulfil each role.
- mapping who undertakes the roles within the group.
- assessing how well the group fulfils each role.
- thinking about increasing the spread of roles.

The mix of roles used in any group will vary depending on needs – the model is not suggesting all of them will be needed in any one group. The range of roles in a group may change and grow over time as new people join, new projects start and the group goes through different stages in its lifetime.

Reflection

Are there times when you fulfil these different leadership roles? Do they feel different?

Retford Action Centre

Case Study: View of a Development Worker

Liberating Leadership helped me appreciate the value of leadership and how it contributes to the strength and development of groups.

I felt that I connected most with the **Using Roles** element; I thought it was easy to understand and I could see how this element would be easy for groups to relate to and how they might find it beneficial.

In previous sessions with a local residents group, we had identified some issues around relationships, personalities and responsibilities. We agreed to try the Using Roles tools to look at the dynamics within the group. My only concern was how the Chair of the group would respond to any issues raised by the tools – he is a strong character.

The initial tool encouraged the group to think about their existing assumptions about leadership. Not surprisingly different viewpoints emerged – it highlighted that the Chair had more traditional views than most of the group members.

A simple ice-breaker exercise introduced the ten roles, which stimulated a broader discussion about the roles in general. The main exercise invited everyone to identify which roles they and their colleagues within the group carry out.

I encouraged them to discuss their ideas role by role. Where there were obvious differences, we discussed it in relation to what they thought the role meant. This exercise was a real revelation for the group because it demonstrated to the Chair, who had the (common) misconception that he had to carry out all roles, that roles could be shared and that other people were willing to get involved.

It enabled others to put their opinions across and say that they would be willing to help in particular situations.

A short discussion about next steps identified that some committee members may need training to develop their skills and experience for particular roles. Overall, the session was really successful: the group completed the exercises without incident and is now looking at ways to involve more people in sharing tasks and responsibility. I will be happy to use the tools again with another group – perhaps using a tool based on a different element.

Making the Connection

Leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Liberating Leadership understands the importance of looking beyond the immediate. All community groups need to look beyond the boundaries of their own activities and place what they are doing in a wider context.

Making the Connection is about the relationships and alliances that groups develop and use to more effectively achieve their aims. It is about leadership in communities, not just in the group.

The wider environment can be a confusing maze where groups feel overwhelmed. **Making the Connection** encourages groups to focus on the links they have, both with other groups and with larger organisations:

- **horizontal links** with other community groups – how groups connect with each other, combine forces when needed and have strength in numbers for effective community action.
- **vertical links** with larger organisations and agencies – seeing where and how decisions that affect their community are made and how to influence them.

Developing and maintaining appropriate horizontal and vertical links is central to effective leadership in the community sector.

Making the Connection encourages groups to see the bigger picture by:

- exploring sources of power.
- mapping their existing links, both horizontal and vertical.
- identifying when and why they need to develop new links.

Reflection

How important is influencing stakeholders and partners in your leadership, and in achieving your organisation's objectives?

Strengthening Self and Skills

Leadership needs to start with an awareness of self. The possession or development of a wide range of interpersonal skills and the awareness of how to work with people in a variety of contexts is key for people in leadership roles in community groups.

Strengthening Self and Skills supports learning for leadership by focusing on two core areas:

- **self development** - including such areas as emotional intelligence, assertiveness and understanding how groups work.
- **skills development** - drawing on existing skills frameworks on leadership.

The process of **Strengthening Self and Skills** encourages individuals and groups to undertake a leadership 'learning journey' by;

- identifying and valuing existing skills and experience.
- reflecting and learning from their experience.
- assessing skills and experience against external frameworks.
- identifying potential areas for improvement.
- planning their self and skills development.

The focus on *skills* development recognises leadership can be learnt rather than being about inherited traits. The new approach stresses building on and developing skills, while recognising and valuing the skills that people already have. It presents skills frameworks such as occupational standards as a means of assessing skills.

Reflection

How and when do you make time to reflect on your leadership experience?

Example: Empowering users

The New Parish Village Hall committee wanted to run their hall more effectively and develop new activities.

The chair invited committee members and volunteers to a special meeting to look at their leadership of the hall. They discussed each of the Liberating Leadership principles and its relevance to the group's work. They agreed with six of the principles and added one additional principle. Over the coming months the group used the principles to steer their activities, and how they acted as leaders - it enabled them to work in a more empowering way with users of the hall. For example they promoted the AGM as an Open Day, and encouraged users and local people to get participate in making decisions about the future use of the hall. At the event, they invited the Rural Community Council to offer practical support to enable new groups to set up.

Acorn Centre

Example: Campaign connections

AnyTown Older People's Luncheon Club management committee wanted to start a campaign to stop the closure of a local sub-Post Office after many members expressed concern at getting their money out. As leading a campaign in this way was a new activity for the committee, they decided to think about the links (horizontal and vertical) that they needed to make to achieve their objectives:

- Coordinating with two local groups who already had similar concerns.
- Identifying any other local groups who would be affected.
- Researching campaigns in other areas and learning from their leaders.
- Finding out if the CVS would back their campaign or provide help with campaigning.
- Talking to local councillors and establishing the local authority perspective.
- Discovering if there are any national organisations that lobby on this issue that can help.

All members of the group took responsibility for different tasks according their skills and interests (like Using Roles). A month later they had a good campaign plan with plenty of supporters. Unfortunately, the post office did close. As a result of their campaign work they developed good links with other local groups, and together they bid for a small grant to help some of their members access community transport provision to get to another post office.

Impact of leadership

Supporting leadership using the Liberating Leadership approach will strengthen the impact of community groups in many ways:

- **Stronger voices locally** - people are more involved in decisions about their communities, and campaign and advocate for changes in policy and practice for their local area.
- **Achieving more** - groups make better use of the talents and the resources available to them.
- **Enhancing community cohesion** - groups develop better links between community groups with people of different ages, cultures and traditions.
- **Better quality of life** - empowering people to feel better about where they live and gain satisfaction from contributing to communities. Acting in different leadership roles is an accessible way to learn new skills that can be more widely used.
- **Building local democracy** - by encouraging involvement and accountability in decision-making and including people who are often left out.

Supporting leadership in community groups will also strengthen the impact of the community sector and local communities to achieve:

- **social justice** - liberating leadership will contribute to redistributing power and opportunities to people previously left behind. It will help stimulate leadership as a positive force for community action that can challenge injustice.
- **a stronger voice nationally** - the community sector needs to be assertive and confident in contributing to the national policy scene, expressing its views and messages alongside the diverse range of interests and agendas in the wider third sector.

What Next?

Toynbee Hall

Liberating Leadership is currently delivered as a package for development workers who provide hands-on support for community groups, such as infrastructure organisations and local authorities, because Capacitybuilders' National Support Services fund it.

The package consists of a three-day training programme and accompanying learning resource (The Toolkit) – see back page for more information.

Community Sector Coalition intends to create **a new Liberating Leadership package that delivers directly to community groups** – probably a one-day workshop and revised Toolkit.

Liberating Leadership potentially has a broader audience than community sector groups, as it could be used more widely in the third sector and public sector to support collective leadership, such as Boards of Directors or other partnership boards.

If you have a suggestion about how to try out the Liberating Leadership approach in your community or organisation please contact Hazel at CSC.

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About CSC

The Coalition aims to be a credible and authoritative voice for the community sector. Our strategic plan is to champion the unique contribution that the community sector makes to society.

Our goals are

- to campaign for policy change that will benefit the community sector.
- to deliver a programme of research and learning about the community sector.
- to enable members to share information and identify priorities for collective action.

The Coalition consists of 25 national umbrella organisations whose focus is on the community sector. Our vision is for the community sector to be empowered, valued and active in local democracy.

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www.communitysectorcoalition.org.uk

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LIBERATING LEADERSHIP

community sector coalition

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"It was brilliant role-playing how to implement our learning from the day"

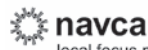"I like the very practical tools that my groups will be able to understand too"

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