

# Leading Through Crisis: Cross-Sector Lessons from COVID-19



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## Preface

### Lieutenant Colonel Langley Sharp MBE SO1 Leadership, Centre for Army Leadership

In May this year, the Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) presented a perspective on the leadership fundamentals required to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on the Army's core leadership philosophy, coupled with centuries of corporate experience in the field, the CAL published *Leading Through Crisis: A Practitioner's Guide*. Having gained traction across the breadth of our network, we were keen to understand the role leadership played for many of our cross-sector partners during these difficult times. Throughout the following summer, we asked a range of contributors to reflect on their leadership experiences. The result is this collection of papers: *Leading Through Crisis: Cross-Sector Lessons from COVID-19*. While the British Army is proud of both its leaders and its leadership at all levels, we must never forget that the organisation does not have a monopoly on best practice. Calibration of our thinking remains a critical task because we are secure in the belief that the day you stop learning is the day you stop being a leader.

The perspectives shared in this publication are drawn from across academia, business, sport, politics, the military and faith communities. It is rich in contextual understanding yet, reassuringly, the fundamentals, many of which were highlighted in our original publication, evidently endure. The importance of clear, consistent, open and transparent communication echoes across almost every article, with Chief Constable Matt Jukes appropriately concluding, 'a key lesson of the crisis... came not from data but from listening and responding to our people.' It is through effective communication that we not only drive purpose and meaning, provide direction and guidance, inform planning and develop shared understanding but also, critically, we build trust - the glue that binds. As John Blakey reminds us, 'the currency of leadership is trust'. It is with the trust inherent across our organisations that we can enact Mission Command, the cornerstone of how we in the British Army operate both on operations and in barracks. It is a philosophy that 'promotes decentralised command, freedom and speed of action and initiative, and focusses on achievement of intent.' It is a highly effective mindset for dealing with the pace, complexities and ambiguities of crisis. For Professor Robert Van de Noort this is manifested in 'distributed leadership... the best source of flexibility and agility.' Operating at the strategic level, Dan Jarvis MP draws on his military experience to champion devolved decision making and resourcing. Whilst working at the highest echelons of professional sport, RFU CEO Bill Sweeney's leadership promotes delegation, shared responsibility and shared accountability. Trust also protects legitimacy. In times of crisis, judgement and decision making are key but as many of our contributors identify, one's decisions and subsequent behaviours will be judged. Maintaining legitimacy is essential to securing relevance in the long term. To earn trust, maintain legitimacy and to 'do the right thing' we must lead by our values. We must be led by moral purpose. 'If our behaviours now disregard values that are held dear, we are unlikely to be forgiven,' Jukes reminds us.

As we collectively reflect on our leadership thus far, we are each reminded that the identification of lessons is worthless unless we are willing to learn, adapt and evolve. The crisis continues and, whatever resolution may be found to the current COVID-19 pandemic and no matter how devastating it continues to be, it is a crisis that does not exist in isolation. Our present is awash with challenges and the future may usher in new tests that prove even graver than our current focus; social injustice, societal polarisation and, most sinister of all, climate change, each have the potential to fundamentally disrupt our norms. As Adam Grodecki rightly concludes for us, COVID 19 is a wake-up call. Indeed, this publication determines that we must answer a pressing question: How, as leaders, are we going to listen and respond, build trust, maintain legitimacy and, collectively, in Grodecki's words, 'build a better, fairer, more sustainable society?'. The answer demands we recognise that, as in every crisis, we now have an opportunity. An opportunity to make a difference, to shape a more positive future and, although 'the task is herculean', it is not impossible. What it requires is great leadership.





## The Power of Local Autonomy in a Crisis

**Dan Jarvis MBE MP**

**Mayor of the Sheffield City Region and Member of Parliament for Barnsley Central**

Finance. Politics. Health. In not much more than a decade, our leaders have attempted to negotiate their way through this series of crises, seemingly without respite.

For the Government, the most recent crisis has been, without exception, the sternest test that any administration has faced since the Second World War. For me, it was one I faced as both a regional Mayor and a Member of Parliament and served to fortify my long-held beliefs in the notions of devolution, subsidiarity and Mission Command.

I was elected as the MP for the Barnsley Central constituency in 2011, having been the first person to resign a commission to contest a parliamentary by-election since the Second World War. Uniquely, since 2018, and, on top of my duties as an MP, I serve as the elected Mayor of the Sheffield City Region. My responsibilities as Mayor include economic regeneration, skills and transport for South Yorkshire.

Devolution is the concept of transferring power from central government to local or regional administrations. I champion this process, not just because it is right in principle but because it works in practice. Unlike all the other Metro Mayors in England, however, I've had to contend with additional complicating factors because my powers and resources were not in place when I was elected.

Consequently, I've had to fight for every penny along the way. Moreover, I've had to navigate an extremely complex and painstaking negotiation process to reach agreement on our devolution settlement. That impasse lasted more than two years and was coloured by continuous disagreement and, at times, outright hostility. I've dealt with it all without taking a salary and while serving simultaneously as an MP.

Even before anyone had heard of COVID-19, South Yorkshire was already reeling from chronic underinvestment, a decade of cuts, the uncertainty caused by Brexit and catastrophic flooding.

The UK is – to our detriment – one of the most centralised developed nations on the planet. This top-down approach means that local and regional leaders do not wield the required influence to affect transformational change. Personally, it too often feels as though the decisions I'm allowed to take mean that I'm only tinkering at the margins, not shifting the dial. The Government's English Devolution White Paper can't come a moment too soon, but it must commit to delivering meaningful change so the pitfalls and obstructions I've experienced are not repeated elsewhere.

The reason I'm making the case for greater powers and resources is to enable subsidiarity in our region. And while we do not have the autonomy we need yet, this crisis provided an opportunity for us to demonstrate our ability to deal with our social, economic and political issues at a local level.

When it became clear that our health and care workers were running dangerously low on PPE and the Government was struggling to source what was needed, I convened our NHS and business leaders to come up with a solution. Nobody told us to do it, we just did it. Scores of offers came from businesses across our region to the call-out and a potential catastrophe was avoided.



This crisis has caused as much damage to our economy as it has to public health. It's why I also gathered together our leading institutions to form a COVID-19 Economic Response Group. The aim was to keep our economy afloat and make sure South Yorkshire has what it needs to overcome this challenge. Local and regional government have been at the forefront of the response to this pandemic. It can't stop there. We must now play a leading role in the recovery, so we've been busy developing our own regional economic renewal plan.

This pandemic has undoubtedly delivered lessons in true solidarity, the efficacy of a localised response and the meaning of soft power. Ultimately though, much of what I have drawn on during this testing period has been from my experiences in the Army and the tenets of Mission Command.

I am convinced that service in our Armed Forces provides the best apprenticeship available anywhere on leading through crisis. Most importantly, you learn first-hand about the need for moral purpose and that people will follow you if there's a clear direction of travel. Get it right and you will succeed; get it wrong and you will fail.

Although it is tempting to make comparisons between life in politics and the Armed Forces, fundamentally, they are worlds apart. I recall coming to terms with the fact that the British Army's Values and Standards aren't just words or old-fashioned notions, but concepts to live your life by. I believed it then. I believe it now.

As I have become more experienced in politics, I wish that all public servants lived by such a creed. We have Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership – the ethical standards to which those working in the public sector are held. Some get it, but nine years of exposure to our political culture tells me that, too often, for many, these are just words, and are rarely lived by.

As the Army puts it, 'Integrity, and the public trust that comes with it, is a hard-won quality which is easily lost.' Trust in our leaders matters. This is especially true at a moment of national crisis. However, rather than building confidence, faith in our political system is deteriorating – a decline that cannot be allowed to continue.

We've heard the axiom repeated over and over that COVID-19 is the greatest peacetime challenge we've faced. It is obvious why. This crisis has upended our way of life, left hundreds of thousands of people in mourning and has decimated our economy.

Whether good or bad, we must use what we have learnt for what we know is coming next. We must rebuild our country, tackle the climate emergency and address the deep inequalities in our society. The task is herculean. It is only achievable if we provide absolute clarity on what we're trying to accomplish and unite around a common purpose.

Over the years, in both the military and in politics, I have often been reminded that culture beats strategy. Every time. In the end, it's about what you actually do, not just what you say or put on a whiteboard. Often it won't be easy, there will be all sorts of frustrations and frictions – 'events' as they say in politics – but show a clear lead and some courage and kindness and you'll be heading in the right direction. And if all else fails, put the kettle on and have a hot brew – it always helps!

## Leading a University through the COVID-19 Crisis

**Professor Robert Van de Noort**  
**Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading**

Achieving major change in big organisations can take years, yet COVID-19 has re-written the model for university teaching and research, built up over decades and sometimes centuries, in the comparative blink of an eye. It has required agility and quick decision-making, not usually the hallmarks of university governance. Nobody saw this coming, yet it will play out for years.

The University of Reading is well placed to face this challenge but will still require significant organisational change. For some universities, I fear it will prove a genuinely existential crisis, with implications for individuals, communities and the UK as a whole.

The development of knowledge is the heart of academic life and shapes what leadership means in a university setting. Learning is built on inquiry, debate and scrutiny and these are applied as equally to senior leadership as to ideas. From this, I have learnt that leadership requires three things:

- A clear strategic vision that is based on the fundamental values of the organisation.
- Open and transparent communication.
- Distributed leadership based on trust.

Clear decisions must be made, and there will rarely be full agreement. Yet a shared investment in the process leads to a greater sense of joint ownership of outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put not just institutional but also national leadership under scrutiny. One might suspect that a far-reaching crisis would require a different leadership approach, a rethinking of previous notions. In fact, I believe it has shown with immense clarity that principles of vision, transparency and trust have been the cornerstones of leadership in those nations most praised for their emergency response.

Everything, in my mind, flows from communication. People need to understand not just their shared goal but the information underlying decisions. Simply told what to do, people may follow instructions. But with information, they can make informed decisions. Thus, despite the need for prompt action, the members of our Executive Board have spent more rather than less time listening and more rather than less time sharing thoughts, ideas and potential solutions. Early in the pandemic, we set up two-way mechanisms to inform and involve our broader senior leadership team, colleagues and students. We engaged beyond our campuses, with local neighbours, community groups and regional partners.

By communicating widely and encouraging feedback, we quickly gained intelligence about how we could help the national and regional effort. We were able to support the NHS with personal protective equipment (PPE) and provide webcams for intensive care units, volunteers for hospitals, facilities for COVID-19 testing sites, accommodation for key workers, and student volunteers for community groups in desperate need of digital skills.

Our colleagues and students have sometimes questioned and challenged our decisions. Rather than become defensive, we have listened and used their views to inform our approach. When students expressed heartfelt concern that our proposals for mitigating the impact of the outbreak on their academic performance did not pass muster, we updated our plans for the better. Some still disagree, but, on balance, I believe our students appreciate this willingness to admit we can do better.





Responding to a challenge of this scale is clearly beyond the capacity and capability of a single person or small group. Trust in distributed leadership and decision-making is vital. A leader seeking to control all decision-making rapidly becomes, at best, a bottleneck and, at worst, makes decisions divorced from the needs of the frontline. Our Executive Board quickly decided to devolve management of our COVID-19 response to a major incident team led by two of its members and including colleagues with the right mix of experience and expertise, rather than seniority. Only strategically critical decisions are escalated to the Executive Board. Wherever possible, we have sought to avoid one-size-fits-all edicts in favour of flexible frameworks that empower colleagues and students to make decisions themselves. We have applied this approach at every stage, from moving teaching online to developing our teaching framework for the new academic year to planning our phased return to campus.

This distributed style of leadership can create ambiguity and uncertainty, but it is also the best source of flexibility and agility. It is a balance that requires careful co-ordination of many moving pieces, something that does not always come easily in the creative chaos of a university. We have also had to overcome our reluctance to make decisions in such a fast-changing environment, sometimes on the basis of limited evidence.

Yet, through goodwill, hard work and a shared vision to help our students and our community, these principles of transparency and trust have helped us turn a 20,000-student campus university into a virtual university within a week. Hundreds of lectures, classes and supervision sessions have been delivered from dining tables and studies and received in bedrooms and kitchens. Academics have harnessed technology and camera angles to talk about Bronze Age archaeology and environmental physics to students who might be down the road or on other side of the world. Thousands of exams that would normally be completed in lecture theatres went online. And our incredible student support and welfare teams continued delivering necessary services through the web, email, phone and video call.

As we face the unfolding financial aftermath of the pandemic, I continue to stand by these principles of trust and transparency as the best way to lead our university through change. I admit that this approach can bring problems. It can create anxiety about the unknown, and highlight gaps in our knowledge that we might rather ignore. Dealing with these problems requires judgement, but the long-term benefits usually play out. I firmly believe that the distrust and resentment bred by silence are far more damaging to our mission, both now and in the future.

I have previously compared the running of a large and complex organisation with being the captain of a classic sailing ship. When that ship is caught in a severe storm, and is nearly overwhelmed by the crashing waves, the safety of the ship and crew becomes the first objective. The best chance of survival is to adjust to the prevailing circumstances, roll with the waves and use the wind to find shelter. Above all, the captain has to trust the crew, listen to them and provide clear instructions, so that together they will see the dawn and can continue their journey.

We are not yet at the end of this storm and our lives will continue to be defined by it for months and probably years to come. I cannot yet tell whether my leadership has been effective. So far, people's goodwill continues despite personal and professional anxieties. I take that as a good sign, but I would never be foolish enough to take it for granted. And ultimately, I suppose, that is the only tenet of leadership that really matters.





## A View from HQ Standing Joint Command (UK)

**Lieutenant General Tyrone Urch CBE**  
**Standing Joint Commander (UK)**

### Context

I write in my capacity as Standing Joint Commander (UK) (SJC (UK)), a position from which, since March of this year, I have been responsible for leading Operation RESCRIPT (Op RESCRIPT), Defence's contribution to the Government's COVID-19 pandemic response. For those unfamiliar with this job specification, I report directly to the Chief of the Defence Staff and Secretary of State for all UK operations but am also Commander Home Command,<sup>1</sup> reporting to the Chief of the General Staff, and a member of the Army Board.

### Framework

After 36 years in the Army, writing essays and papers should be easy, particularly with my background as a chartered civil engineer and my recent completion of the Government's Major Projects Leadership Academy programme. Alas, I always find it difficult to decide on a framework around which to base the threads of my ideas. In this case, I am helped by a friend's piercing question: 'What is it that Generals actually do?' What a ridiculous question – it's obvious isn't it? Yet when I tried to articulate my response as a newly promoted Major General, it was abundantly clear that it was anything but obvious. Here, I offer you my four 'flag officer' thoughts.

### Op RESCRIPT

But first, a quick insight into Op RESCRIPT, described by my team as 'the operation of our generation, touching everyone in the country for the first time in modern history'. On 28 February 2020 (D-Day), the SJC(UK) received activation orders to be ready to 'design, catalyse and support' the NHS and other government departments (OGDs). This manifested in the HQ expanding to a 24/7 resilient capability of approximately 250, from a core standing organisation of only 32, and taking approximately 20,000 troops under command, successfully operating via ten points of presence around the UK. Troops from across Defence, but largely the British Army, undertook several well-documented roles, including construction of the Nightingale hospitals, mobile testing in the community, ambulance driving, logistics supply and liaison roles at national and regional levels. Key initial observations include the following:

- **It worked:** There is nothing that requires a fundamental change with regards to our doctrine,<sup>2</sup> force generation processes, command and control, HQ staff structures or modus operandi.
- **Regional laydown:** The UK operation's centre of gravity<sup>3</sup> for resilience is our regional laydown and the concomitant influence that our joint military commanders have with the NHS, emergency services and partners in local government.

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<sup>1</sup> Commanding ARITC, RMAS, APC, RC, London District, DCYP, DFR, APSG and Arms & Services; see Glossary for abbreviations.

<sup>2</sup> MoD (2017). Joint Doctrine Publication 02: UK Operations: The Defence Contribution to Resilience and Security.

<sup>3</sup> Centre of gravity: a characteristic, capability or influence from which a nation, alliance, military force or other civil or military grouping draws its freedom of action, physical strength, cohesion or will to fight.



- **Strategic neural network:** Acknowledging that the best time to make friends is before you need them, the strategic network across Government, the Devolved Administrations and in our regions morphed into a battle-winning concept and our vital ground;<sup>4</sup> liaison through this network formed the core of our 'decisive offer' and was successful because of our operational experience and our staff training.
- **Delegated authorities:** The key terrain<sup>5</sup> was the innovative decision to grant me authority to deploy troops on tasks without recourse to Ministers, unless such deployments were novel, contentious, at scale or involved pinch-point trades. Faith in the principles of Mission Command has been instrumental in enabling Defence's agility and effectiveness.
- **Information Manoeuvre Group:** The early generation of a well-resourced and strongly connected J2 (intelligence) capability enabled us to make sense of the vast array of inputs from the liaison network and wider information sources on COVID-19.

There are equally valid lessons to learn from what didn't happen, particularly the risk of assuming that all future UK resilience operations can be resolved by the deployment of niche subject matter experts (e.g. logisticians, medics and engineers) rather than mass (e.g. infantry).

## What Generals Actually Do

With that summary of UK operations laid out by way of context, what is it that generals actually do, and how did Op RESCRIPT validate some of my views? My big four:

- **Fight for the business:** Up until 'flag officer' rank, I had always been consumed by the day job of getting stuff done without a genuine understanding of the full implications of what was going on around me. I now find myself consumed with the business: Army Board executive issues, financial control, the balance of investment decisions, politics & Politics, the economy, the future of Defence etc. Op RESCRIPT brought this into sharp focus as we laboured to deliver national effect where others were unable to react quickly or effectively enough and reporting daily to the Secretary of State. The POLAD, Command Secretary and J9 finance teams were as important as operational and planning staff.
- **Let them do it:** We all talk a good Mission Command story, but in reality it is difficult and often uncomfortable, doubly so in barracks compared with operations. I realise now that I cannot do everything that my subordinates can: I do not have the time, capacity, knowledge, skills or experience. So, let them do it (their way) – and incidentally, if you want it done perfectly, you probably will need to do it yourself. Because time is always in short supply, I used to say about an 80% solution on time is always good enough, but of late we have found that unhelpful because it is so difficult to define. We now say, 'I need your best possible work, by [deadline], in the following format', which is clear and achievable. During Op RESCRIPT, I had total confidence in my Commanders and so was able to adopt this mantra widely and to insist on similar from my superiors.

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<sup>4</sup> Vital ground: ground of such importance that it must be retained or controlled for the success of the mission.

<sup>5</sup> Key terrain: terrain or a feature that offers marked advantage to whoever holds it.

- **Manage the leaders:** I know we all expect everyone in the Army to be a leader, but in reality approximately 80% of a unit is of very junior rank (i.e. below Corporal) and probably not ready for such responsibility. So, we look to the leaders to provide direction and clarity. While all Generals are leaders in their own right, the number of decisions they take are surprisingly few; the nirvana is knowing what decision is yours to make and then taking it in a timely fashion. The people in need of most support are the leaders on the 'shop floor' (e.g. Sergeant Majors, Commanding Officers). It follows that our role is in managing these leaders through mentorship, critical advice and sponsorship, a role that is crucial to our corporate success. On Op RESCRIPT, I directed my energy to supporting the OF5 and OF6 staff and Commanders, which was appropriate.
- **Plan the team legacy:** One of the first questions I have learnt to ask on assuming a new appointment as a General is 'What should this look like when I leave the role?' This will focus your limited capacity to deal with the big issues of the future as well as, of course, solving the monumental issues of the moment. For me, it is always about the strategy, reward for the team, our people, the process and finally the structure, in that order. In nearly every interview I have with my people, the answer to my question 'What do you hope to get out of this tour?' is invariably 'Leaving things better than I found them.' Yes of course, but how will you realise your team's legacy?

## Summary

This has not been as easy to compile as I had anticipated but I am always cognisant of the maxim that 'If you are finding it hard to write, then it's probably somewhere close to the right stuff.' I'll let my readers judge the accuracy of that.



## 20/20 Vision: Seeing with New Eyes to Trigger Cultural Renewal, Agility and Resilience

**Dr John Blakey**  
**Founder, Trusted Executive Foundation**

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes."*

Marcel Proust, author, 1871–1922

My favourite image from lockdown was the picture of the Himalayas taken from the village of Pathankot in northern India. Despite 400,000 cases of COVID-19 and 13,000 deaths,<sup>6</sup> the silver lining of India's lockdown was a drop in air pollution that allowed villagers to see this extraordinary mountain range for the first time in 30 years. The residents of Pathankot woke up that morning and saw with new eyes. They saw with 20/20 vision and they then flocked onto social media to share the joy of rediscovering nature's rare beauty.

It is this opportunity to see with new eyes, to find 20/20 vision, that lies before us now as institutional leaders. The air pollution that blocked the vision in Pathankot is a symbolic legacy of the industrial age. The clearing of the air is symbolic of the opportunity to see with new eyes and step boldly into the social age. A failure to seize that opportunity would be disrespectful to all the lives lost in this pandemic.

My work as a researcher, speaker and author has brought me into contact with several hundred CEOs and board-level leaders since March. Through individual and team virtual coaching sessions, I have listened to how business leaders from all over the world are responding to seek 20/20 vision and see with new eyes. Whether these leaders be in healthcare, charities, global corporates, manufacturing, religion or sport, they have all sensed that cultural renewal, agility and resilience are the keys to unlocking our potential. Let us briefly explore each of these themes using the Nine Habits of Trust leadership model developed from my research at Aston Business School (see Figure 3).

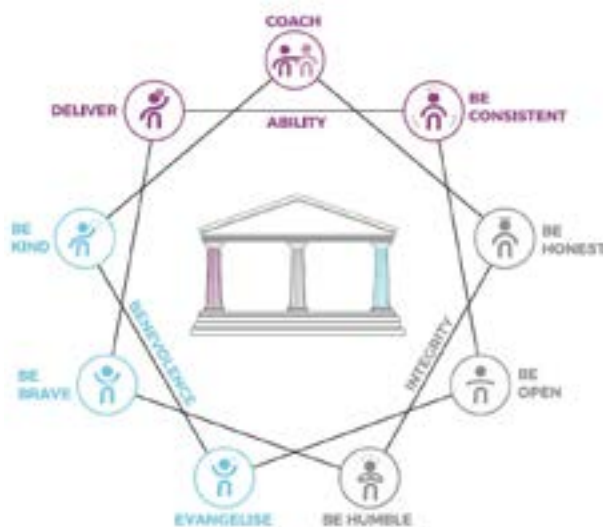


Figure 3: Nine Habits of Trust



## Cultural Renewal

'THIS is England 2020' and we are invited to channel our inner Marcus Rashford. This 22-year-old footballer has modelled the habits of moral courage, humility and kindness that 20/20 vision requires. It is a time when we should all feel emboldened to speak out on issues that, while appropriate to the industrial age, are suddenly out of step in the social age. In organisational life, leaders will continue to be challenged on environmental, social and governance (ESG) topics. We should be mindful that we are all one mis-step away from being considered part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. What are you doing to keep pace with issues such as inclusion, social justice, mental health and climate change? What are you doing to lead a process of cultural renewal?

## Agility

Be dispassionate in the decision-making and compassionate in the implementation. As we pursue the renewal of a compassionate culture, we need to maintain a dispassionate focus on delivering commercial success - Habit No.1 in the Nine Habits model. Agility is required to tear up the 2020 business plan and replace it with 12-week sprints that deliver tangible, bottom-line impacts. 'Knowing the numbers' will remain key to tracking volatile market trends and adapting quickly to prepare for an uncertain future. Agility is also required to move from managing virtual meetings to leading virtual teams. How do we hold an effective performance management conversation via Zoom or Microsoft Teams? How do we measure outputs rather than activities and take our coaching skills to a new level to motivate, challenge and support?

## Resilience

We have shown that we can survive a crisis, but let us not fool ourselves that this unprecedented experience has not left us drained, depleted and divided. There are further challenges to come – redundancies, second waves, technological disruptions and unknown unknowns. 20/20 vision will require Olympian levels of resilience from our leaders. Are we fit for the race ahead? Having worked with many Olympic coaches and athletes, I notice that what distinguishes their resilience is the mastery of Habit No. 7 in the Nine Habits model – they are great evangelists! Great evangelists love what they do. They have a vivid and inspiring vision and they bounce back quickly from disappointments. Leadership author Guy Kawasaki has said, 'In the social age, evangelism is everyone's job,' yet 'evangelism' remains a word that many institutional leaders find unnerving. We must overcome our cool-headed reticence to evangelise.

Like the hidden Himalayas of northern India, the lockdown has allowed us to see the challenge of leadership with new eyes, with 20/20 vision. We cannot let a good crisis go to waste. We must ameliorate the loss of half a million lives worldwide through pursuing bold cultural renewal, mastering accelerated agility and building Olympian levels of resilience. These three characteristics will help leaders navigate the transition from the industrial age to the social age.

It does not disrespect history to recognise that the currency of leadership in the industrial age was power. That was simply the nature of the game. Those were the statues that were built. We all colluded in that game to one extent or another, because our vision could not contemplate a viable alternative. 20/20 vision allows us to glimpse a new possibility – the exciting possibility that, in the social age, the currency of leadership is trust.

A change of leadership currency requires us to unlearn the habits of power and master the habits of trust. If you have the appetite for the new game of trust, then the Nine Habits model provides a roadmap and compass for the journey ahead. Armed with a bold vision and a reliable compass, we can renew our licence to lead and step forward with motivation and confidence. Whatever the field of your leadership, I invite you to let go of trusting in power and take hold of the power of trust. That shift is how you and your organisation will see with new eyes and win in the new game.

## Rising to the Challenge at Fulham Football Club

**Huw Jennings**  
**Academy Director, Fulham Football Club**

### Context

Professional football, in keeping with other elite sports, demands certainty to function effectively. The certainty of stadium location, match scheduling, kick-off time and kit colours are just a few examples of macro- and micro elements that are fixed tangibles. The irony is that the uncertainty of the outcome of a match represents the intangible, a paradox that appeals to supporters and observers alike of our nation's most popular sporting pastime. This is the backdrop to the industry's response to the COVID-19 outbreak which has provided anything but certainty.

The day before the re-start of the Championship season, 99 days after the postponement of our last game, it is interesting to reflect on the most tumultuous period of my career.

### Born Ready?

We were aware of the potential impact of COVID-19 from February 2020 and we started to put protective plans in place from this time. We have two management groups that meet regularly to discuss the issues of the day and plan for the future. Both are chaired by Alistair Mackintosh, our CEO. The Management Board, which meets weekly, comprises the Club's heads of department (e.g. operations, legal, commercial). The Club's performance steering group, known as the Technical Board, focuses on our product (football) and planning matters such as pre-season preparation, Academy and First Team integration and medical support. Only a few of us sit on both groups, and as one of those individuals, it soon became apparent to me that we were dealing with a very different challenge to the norm for professional sport. Initially, my reaction, along with that of most of the non-medical leaders at the Club, was 'this will pass' and 'it won't derail our programme'. Reports from Wuhan in China at the time were troubling, but we had seen this type of incident before, with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) for example. However, when reports came in from Italy that the pandemic was taking hold in the north of that country and that the outbreak may well have been focused on the skiing region, concerns were more sharply focused.

Technical Board meetings quickly became more frequent and focused almost exclusively on the pandemic. A COVID-19 group was established. Plans were put in place to isolate the First Team players and staff from the rest of the organisation. We introduced more comprehensive and extensive hygiene measures. Visitors were denied access and guests more closely scrutinised. And then the inevitable: on Friday 13 March, our First Team home game against Brentford, due to be screened live on SKY, was postponed. On the following Monday – my wife's birthday, but one of the most sombre days in my 32 years in professional sport – we sent the players home.

Looking back, the outcome was never in doubt and yet only a week before we had travelled to the Valley, Charlton Athletic's home, to come from behind to secure a 2–1 win in extra time and to qualify for the last eight of the PL U21 Cup. On the journey back to our Motspur Park training ground, travelling across London, we listened to Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England, Chris Whitty, explain how the situation in Italy was not likely to be replicated in the UK. Of course, they probably knew otherwise: COVID-19 was already rife in London communities. Professional sport knew what was coming, even if the general public did not.

### A Youthful Response

My principal responsibility is managing the club's Academy. Anyone who has ever worked with young people and the leaders of young people will know how adaptable this community is. It is how it thrives, and the response from both groups in our Club has been amazing.





JOHNNY HAYES

The gusto with which the players dived into videoed skills sessions to share online with supporters and posting their physical scores on Strava to encourage fans to get exercising has been testament to their enthusiasm and inventiveness. Equally, the commitment to support others has been terrific. First Team players were on video calls with Academy aspirants, and Scholars (U18 Academy players) were doing likewise with Foundation Phase boys (U9-12).

We adopted three core principles to operate our programme during lockdown (see Figure 1) and developed a strategy to put these core principles into action (see Figure 2).

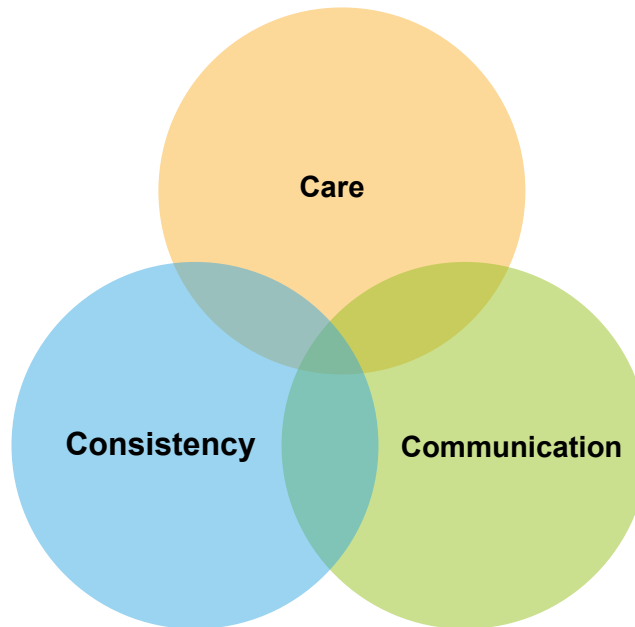


Figure 1: Three core principles

- **Care:** Be aware of the individual needs of and challenges faced by staff and players.
- **Consistency:** Give structure and clarity to support staff's and players' purpose and understanding.
- **Communication:** Build a community, players to staff, staff to staff, Academy to First Team, Academy to Club, Club to supporters.



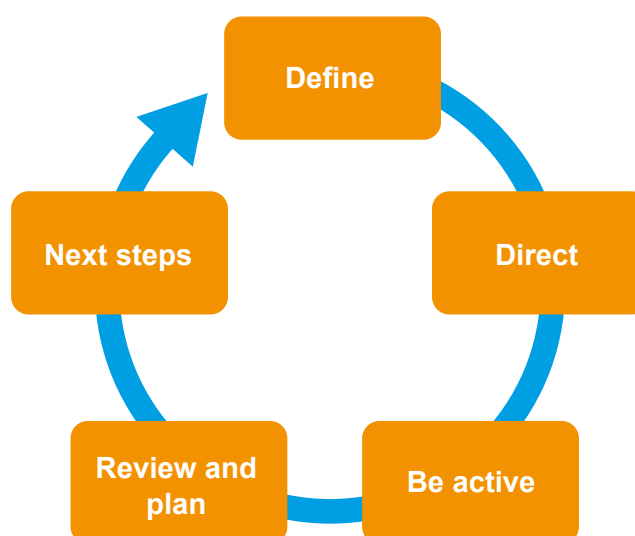


Figure 2: Implementation strategy

- **Define:** We acknowledged early on the different interpretations of what lockdown meant to staff and players – holiday, the season's over, the season's still going, need to work more, need to work less and so on.
- **Direct:** To provide direction, we identified the period as having three phases – player activity, review and planning and preparation. The length of each phase needed to be flexible and malleable due to the prevailing uncertainty, but there would always be clarity about which phase we were in and therefore what was expected.
- **Be Active:** We instilled lots of structure by sending out weekly schedules, holding regular staff meetings, focusing on supporting the players including both their mental well-being and physical development. We used activities as varied as weekly physical challenges, Strava, quizzes, bake-offs, and tests of game understanding, using lots of communication, and encouraging critical thinking - expressed through video analysis sessions and the sharing of clips and articles.
- **Review and Plan:** Players presented their reflections and intentions in their Individual Learning Plans in age groups (season review, handovers), followed by the broader programme (department plans, vision and mission, objectives, strategy and tactics (VMOST)).
- **Next Steps:** Re-engage players and plan the return to training.

## Lessons

The ingenuity displayed by the team of staff to co-ordinate virtual programmes was impressive, and it was great to receive a message of support from a parent who has been a professional football club manager for over 900 games. He wrote 'Can I please congratulate you and your extended team on the exceptional effort, innovation and care shown to Joe during this bizarre time.'

'It is my opinion that your communication, ideas and resolutely positive mindset are having a huge impact and helping to develop a strength of character and attitude of mind that will be an asset to all irrespective of their future career.'

It is too early to be certain what the critical lessons from our response will be. On the pitch, the ultimate test will be whether we are able to secure promotion back to the Premier League. Off the pitch, will our people be able to move forward healthily and securely?

Unquestionably, the opportunity for more horizontal working has enabled our Club and our Academy to become closer. This has been demonstrated by reaching out to our senior and vulnerable supporters, 1,400 of whom have been contacted by players and staff to check on their health and well-being. This proved as much an uplifting experience for the caller as for the recipient. We hope this provides a metaphor for the way forward.



## Leading Rugby Football Union through COVID-19

**Bill Sweeney**

**Chief Executive Officer, Rugby Football Union**

The following is a transcript of an interview conducted by Lt Col Langley Sharp, SO1 Leadership at the Centre for Army Leadership, with Bill Sweeney, CEO Rugby Football Union, the governing body for rugby union in England.

*L: How did the RFU react to the impact of COVID-19?*

B: When we went into lockdown, within 24 hours we were functioning perfectly with almost 100% of [our 580] staff working remotely. We set up nine working groups each of which now has a daily call to review priorities and follow up actions for that day. The following day they report back in terms of progress and status across those key areas. We also have an executive team meeting daily, as well as a COVID crisis group that focuses on anything that is at the top of our minds for that particular day or week. We also now have a weekly Board meeting to keep all informed on priority issues. The level of communication across the organisation has ramped up heavily to the extent that there is now better communication and interaction during the crisis than there was previously, something that we envisage will continue post the crisis.

The question now for when we operate post COVID is ‘What will we learn from this that will make us a more efficient and effective operation going forward?’ Previously, in all honesty, don’t believe there was lot of trust generally about working from home in business. The unspoken word was that if someone was working from home on a Friday, it was probably for a game of golf or a way to take time off but if you look at the way we’ve functioned, working remotely and more flexibly, and often faster, then we have to take some lessons from that experience. Greater trust across the organisation, different ways to measure productivity, more outcome driven. Should the organisation be measured even more against specific objectives, really clear deliverables and key performance indicators (KPIs)? Then provide the flexibility of where people want to work. Do they want to be in the office or do they want to work from home, and what is the right balance as long as the work is being done and the targets achieved?

It’s a bit risky, because a lot of key interactions revolve around face-to-face cooperation and team spirit – you couldn’t have that with Eddie<sup>7</sup> and the coaches, they have to be together with the players on a regular basis for obvious reasons. In parallel during this crisis, we’re looking at a number of companies that are doing some quite interesting stuff in this space. We’re looking at what will make us more efficient, more focused and a better more enjoyable and fulfilling place to work – in terms of work–life balance. We want to come out of this crisis at the forefront of changing ways of working in the new landscape.

*L: You’ve got to bring in the changes you want for the long-term benefit of the game, in addition to responding to the crisis. How do you balance that decision-making and know when to make that call? Are you having to delay some of your decisions?*

B: Yes, and I don’t think we’ve ever worked as hard. These are 13–14-hour days 6 days a week, and you have to be careful in watching for the signs of burn-out. One of the problems with working from home is the difficulty in separating work and home, the two merge into one seamless day with no demarcation.

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<sup>7</sup> Eddie Jones, England Rugby Head Coach.



You have to be careful not only in terms of your own well-being but also for the rest of the team as well. When you're involved in sport you understand the importance of physical well-being, you know the contributors to high performance. I book in an hour and a half every day for exercise and, unless there's an absolute crisis, I religiously hang on to that routine. I also have to really watch my nutritional intake because it's very easy to lose track. Making sure that you're following good habits throughout this crisis is really important to maintain performance in a very challenging environment.

The increased communication has helped a lot. I knew I had a good executive team at the RFU, but every single [person] has gone up another level through this crisis, over and above what I thought they were capable of doing, and I delegate a lot of responsibility to them. Having high levels of communication and interaction in this situation is critical. What takes up the most time in the executive team are the various different types of scenario-planning we're going through. Every week there's a shift in assumptions and updates; scenarios are not going to predict the future but it's an essential exercise in establishing the likely range of outcomes and what options are available to manage them. It's a very collaborative approach which involves the entire exec [team] together. We review the scenarios on a weekly basis and coming out of that we have very clear directives in terms of who does what, and then we report back in terms of where we are.

At least every two weeks, I do an all-staff video, which will kick off a capability review. This will review our current strategic plan, focus down to the absolute priorities that we must deliver on and match these against the capabilities that we need to have in place to achieve our objectives given the reduction in resources available. It will be the first stage in restructuring the organisation to cope with a new world, and it will be done in a way that is open, fully transparent and honest. It will be a completely integrated executive team approach. We've reviewed the strategic plan together, we've built the various different components and challenged each functional head together. HR has obviously taken a bigger lead, but it's very much a shared responsibility and shared accountability across the group, which I believe has and will continue to work very well.

It is also critical not to lose sight of the long-term purpose and vision. It's very easy to get sucked into the day-to-day grind and manage only what is required to survive through the present. I look at it as three different phases. You've got the immediate response stage (how do we support our member clubs and plan our survival), then the short-term recover piece (how do we stabilise the situation and provide some clarity and calm), and then you've got the longer review where we reset the organisation for a future that will remain significantly impacted by COVID: how do we renew our approach and take advantage of some of the opportunities that this crisis has provided regarding the shape of the global and domestic game?

The difficulty at the moment is that these phases are not consecutive, they're running concurrently, and we need to remind ourselves continually: 'Let's remember what our purpose is, let's not lose track of what we want to create and leave behind,' is important. People need to know that they are on a journey, otherwise the continual spinning of plates with no end in sight causes burn-out and fatigue. Coming back to 'What's our five-year plan that we've got in mind for ourselves and how does this live up to our purpose?' has been really important.

Also, little phrases that we have adopted such as 'you've got to be really comfortable being uncomfortable' helps in this situation. If you can't get used to the fact that life is not going to be stable, you're going to have a huge degree of uncertainty and burn energy worrying about what you can't control. We've got to provide some degree of clarity in an uncertain world. Let's just get comfortable with the fact that we're going to be uncomfortable for a long period, and if you can't deal with that, then you're going to get frustrated fast. Sticking to that and repeating it to ourselves every now and again helps.

*L: What's been your biggest leadership challenge in the last ten weeks, and what have you learnt about yourself as a leader during that time?*

B: I think the biggest challenge is keeping people focused and optimistic, but also recognising where the stress points are occurring. In one particular week, there may be a lot of work going on with financial modelling. You know the finance team is under significant pressure, so all of us try to support them and not add any further burden. Another week it might be another team going through a particularly difficult time. I think shifting that focus where it's needed has been a challenge. The team works really well at that and there's almost a sixth sense now about where we've got to spend our time and where we need to prioritise our energies.

Somebody said the other day 'this isn't a particularly pleasant experience,' but my response is: 'it's actually a privilege. To be here and have a role in getting through this'; if you have a passion for what you do – and England rugby is my passion – then when you look back in 15 years, there'll be a chapter in the RFU's history about 'How did we get through COVID-19?'; that's why I feel it's a privilege to be part of this remarkable team that's looking after the RFU through this crisis. You say to yourself 'you can't screw this up.' The last thing you want to do is come out of this and be judged unfavourably for how we responded. When times are at their worst you've got to be at your best; we want to be able to look back and say 'right, we dealt with a really difficult situation but we came through it as a team, and we came through it with the RFU in a stronger position for the long term.' In terms of satisfaction and fulfilment, that's huge.

You wouldn't wish this crisis on anybody, but in some ways it is a way of creating a bit of a legacy for the next management team, and it was never just a job anyway.





## After the Phoney War, the Communications Battle

**Fiyaz Mughal OBE**  
**Founder, Faith Matters**

Much like the Phoney War of 1939–1940, when COVID-19 started to blight communities in Northern Italy, many of us went about our business thinking that we could carry on with life as normal. Just over the horizon and in mainland Europe, COVID-19 was already taking lives and creating panic in local communities as people fell ill and many ended up on respirators ventilators in emergency departments. As in the first year of the Second World War, we thought that the risk to our country was much less significant than it actually was. When COVID-19 hit our shores, it silently crept up on us and has, to date, taken over 40,000 lives.

As someone who has worked with faith communities for over 30 years, it was only a matter of time before the effects were felt across the board and in all areas of society and walks of life. As churches and synagogues shut, so did mosques, gurdwaras and temples. Since each faith community has different styles and rituals of worship, there are both shared risks in practising faith and risks that are unique to specific faith communities.

My experience of working on messaging with British Muslims has extended to communities in the UK as well as in countries like Pakistan, where there are strong historical, familial and cultural links to British Muslims in the Midlands, Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and London. The arrival of COVID-19 on our shores has therefore caused substantive changes in how British Muslim communities worship and has directly affected key holy months, such as Ramadan, during which direct engagement with family and relations and daily attendance at the mosque form part of the religious duties undertaken.

My role during this time was to advise colleagues and staff in two organisations that I founded, namely Faith Matters and Tell MAMA, around messaging that needed to be put out to British Muslim communities to ensure their safety. At the core of my organisational leadership within the charities and not-for-profit organisations I have founded and led is the need to ensure that communities feel a part of wider society and to instil a set of beliefs that each action we take is inter-connected and that there are knock-on effects that can create positive or negative social change. Allied to this, I have been a firm believer that the social values of this country, the rule of law, democracy, pluralism, free speech and the right to be heard, should be staunchly defended throughout the work we have undertaken.

This brings me to one of the key tenets of effective leadership which is believing in what you are defending, promoting or ultimately upholding. Some of the most effective leaders have been driven by a set of beliefs and values that they have aligned with outcomes that they were looking to achieve and, in doing so, seeing a clear route and path of action ahead. Effective leadership is also based on another key principle: ensuring clear and consistent messaging, whether this be to colleagues, military partners or to the multiplicity of teams working on various tasks.

The assumption that many people make is that an effective leader is someone who has innate leadership skills, is bold, fearless and charismatic, and drives change among people through these qualities. The reality is that some of the most successful leaders have not had the full array of these characteristics and skills, but what they have had is the ability to communicate, to bring people with them to achieve an outcome and the capacity to gain the trust of the teams they lead. One of the most successful leaders to do this, and to be fearless and bold, was Alexander the Great, who married into the ruling tribes of the countries that he conquered, knowing that the family that he entered into would communicate his messages in the very forms and mediums that local communities were accustomed to. He had, in effect, married into these tribes to communicate with them and acclimatise himself into

their ways of life, irrespective of what the reality was. He was therefore *communicating* with them and respecting who they were. It is also fair to say that, in doing so, he managed to maintain an army despite the fact that the original Macedonian cohort that he started out with had dwindled through war and disease.

Returning to the challenges presented to me during the pandemic – getting Muslim communities to accept the online messaging and the risks to them by continued association with relatives and co-religionists – meant that the messaging needed to promote the health risks to these communities, whilst binding them into a wider narrative that they had a role to play in ensuring the safety of all people and the wider community. It bound them to others, breaking down perceived barriers around race and culture and thereby reinforcing a message that we truly ‘were in this together’. It also placed them into a role of taking responsibility, which entrusted them with respect and dignity.

Furthermore, the messaging needed to be visually representative, use language that communities could relate to and also play on a sense of social responsibility, something that many British Muslims will relate to, since charitable giving and looking after the more vulnerable and weak in society are fundamental to the belief pattern within Islam. The latter element of supporting the weak and vulnerable in society by shielding, giving food and checking up on senior citizens was further strengthened through the month of Ramadan (May 2020), which is based on ensuring social justice and carrying out good deeds for the wider public.

The online messaging that both Faith Matters and Tell MAMA put out reached over 1.4 million British Muslims in the online space, out of a population of 3 million. This means that at least half saw messaging that we had developed. Over 74% of the online videos we have put out since March 2020 were watched for more than 60 seconds, meaning that our core messaging has been accessed, viewed and digested.

What leadership lessons can we take from these actions and the success we experienced in reaching out to British Muslim communities? First, a clear vision and set of actions, allied to consistent, relevant messaging to the target audience, created the necessary change. Placing that within the bounds of wider shared risks and threats whilst acknowledging the strengths within the target audience meant that we managed to bring many along in the behavioural change required to face the challenges of COVID-19.

Finally, we must not forget that leadership also means having the emotional intelligence to know when to place responsibility with others. Throughout this process, we simply tapped into a strong sense of community responsibility among British Muslims which has always been there. In the end, the change was theirs to make and, by doing so, it opened up their social activism so that wider communities could benefit from it.

## Policing during the Pandemic

**Matt Jukes QPM**

**Chief Constable of South Wales Police**

Almost half of Wales' population live in our patch and represent two-thirds of its most deprived communities. By March 2020, it had already been a busy year for South Wales Police (SWP). Our work to address knife crime and other violence was showing signs of success, the Six Nations Rugby season was almost complete and it was business as usual in comparison to the major flooding that had struck homes and business during the previous month. Then COVID-19 hit the UK, bringing with it an unparalleled challenge. Two of our local authority areas have been among the UK's highest levels of COVID-19 infections, and the densely populated and diverse communities of Wales' capital have been similarly affected.

Our operational response has been co-ordinated across civil contingency partners by a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG), chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable. Much of my focus has been on strategic relationships, including those with Government, in Cardiff and London, and on the national responsibilities that chief constables share between our otherwise territorial roles (in my case, related to workforce issues, and actions to enable the mobilisation of extraordinary capacity).

From the perspective of policing, the pandemic raised a number of challenges (see Table 1).

Strategic challenges	Operational challenges	Organisational challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailor existing civil emergency procedures to respond to the specific nature of the pandemic.</li> <li>• Co-ordinate a response that places evolving scientific understanding of COVID-19 at the centre.</li> <li>• Align our operational responses with the Welsh Devolved Administration and its partners, while supporting the Ministerial lead for policing within the national Government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to new and evolving legislation that constrains public freedoms.</li> <li>• Develop training and communication in these laws with unprecedented urgency and pace.</li> <li>• Maintain core operational services to address crime and disorder, whilst anticipating escalating numbers of staff away from work through ill-health and isolation.</li> <li>• Develop operational procedures to safeguard isolated vulnerable people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure the health and safety of officers and staff in critical public-facing roles.</li> <li>• Accelerate action on remote and home-working.</li> <li>• Manage the welfare and well-being of our people at time of significant anxiety and pressure.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Strategic, operational and organisational challenges of COVID-19





HEDDLU  
POLICE

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Policing has played a vital role in the response to COVID-19, simultaneously providing all its core services while also ensuring the integrity of lockdown. This has made the police more visible to the population, particularly in our upholding of hastily formulated laws that are unprecedented in peacetime – laws that have touched areas of our lives that we would ordinarily enjoy with unfettered freedom, such as when we go outside, visit shops, use public transport and spend time with friends and relatives.

As the head of SWP's leadership team, I have therefore felt a three-fold responsibility: to keep our public safe; to keep our people safe; and to safeguard our legitimacy in the eyes of both at all times.

### **“Dealing with the Unusual in the Usual Way”: Listening and Responding**

There is always a risk of fighting today's battle with yesterday's plan. The pandemic has taught us a great deal about our need to adapt and innovate. It has certainly been a time to challenge our assumptions and cut a straight path through some procedural mazes. We have been quicker in making decisions and leaner in our bureaucracy. However, I have also been mindful of a maxim of a former boss: 'Deal with the unusual in the usual way.'

With well-established principles of command and control, and with core values and an organisational culture that have been the foundation of effective past performance, this has been the time to capitalise on those assets. My leadership team has remained focused on a deliberate symmetry:

- Listening and responding to our communities' needs
- Listening and responding to our own people.

Both communities and our people were with us before COVID-19 and will be after. If our behaviours now disregard values that are held dear, we are unlikely to be forgiven. Put another way, and reflecting on Army doctrine: 'Keep an eye on the long term.'

In the necessary haste to secure lockdown rapidly and to maintain it robustly, policing has stood firm on the principle of 'policing by consent' – the utmost respect for the powers we are granted to serve and protect communities. During this time, communities have been receiving information that has been disorientating, and, at times, partial. In our response, we could not appear to be either overzealous or absent.

### **Discretion and Common Sense**

With potentially draconian powers, we have had to demonstrate to communities that policing lockdown has been done *for* and *with* them and has been respectful of the disorientation and uncertainty everybody has experienced. So (and forgive a less than strategic reflection), common sense and discretion apply, and so should humanity and good grace. *Firm but fair* policing has remained critical.<sup>8</sup>

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) reflected these principles in its guidance on the enforcement of public health regulations:

- **Engage:** First speak to people.
- **Explain:** Outline the law and highlight the responsibilities we all share.
- **Encourage:** Politely but clearly underline that the police have powers we can and will use if necessary.
- **Enforce:** Where other reasonable appeals have failed, or are simply not appropriate.

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<sup>8</sup> Very similar principles were first articulated by the Metropolitan Police's first commissioners, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne.

## Public and Media Scrutiny

The test of ‘doing the right thing’ in relation to enforcement has been compounded by the heightened attention to being ‘seen to do the right thing’. Many people and most journalists have spent more time than ever on social media during lockdown. The amplification of a mistake or miscommunication has been rapid and unforgiving, even when the best of intentions are on show. For example, we have seen community support officers criticised for a tweet that showed them ‘enjoying’ walking on a beachfront that was largely off-limits to the public, when in reality their presence was needed to reassure residents.

These and other news stories have certainly highlighted the ‘Goldilocks’ challenge for policing: too much, too little or ‘just right’. Feedback through neighbourhood policing has therefore been critical, for example through meetings with Members of the Welsh and UK Parliaments and local networks to ensure the diverse communities of our cities, towns and villages are heard.

More work and time are needed to say whether we have the balance right, particularly in the light of recent events relating to public disorder. Even so, in the first three months of lockdown, we took over 15,000 COVID-19-related calls, almost all alleging a breach. From those approximately 1,100 calls each week, and with relationships between families and neighbours under strain, we received only around seven complaints a week about our handling of these reports, suggesting that, broadly, our teams have got it right.

### ‘Same storm, different boats’

Everybody’s experience of the pandemic has been unique. Most have experienced it as a period when the valued rituals of life have been disrupted, in some cases for the better (perhaps we will all drive less in future), but in many cases with great and profound losses experienced and sacrifices made. As a colleague put it: ‘we are all in the same storm, but in different boats.’ In order to understand those diverse experiences, we have to double down on listening and responding to our people.

These interactions can appear spontaneous, but we soon recognised the need to be more deliberate in structuring engagement, in the interest of representing the diverse communities we serve. We have encouraged leaders at every level to pay attention to engagement opportunities that cross ranks and roles while maintaining appropriate levels of command visibility and scheduling the type of contacts that in normal circumstances would be simply routine. It is on the margins of such engagement that leaders get the opportunity to do something the Army recognises as vital: ‘Look out for weak signals.’

Weak signals come in many forms, and we worked as team to identify those business intelligence indicators that flag up instances where we were not functioning well in serving the public or our people. For example, reports of domestic abuse and concern for children led to strategies to get behind closed doors and reach the most vulnerable.

Consequently, a key lesson of the crisis – reinforcing a central tenet of my leadership – came not from data but from listening and responding to our people.



## **‘One Team, Always’**

For our people, the challenges of working from home led to a dual isolation, from friends and family, and from colleagues. At the same time, frontline staff were being equipped with unfamiliar PPE and asked to confront difficult operational situations, unable to withdraw from their primary duty to protect the public. For many colleagues in both groups, there was home-schooling to contend with and other caring responsibilities. Under these pressures, I sensed a weak signal of the potential for a fracture in our superb ethos of Team SWP – of us operating as ‘one team, always’.

In practice, that has seen us dismantling, over the past decade, the distinctions between a so-called ‘back-office’ and the frontline. It is of huge credit to my colleagues that it has taken only small adjustments to address the whole organisation and broaden the important, initial messages that were focused on those courageous women and men at the tip of the arrowhead of operations.

I have listened with pride to operational colleagues celebrating the ‘Cinderella’ functions of business continuity planning and ICT and to others acknowledging the dedication demonstrated in every corner of the Force, from the fleet and estates teams, to colleagues working in HR, finance and administration. When I visited the temporary mortuary facility established for Wales’ capital city, I did so knowing that each life reflected there (and there were dozens) represented a family’s tragic loss. The scale of the facility struck me as testament to the potential escalation of the pandemic that we have played our part in stemming. Once again, whether working from their homes or on the street, the people who together make up Team SWP have shown resilience, responsiveness and compassion; whether working from their homes or on the street, they have stepped-up.







## A Wake-Up Call?

**Adam Grodecki**  
**Founder and Chief Executive, Forward Institute**

At the start of this year, most people hadn't heard of COVID-19, nor spent any time considering infectious diseases. Then, virtually overnight, all attention turned to this invisible yet deadly virus. And rightly so; lives were (and still are) at stake.

In a matter of weeks, our lives were turned upside down as leaders sought to contain the pandemic. In doing so, the crisis:

- Demonstrated that significant, rapid change to the status quo is possible, both for governments and organisations. Previously 'untouchable' policies and approaches changed overnight, and digital transitions, that had been due to take years, suddenly happened within weeks.
- Showed that the health of members of the public and the safety of employees are ultimately what matter most. The Prime Minister went so far as quoting Cicero: 'the health of the people should be the supreme law'.
- Exposed and amplified significant inequalities in society, resulting in greater recognition of, and appreciation for, frontline and 'key' workers.
- Illustrated how preparing for potential crises is essential and the substantial flaws in a short-term, narrow and mechanistic economic system that is maximised for efficiency only.
- Revealed how interconnected and interdependent we are, as countries, as organisations and as a species.

As a result, many leaders we work with are reflecting on COVID-19 as a wake-up call and window of opportunity for reform. As we emerge from the destruction of the first wave of the crisis, they consider it their responsibility not just to take the opportunity of a system shock to reflect on how we run our organisations and society but to make actual change. They feel a responsibility to 're-set' ways of working and assumptions about what is possible – not just to 'pause' and then continue as before. The recent global public movements around climate change and racism, together with the underlying global rise in populism and discontent with the 'system', have given further weight to calls for reform as political and commercial leaders unite in aiming to help the country 'build back better'.

Consequently, leaders in many organisations have started to discuss this in order to capture learning from this remarkable period – and to try to 'bottle' the sense that significant rapid change is possible. Many organisations have also felt they've rediscovered their sense of purpose, and it's been inspiring to see many making enlightened decisions to protect and look after their people, their communities, their customers and their supply chains.

The question is whether we will learn the 'right' lessons from this period and whether this reforming energy, agency and purpose will be sustained as we move out of the immediate phase of the crisis, economic pressure starts to bite and leaders face incredibly difficult choices.

For a shock to the system does not create system change in itself: it merely opens up the opportunity for it.



The last major global shock we faced as a society, the financial crash of 2008, sounded a warning. In the immediate aftermath of the crash, as countries and organisations grappled with its economic and social fall-out, there were calls for significant change and reform. Leaders almost universally (at least in public) agreed that the financial services sector needed to change. Significant media attention and large public demonstrations, including mass camping outside St Paul's Cathedral in London, kept the pressure up for reform. There were conferences, papers, high-level discussions, working groups and reviews. Despite all this, some years later, it is apparent that the crisis was ultimately a missed opportunity. Despite their words, many in the financial industry were keen to get back to 'business as usual', and short-term financial pressure provided more powerful and immediate motivation for leaders than the more intangible calls for cultural change. The complexity, bureaucracy and sheer scale of the organisations made change difficult, and gradually swallowed up the initial reforming zeal and diluted the sense that change was possible. Organisations largely hunkered down. They focused on survival and dealt with the more immediate and tangible priorities they faced. More egregious excesses and problems with individual conduct were dealt with, but most firms broadly reverted to their industry norms of leadership and culture.

Great work was done on the urgent task of ensuring a similar crash would not happen again. Indeed, we are benefiting from that now, as the financial system absorbs this unprecedented shock with great resilience. But many of the wider, deeper questions thrown up by the crisis were not resolved. The government, regulators and organisations focused on the urgent tasks that were necessary to build economic resilience. They never quite got round to properly dealing with critically important but more complex and less time-bound issues, such as inequality, national productivity, public and private risk and reward, and organisational purpose and culture. Arguably, the failure to deal with these issues has significantly contributed to much of the discontent, division and political instability we witness around the world today.

There is little doubt that as a society we will address the urgent questions thrown up by COVID-19 around public health and pandemic preparedness. But I worry we will again fail to properly address many of the important but less urgent wider questions.

From our conversations with leaders across different industries, some of these questions include:

- How do we think about, account for and take meaningful action on warning signs of existential risks? There were warning signs of the financial crisis, which were largely ignored. So too for COVID-19 (Bill Gates gave a speech warning of the risks of the pandemic in 2016). And as a society, we are still making painfully slow progress on climate change, despite scientific consensus on the need for action for well over a decade, and growing weather extremes around the world.
- How can we build organisations and systems designed for resilience in an inherently uncertain world, while economic pressures will likely continue to drive a focus on efficiency?
- How do we face into the inequality in our society, and create a future where we properly reward the frontline workers we've been calling heroes? How do we do this whilst at the same time, the brutal nature of short-term capitalism drives increased investment in technology to automate jobs more quickly (especially as robots can't get ill) and national debt puts pressure on public sector wages?

As we see leaders start to wrestle with questions such as these across different sectors, two traits emerge as particularly vital.

First, the importance of making the time and space to get perspective, to step back to reflect and 'look up and out' of your organisation. In crises, most leaders tend to feel isolated, caught in short-term pressure, and they unintentionally narrow the voices they hear from, at a time when they need to make challenging decisions while under significant scrutiny. Quality of thinking is key, so finding space to reflect and to gain

perspective is hard but absolutely vital. As Martin Hewitt (Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and Non-Executive Director of the Forward Institute) recently said, 'When the stakes are this high, it is vital that as leaders we make the space to challenge our assumptions, stretch our vision and learn from others.' Effective responses to big risks require leaders to be thoughtful, long term, open and to look widely (and to unusual suspects) for ideas and advice. To keep focused on the important – not just the urgent – questions requires leaders to step out of their silos and remain connected to the wider world. Some of the most inspiring stories and actions we've seen over the past few months have come from unlikely yet effective collaborations and networks.

Second, the importance of legitimacy. The profound social and economic consequences of the pandemic are leaving leaders in almost every sector with invidious decisions, as they have to wrestle with dilemmas and trade-offs that have profound short- and long-term implications for their employees, supply chain, customers, communities and the public. The likely result is that pre-crisis issues of public and employee trust in leaders and major organisations will only grow. For thoughtful leaders then, the question is not just what the 'optimal' choices are but how to determine them so that the majority of people feel that they are legitimate decisions, that is that they have been reached in the right way and can be broadly understood and accepted by all.

None of this is easy of course. If we get it right though, we can hope that out of the tragedy of this pandemic, together we can build a better, fairer, more sustainable society.

THANK  
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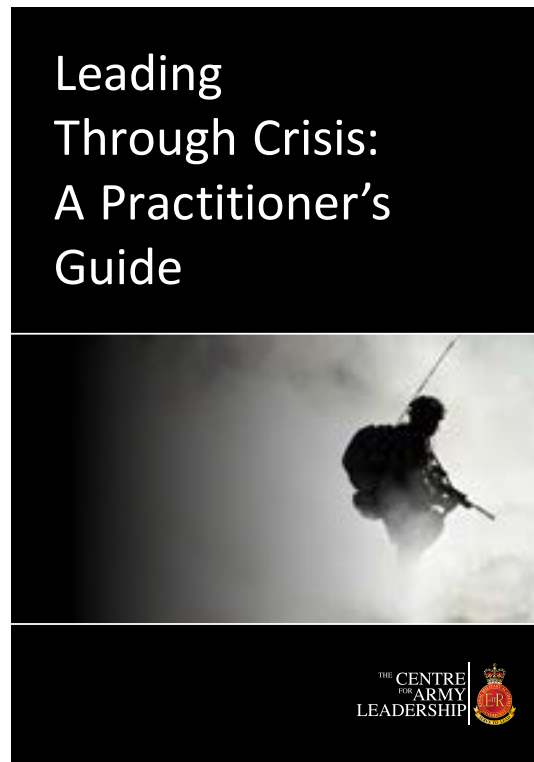


## Glossary

APC	Army Personnel Centre
APSG	Army Personnel Services Group
ARITC	Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
DCYP	Directorate Children and Young People
DFR	Defence Fire and Rescue
ESG	Environmental, Social And Governance
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
POLAD	Political Adviser
NHS	National Health Service
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OGD	Other Government Department
Operation RESCRIPT (Op RESCRIPT)	The military operation to assist the UK's efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom
RC	Regional Command
RMAS	Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCG	Strategic Co-ordination Group
SJC (UK)	Standing Joint Commander (United Kingdom)
VMOST	Vision And Mission, Objectives, Strategy And Tactics



## Previously published by the Centre for Army Leadership:



The world is currently in crisis. Our health, economy, politics, industry, employment markets and indeed our social fabric are facing challenges unseen in our lifetime. It is in this context that this paper offers a British Army perspective on Leading Through Crisis: A Practitioner's Guide.

These are exceptional times, requiring exceptional leadership; everyone has a role to play.

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