**Mission possible: how to lead like an action hero**

**Wendy Merry, Chief People Officer at Civica, examines the power of effective leadership and a clear organisational vision**

In today’s evolving landscape, leading isn’t an easy task. However, strong leadership is the backbone of solid governance and is increasingly important for organisations to navigate their way through the most turbulent period in recent history.

Effective leadership has an empowering ripple effect across an organisation and its workforce. With a clear vision and sustained communication, underpinned by strong guidance, leaders can bring about a change in culture and performance.

Civica recently hosted a Leadership Forum, attended by more than 40 public sector representatives from across the UK, which found that modern leadership calls for far more than an impressive job title or years of experience. It’s an attitude, an attitude that enables you to tackle the impossible task. The Forum agreed that when it comes to identifying inspirational leaders, the action heroes that succeed are authentic, visible, engaging, brave, transformational, ambitious and passionate, to name a few.

But crucially, leading from the front requires the balancing of four key elements to build the foundation for innovation and stable growth.

**1. Leading self**Senior leaders need first and foremost to be great at leading themselves. If they cannot lead themselves, they have no credibility in leading others. Today, self-awareness and a flexible approach are essential in establishing and maintaining authority. And like every action hero, they need to have a clear personal mission, a focus on what they can do and compassion. Critical to this is knowing how to measure personal success, treat people with respect and act on what’s within your control – but have a plan for factors outside of this as well.

**2. Forming the top team**A hero is nothing without their top team of colleagues around them to help disseminate change within any organisation. In an ideal world they are high performing and all totally aligned behind a common mission. However, our leaders agreed it’s not always that simple as you can sometimes inherit a team with some bad habits. They may have different agendas and historical differences and these can be exacerbated if you’re bringing together people from different organisations. So to build a high performing top team there needs to be a clear vision, strong relationships and tailored leadership to bring out the best in each person.

**3. Creating a leadership community**But achieving the ‘impossible tasks’ takes more than a top leadership team. Heroes are essential at all levels and in all functions. These are people that understand the mission, who feel that they are part of the solution and who are willing to take action. These people need to feel empowered and encouraged to work across functions and to develop solutions. At the core of the leadership community is a shared vision, engaged influencers and the ability to support key initiatives.

**4. Engaging the whole organisation**Behind any missions’ success is clear and continuous communication. Formal roadshows have a part to play, but a lot of communication will be through informal conversations, by sharing war stories as well as success stories. Individuals need to see how the vision relates to them and feel as if they’re contributing to something. Effective engagement that will instil confidence in your vision comes from making it personal, open and with a clear call to action. People won’t believe the vision until they see the action it drives.

Today’s leaders must be more competent, ‘awake’ and action-led than ever; embodying all the values and changes they wish to see in their wider team and ecosystem. Without a strong following, they won’t be able to fight through the tough times, and in today’s environment standing still is not an option. To some, it may seem like an impossible task, but being an action hero leader doesn’t mean working alone. With trusted advisors from inside and outside of an organisation and a collaborative approach with the entire workforce, transformation is possible, and for some, it’s already in sight.

To read more on this topic, download our report, *'Leading from the front: re-writing the book to deliver public sector transformation*' [**here**](https://www.civica.com/en-GB/whitepapers-value-exchange-block-library/re-writing-the-book/).