Seizing the future

Being prepared to take action now to shape and implement a vision for the future development of services.

Why it matters

Leaders of health organisations often work with uncertainty, ambiguity and incomplete information. They need to have an eye to the future in making decisions about the present, driven by a motivation to achieve service and health improvements.

This strategic vision enables them to take the radical actions, which may be needed to modernise the service and make it genuinely responsive to the needs of users. The improvement of services often requires leaders who are prepared to take some risks, to dare to be different, to be creative and to challenge the way things are done. Those with the vision also need to be prepared to put the vision into action and to bring others with them.

Levels

Some quality levels are particularly associated with success at Chief Executive and Director level. These are indicated by brackets [ ]. This does not mean that leaders at other levels will not demonstrate these levels (they may well do) but that these are the levels for which leaders at Board level should be aiming.

0 Is locked in the present
- Fails to think about the consequences of actions in the future.
- Is preoccupied with the present and the operational detail, failing to balance this out with a longer-term view.
- Resists new ideas and approaches.

1 Acts decisively
- Reacts to current issues and problems and does so decisively.
- Acts quickly and decisively in a crisis or other time-sensitive situation.
- Anticipates and takes action to avoid an approaching problem that might interfere with effective service delivery.
- Makes the most of current opportunities to bring about incremental improvements that are of benefit to staff, carers or patients.
- Looks ahead within a 3-month time-frame.

[2] Thinks and acts 4–12 months ahead
- Sees how the current service developments fit into the bigger picture for service improvement.
- Takes action to realise service improvements in the short term.

www.NHSLeadershipQualities.nhs.uk
Setting Direction

Seizing the future (continued)

[3] Thinks and acts over a year ahead
- Thinks through and actions decisions, goals and priorities that can further the stated strategy for health and service improvement over the next year or so.
- Identifies the implications and risks of alternative courses of action; goes out to make these work, looking beyond existing organisational boundaries.
- Takes action to improve service delivery, the benefit of which should be fully realised in the medium-term (1 year +).

- Looks to the future and is able to see current opportunities and linkages that others may struggle to see; acts on these.
- Generates, tests and implements a range of innovative approaches to move a situation on, understanding the broader trends in health improvement and service delivery.
- Thinks and acts with a long-term, futuristic perspective.

Links
The ability to Seize the future in the health service requires a leader to have a high level of Political astuteness. This enables them both to anticipate and interpret policy direction – translating this into local action. The most effective leaders are those who can take their strategic vision and turn it into action – this quality is therefore often associated with Drive for results and Leading change through people. Importantly, those with real vision take the time to Empower others – thus ensuring that the vision has real longevity.
**Intellectual flexibility**

The facility to embrace and cut through ambiguity and complexity and to be open to creativity in leading and developing services.

**Why it matters** Leaders in the health service need to be able to get a grip on short and long-term priorities, especially where resources are finite, and in order to provide direction to others. This requires the ability to move rapidly between big picture thinking and paying sufficient attention to significant detail.

Keeping an open mind is important for radical and creative thinking. To define and drive through change and reorganisation or to reconfigure and reorganise services so that they are more responsive to the needs of diverse user groups, a leader needs to be receptive to new ideas, especially around how patients and staff are treated and involved in decision making.

**Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 0     | Fails to integrate information  
- Fails to make connections and relate things to a wider context.  
- Cannot see the ‘wood for the trees’.  
- Ignores information from diverse, or ‘non standard’, sources. |
| 1     | Considers new information and perspectives  
- Responds positively to new information and alternative views, including those from other professional areas.  
- Modifies own thinking, and sets of assumptions, to take account of new and diverse viewpoints. |
| 2     | Integrates information  
- Makes sense of disparate information; sees patterns and trends.  
- Finds and uses existing models, for example of how organisations work, to help integrate things into a whole.  
- Is adept at moving between significant detail on the ground and the big picture. |
| 3     | Clarifies complexity  
- Crystallises key points from a mass of disparate information and makes sense of complex situations.  
- Comes up with new ways of explaining something complex, or seeing beyond the obvious, so that others are able to understand it; this may include the use of analogies.  
- Encourages others to be innovative, in finding ways of developing service improvements. |

**Links**

A leader requires emotional intelligence to lead and motivate others (the Personal Qualities). In the complex context of the NHS, a leader also requires a high level of Intellectual flexibility. The intellectual capacity to make sense of complex information and situations is critical, especially to spot opportunities for Seizing the future or making an investment for future service delivery. Intellectual flexibility is a critical prerequisite for Leading change, be it through people or through Effective and strategic influencing.

www.NHSLeadershipQualities.nhs.uk
Broad scanning
Taking the time to gather information from a wide range of sources.

Why it matters The focus on continuous improvement in provision of health care requires leaders who stay aware of best clinical and management practice. Being aware of practice elsewhere enables them to replicate or improve upon it in their own organisations and across the health community.

Leaders are held accountable for service delivery in their own organisation. Thus, they need to understand how services are being delivered to patients, to pick up early warning signs of difficulty, and to seize opportunities to improve the patient’s experience.

Levels

0 Focuses narrowly
- Has a narrow range of vision - misses important developments within own organisation, locally, or nationally.
- Is haphazard, rather than systematic, in scanning for information.

1 Personally investigates
- Gets out personally to find out directly from those who are involved what is happening.
- Checks what is happening on the ground, asking patients and staff about their experience of services.

2 Looks more widely for information
- Probes to find out more about what is actually happening.
- Asks questions to get to all the facts, and to get to the heart of an issue.
- Accesses local networks for information and to benchmark own services.

3 Seeks diverse viewpoints
- Has systematic ways of keeping self informed, or keeping in touch, through wider networks.
- Keeps abreast of national developments in health and social care through active involvement in national networks.
- Commissions research to probe particular local issues.

Links
A leader’s natural curiosity underpins their Broad scanning activities, and provides the food for thought on which to base decisions around service delivery and changes in strategy or direction. It provides a critical means of developing a leader’s Political astuteness and acts as the fuel for their Intellectual flexibility. Having the best quality of information helps to ensure any resulting activity is focused on providing the best quality outcomes.
**Setting Direction**

**Political astuteness**

Showing commitment and ability to understand diverse interest groups and power bases within organisations and the wider community, and the dynamic between them, so as to lead health services more effectively.

**Why it matters** Leaders in the NHS operate in a complex local and national political context. To meet the challenge of bringing about radical and integrated change for the benefit of patients and other service users, leaders in health organisations have to understand the politics and work with them. This includes the understanding that the boundaries between organisations are not important, that services should work across boundaries, and that no one organisation in the health service can ‘stand alone’.

**Levels** Some quality levels are particularly associated with success at Chief Executive and Director level. These are indicated by brackets [ ]. This does not mean that leaders at other levels will not demonstrate these levels (they may well do) but that these are the levels for which leaders at Board level should be aiming.

**0**

Lacks political ‘antennae’
- Fails to tune in to what is really going on across the health and social care context.
- Tends to over-rely on formal processes and structures.
- Does not understand or work with the informal networks and process within the organisation.

**1**

Uses informal networks
- Identifies key people inside and outside the organisation who can help to influence or get things done
- Uses own networks to gain information or communicate

**[2]**

Understands culture and climate
- Understands what is and is not possible in a given local or national climate, in terms of health service provision.
- Is keenly aware of group norms and the way things have been customarily done.
- Uses this understanding of how things have been done in the past to manage and pace the changes required to bring about local service improvements.

**[3]**

Understands the politics
- Understands the ‘politics’ – with both a small and a large ‘p’ – of the health and social care context.
- Is well aware of the relevant interest groups, networks and groupings, and uses this understanding to get things done in terms of service improvements and service delivery.
### Political astuteness (continued)

**[4]** Understands long-term, underlying issues

- Understands the underlying social, political and historical factors shaping local and national realities of health services, and uses this understanding to get things done.
- Knows who the key influencers are and how to go about involving them to shape and deliver change across the wider health and social care system.

### Links

Political astuteness is absolutely key for Strategic influencing to be effective; the leader must fully understand the politics of the health and social care context. It also underpins their Seizing the future, ensuring it is both forward-looking and politically realistic. It is critical that the leader has a clear understanding of what is – and what is not – achievable in a given context.
**Setting Direction**

### Drive for results

A strong commitment to making service performance improvements and a determination to achieve positive service outcomes for users.

**Why it matters** Setting and achieving key priorities and targets requires energy and determination - focused on tangible and quantifiable gains for users of the service.

Leaders need to interpret national policy directives and to translate these into plans at a local level - setting appropriately stretching targets to deliver real health improvements. The drive and energy of leaders creates the momentum needed for service change and for meeting challenging targets.

#### Levels

**0**  
**Fails to focus effort**  
- Spreads efforts too thinly and dilutes own, and others’, impact by focusing on too many - or the wrong - priorities.  
- Continually ‘firefighting’ rather than applying learning from past situations.

**1**  
**Strives to deliver local targets**  
- Takes actions that lead to the delivery of set service targets.  
- Shows determination to meet the objectives set by others.  
- Keeps track of and measures outcomes against own standards, over and above those set by others.

**2**  
**Places a focus on improving performance**  
- Takes actions that lead to quantifiable service improvements.  
- Encourages others to find ways of delivering services that will better serve the needs of patients while meeting local targets.

**3**  
**Sets and meets challenging goals**  
- Sets self and others stretching goals, over and above those required to meet national standards and targets, where these will help to improve local services.  
- Takes the necessary actions to meet these goals; identifies and applies measures to track and quantify achievement.  
- Overcomes obstacles to achieving goals and uses failure as an opportunity to learn.

www.NHSLeadershipQualities.nhs.uk
4 **Sustains focus**
- Is unceasing in their determination to achieve goals over time; resists any pressure to be deflected from this attainment.
- Is prepared to challenge others and address poor performance where this is impacting effective service delivery.
- Takes calculated risks, based on learning and experience, to achieve longer-term service improvements.

**Links**
Drive for results is fuelled and defined by a leader's Drive for improvement, the effort of which is focused by Intellectual flexibility. The conviction in Personal integrity helps leaders to be ambitious in achieving results. Political astuteness enables leaders to be realistic and grounded, while Broad scanning makes it more likely that targets will be appropriate in changing circumstances. There is a key link to delivery through Leading change through people, with leaders communicating a clear direction as the basis for setting goals for others.