

Three Ball Juggling

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To lead is a demanding and complex business. It is no surprise therefore that leadership abounds with many books and models of 'how to do it'. We have found that despite this many leaders welcome a straightforward guide as to what to keep in mind as they tackle a particular challenge.

We set out below a model we devised which attempts to be a straightforward guide to the leadership terrain. It is not new but brings together three familiar aspects of leadership – having a vision and having a way of delivering these business outcomes, negotiating with stakeholders and interests; and taking people emotionally and behaviourally with the change. These are the three 'balls' which leaders need to 'juggle'. Leadership has similarities to juggling because the focus of attention is continually changing as 'balls' require more or less attention. It is also dependent on the particular skills of the juggler (or jugglers) at the centre of it all.

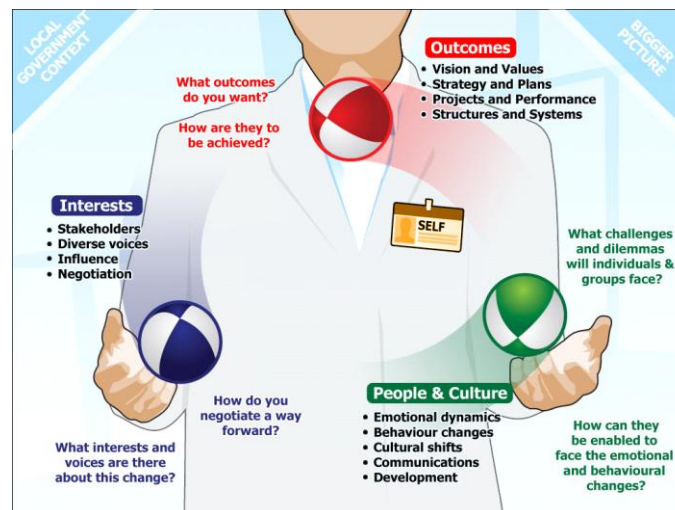
There are five aspects that require attention in leadership (and juggling).

Leadership starts from ourselves. It comes from a personal or small group concern to act or get something done. It draws upon our knowledge, character and skills. To lead well requires good self knowledge - to be aware of our drives, character and style.

Leadership must then juggle three aspects of the particular situation:

- Focusing on what needs to be done – ***the vision and business outcomes;***
- Spotting who is for and who against the change and finding a way forward – ***negotiating with interests;***
- Enabling those involved to emotionally and behaviourally adapt – ***the people and cultural dimension.***

[Click here to download the Three Ball Juggling Interactive Application.](#)



Leadership is also inevitably within a context and does not happen in a vacuum. It must account for the context – how the context shapes what can be done and how what is done begins to shape the context.

A leader is at the centre of these processes, shaping and directing them, though not, of course, always responsible for carrying them out. What is critical is that although one aspect seems central at any time, e.g. developing a strategy, a leader's role is - like a juggler's - keeping an eye on other aspects at the same time, e.g. building support, allaying fears.

When it comes to leading a particular change each of the three 'balls' involves a wide range of activities and effective leadership is about ensuring each is dealt with at the appropriate time. We used the model in the Leadership Development Commission Strategy and the IDeA's guide for Cabinets and Corporate management teams: *Inside Top Teams – A Practical Guide* available from Local Government Improvement and Development/Knowledge or on this site.

Some key questions to keep in mind are;

Understanding our personal and team leadership

How well do you know your personal/team characteristics, skills and knowledge?

Focusing on developing and delivering clear outcomes

What vision do you have and what outcomes do you want?

How are they practically to be achieved?

Spotting stakeholders interests and negotiating a way forward through influence, authority and power

What interests and voices are there linked to this change?

How do you negotiate a way forward?

Enabling people to adapt emotionally and behaviourally

What challenges, possibilities and dilemmas will individuals face?

How can they be enabled to face the emotionally and behaviourally challenging changes?

The Context

How well does the context of what else is happening define your room for manoeuvre?

The competing demands of leadership

