

LEAD SELF

ENGAGE OTHERS

ACHIEVE RESULTS

DEVELOP COALITIONS

SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

# ENGAGE OTHERS

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER:

**WHAT EVERY HEALTH LEADER SHOULD KNOW**



Engaging and connecting others is an essential element of leadership. Without willing, energized, and engaged followers, a leader is unable to accomplish results on any significant scale. Leaders engage others through personal influence, teamwork, communication, and through the creation and management of performance expectations. Leaders also focus on the whole organization, by providing an engaging vision and by paying attention to the health of the organization.

The research on leadership provides insight into all of these dimensions of engagement, and provides guidance on strategies that can help leaders effectively engage others. Engage Others presents evidence of how leaders engage others noting both the unique complexities of the healthcare system as well as the common challenges of leaders in all contexts.

Leaders do not exist in isolation—they exist in context and in relationship. In fact, leadership has been defined in the literature as existing only when there are followers, be these employees or others who are drawn to follow for various reasons. Job positions often require or expect us to lead and engage others; however the term leadership is as much a process as it is a description of a position. We can lead within the context of any position or situation, should we first of all choose to, and secondly engage others to follow.

When leaders develop the capabilities in all five domains and express these through corresponding behaviours, leadership becomes visible and contributes effectively to the effectiveness of the healthcare system.

Engage Others explores the leadership domain of Engage Others, and examines research that supports each of the corresponding four sub-domains as a key dimension of leadership. The four capabilities (or sub-domains) are:

- 1. Foster the development of others:** Support and challenge others to achieve professional and personal goals
- 2. Contribute to the creation of a healthy organization:** Create an engaging environment where others have meaningful opportunities to contribute and the resources to fulfill their expected responsibilities.

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3. **Communicate effectively:** Listen well and encourage an open exchange of information and ideas using appropriate communication media.
4. **Build teams:** Facilitate an environment of collaboration and cooperation to achieve results.

Engage Others explores conceptual models and theories of engagement, leadership styles, emotional intelligence, strength-based development, organizational health, language of communication, and teamwork as they relate to engaging others, with some evidence through examples from healthcare. The review also addresses research literature that focuses on the four capabilities identified above. The evidence in the literature supports the key action points or leader behaviours that actually do engage others. Others in this definition refer to subordinates and other employees, but may also mean suppliers, partners, stakeholders, or patients.

Fostering the development of others is a relatively new area of investigation that stems from the recognition that leadership needs to be enacted at all organizational levels. As leadership is no longer focused solely at the top of the organization, it becomes imperative to hold management at all levels of an organization accountable for the development of others. This ensures leadership bench strength and creates a culture of growth and development that is more holistic and less hierarchical. When the bench strength is strong and there is an investment in development, there is healthy growth. When people are committed, they are more easily engaged; however, the challenge is to ensure they also stay balanced and healthy, or the entire organization can become toxic with overworked and overwhelmed employees.

Leaders contribute to the overall health of an organization by ensuring employees have the human, financial, and tangible resources they require to perform optimally. By creating opportunities for people to have professional relationships and make meaningful contributions, they engage people in communication, encouraging and supporting them toward objectives. What leaders do and what they do not do explicitly tells employees what is valued. It is important to match words with action—what we often hear as “walking the talk.” In becoming conscious of all methods of communication it helps us understand that they reinforce each other. Not communicating is also a form of communication.

There is much in the literature that supports effective communication as an essential skill for leaders. Effective communication is more than just sharing information. It is through an open exchange of thoughts, stories, ideas, questions, and images that employees are drawn to leaders and encouraged to participate in dialogue and interactive collaboration that is the foundation for meaningful communication. Effective communication contributes to the creation of shared meaning and understanding, which supports an environment for pooling the work of others and achieving collective success.



As people work together collaboratively, they form teams. These teams may be typical department or work teams, but may also span internal boundaries to include cross-disciplinary project teams, virtual teams, or teams that include suppliers and others. Leaders need to develop the ability to effectively build these kinds of teams, using technology and media, where appropriate, and pushing the boundaries of traditional team planning, thinking, and doing. At their heart, a strong team or great group is about successful collaborations or dreams with deadlines. They are places of action, not just think tanks or retreats. Through persistence, curiosity, and focus they are driven collectively and by the leader to get results.

As leaders go about fostering the development of others, creating a healthy organization, communicating effectively, and building effective teams, they are contributing to an engaging leadership culture that, when added to the other four domains in the LEADS competencies of Lead Self, Achieve Results, Develop Coalitions, and Systems Transformation, creates a strong framework that will guide the development of leaders in the healthcare system and, ultimately, a transformation of the system itself.

