Lecture 6: Leadership in OHS

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Wickens (1998), in his book The Ascendant Organisation, states that:

"A manager who cannot lead is a waste of space and money."

Leadership defined

Leadership is a topic that has long intrigued scholars and practitioners alike, with numerous interpretations and approaches. As noted by Burns (1978, cited in Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p.14), it remains "one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth." Among the more straightforward and widely accepted definitions in leadership studies is that "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2006, cited by Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p.2). This definition could be expanded to include "vision" as a central aspect of this goal.

Leadership has been integral to human societies from their inception, driven by both a deep-seated desire to lead or exert influence and a corresponding inclination to be led. This collective endorsement of leadership, where individuals willingly follow a leader, is often referred to as "plural action." Interestingly, the dynamic of leaders and followers is not unique to humans; it is observed in many species. Historically, leadership has been closely associated with offering direction and safety to followers. Notably, effective leadership does not always stem from formal titles or organisational hierarchy. "Non-sanctioned leadership," or informal influence, often plays an equally, if not more, significant role within organisations. Leaders can emerge organically within groups, highlighting that leadership is not solely the domain of those at the top, though ideally, formal leaders would assume that role.

In essence, leadership can be distilled into three key areas:

1. **Traits**: Characteristics that define successful leaders.
2. **Behaviour**: Actions that leaders take.
3. **Effectiveness**: Knowing what approaches work best and when to apply them.

2.2 Leadership vs. management

The classical roots of leadership theories have always included a comparison between leadership and management, and this debate continues to the present day. Grint (1995, cited in Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p.14) remarked that management remains enigmatic, with research often leading to more questions rather than clarity. This highlights a certain ambiguity and complexity within the concepts of leadership and management. Not every leader is necessarily a manager, and not every manager is a leader.

Mullins (2016, p.18) describes management as the process by which organisational members are coordinated, directed, and guided towards achieving organisational goals. This description could also be applied to certain aspects of leadership. Management is often seen as a 'transactional' process, focusing on ensuring tasks are completed and objectives are met. Leadership, on the other hand, is considered 'transformational,' involving the inspiration and transformation of people and circumstances. Leadership is about 'path-finding' – identifying and establishing the right direction – while management is about 'path-following,' or ensuring that things are done correctly and efficiently.

Figure 1 below illustrates a conceptual framework that adds depth to the leadership and management discussion. An 'assigned leader' is an individual who derives authority from their appointed role within an organisation. This formal position may mean other employees are expected to respect this leader based on their title rather than their leadership skills. Conversely, an 'emergent leader' is someone who demonstrates their leadership qualities before formal promotion, gaining respect from colleagues who recognise their work ethic and abilities. Employees might anticipate that emergent leaders, having risen through the ranks, show more empathy than assigned leaders.

A conceptualised framework of the leadership and management debate based on the constructs of power (Adapted from Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p.22)

Figure 1.

Open the following link and view the first two videos for perspectives on the leadership-management debate: https://www.linkedin.com/learning/search?keywords=leadership%20vs%20management&u=42447028

The British Army offers an example of how leadership is cultivated through experience and challenge. Its regular commission board assesses candidates over four days of command tasks and problem-solving exercises before training even begins, selecting individuals based on their demonstrated potential to lead. Power, indeed, is an inherent part of human social structures.

2.3 Leadership and power

Power is fundamentally the capacity to shape the behaviour, attitudes, or beliefs of others, often through the control or distribution of valued resources. Influence, a key component of power, can be exercised through various means, including persuasion, authority, and coercion. Understanding power involves exploring how it originates within social relationships and the ways it shapes interactions. Power is typically categorised into several distinct bases, each with unique characteristics:

- **Legitimate Power:** This form of power is rooted in an individual's recognised right to hold authority over others. It is often derived from formal roles or positions within organisations or society, where the authority is accepted as justified or legitimate. Legitimate power is typically granted to leaders, managers, or officials who are seen as rightful decision-makers.
- **Reward Power:** Reward power is based on the perception that an individual can provide desirable rewards or benefits, such as promotions, pay raises, or privileges. The potential to grant rewards makes others more willing to follow directions or align with the individual's goals. This form of power can be particularly effective in motivating individuals, though its influence may weaken if rewards are perceived as inadequate or insincere.
- **Coercive Power:** Coercive power is associated with the capacity to impose sanctions, punishments, or other forms of negative consequences. It often relies on the fear of repercussions, which can compel individuals to act in ways they might not otherwise choose. While coercive power can be effective in achieving short-term compliance, it can also lead to resentment and decreased morale if overused or perceived as unjust.
- **Referent Power:** This form of power stems from personal identification, admiration, or respect that one person feels toward another. Individuals with referent power are influential due to the strong personal connection or identity they inspire in others, who may emulate them or seek their approval. Referent power is often observed in charismatic leaders or role models who can inspire others simply through their actions, values, or personality.
- **Expert Power:** Expert power is grounded in the perception that an individual possesses specialised knowledge, skills, or expertise in a particular area. It is commonly associated with professionals such as lawyers, doctors, or engineers whose insight is trusted and valued. This type of power often commands respect and deference, as people are more likely to be influenced by those they believe have superior knowledge or experience in relevant matters.

Each of these power bases functions uniquely within relationships and organisations, shaping how individuals interact and how leaders effectively guide their teams. By understanding and appropriately applying these forms of power, leaders can build trust, inspire commitment, and create a positive influence that supports organisational goals.

2.4 Trait theories of leadership

What are leaders like? What do they look like?

Trait theories represent one of the earliest approaches to understanding leadership. These theories focus on identifying specific qualities and characteristics associated with effective leaders. The pursuit of distinguishing personality, social, physical, or intellectual attributes that set leaders apart from non-leaders dates back to the initial stages of leadership research. Generally, the view is that leaders possess distinctive qualities that make them different from others.

To explore this, we turn first to personality psychology. A thorough review of leadership research (Judge & Bono, 2000) aligned with the Big Five personality framework (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Tupes & Christal, 1961; Norman, 1963) highlights extraversion as a crucial trait for effective leaders. However, extraversion is more closely related to leader emergence than it is to leadership effectiveness. Sociable and dominant individuals are naturally inclined to assert themselves in group settings, but leaders should also ensure they balance assertiveness with sensitivity to others' feelings and actively listen. Conscientiousness and openness to experience were also significantly linked to leadership, though less strongly than extraversion. Meanwhile, agreeableness and emotional stability were found to have lower correlations with leadership effectiveness.

According to the trait approach, leaders tend to enjoy being around people, show assertiveness (extraversion), display discipline and reliability (conscientiousness), and demonstrate creativity and adaptability (openness). These traits collectively provide a considerable advantage in leadership contexts. The Big Five personality traits are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Norman's Markers for the Big Five

1. Surgency	**4. Emotional Stability**
Talkative - silent	Calm - anxious
Sociable - reclusive	Composed - excitable
Adventurous - cautious	Not hypochondriacal - hypochondriacal
Open - secretive	Poised - nervous/tense
2. Agreeableness	**5. Culture**
Good natured - irritable	Intellectual - unreflective/narrow
Cooperative - negativistic	Artistic - non-artistic
Mild/gentle - headstrong	Imaginative - simple/direct
Not jealous - jealous	Polished/refined - crude/boorish
3. Conscientiousness	
Responsible - undependable	
Scrupulous - unscrupulous	
Persevering - quitting	
Fussy/tidy - careless	

(Source: Norman, 1963)

This perspective proposes that effective leaders tend to share certain key traits. One explanation for this is that conscientiousness and extraversion are positively linked to leaders' sense of self-efficacy. People are generally more inclined to follow someone who is confident and appears assured in their chosen direction.
Emotional intelligence (EI) also emerges as a significant indicator of effective leadership. A central element of EI is empathy, enabling leaders to connect more deeply with others. Leaders who skillfully manage and express emotions can more effectively influence followers by showing genuine appreciation for others and fostering enthusiasm for high performance.

Are Leaders Born or Made?
Traits can indeed serve as indicators of leadership potential. However, the presence of these traits, and the recognition of someone as a leader, do not necessarily equate to effective leadership in achieving group goals. While trait theories can help predict who may emerge as a leader, they fall short of fully explaining leadership effectiveness.

Table 2 below presents a summarised version of Jago's taxonomy, which outlines several recognised leadership traits. Trait theories offer valuable insights for predicting who may become leaders by describing the qualities, behaviours, communication styles, and essential skills of effective leaders. While these theories provide a framework for selecting leaders, behavioural theories of leadership suggest that leaders can also be developed through training.

Leadership traits – with examples

Physical factors	Personality	Social	Skill and ability
- Energy	- Aggression	- Sensitivity	- Intelligence
- Height	- Dominance	- Prestige	- Judgement
- Weight	- Enthusiasm	- Tact	- Knowledge
- Appearance/grooming	- Extraversion	- Popularity/prestige	- Verbal fluency
	- Originality	- Social standing	
	- Independence		
	- Initiative		
	- Control		
	- Self-confidence		
	- Persistence		
	- Sense of humour		

(Table 2 adapted from Jago, 1982, p.317)

Watch the interview with Dr Robert Hogan, who devised the the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) (Hogan & Hogan, 1995) based on the Big 5.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yiFUCBkhoc

2.5 The British Army leadership framework

The British Army Leadership Framework (see Figure 2 below) outlines the core components of army leadership, detailing the essential attributes of a leader. This model integrates leader attributes, standards, and values, which collectively contribute to the competencies a leader needs to perform effectively. These competencies represent what leaders know and the necessary expertise they bring to their roles. This foundation of knowledge and skill is crucial, as it shapes leaders' actions, particularly in areas like self-development, team-building, and achieving organizational goals.
The framework emphasizes not only what leaders do but also how they approach the process, maintaining a focus on the outcomes. One fundamental tenet of army leadership is the principle of never asking a subordinate to perform a task the leader would not do themselves. This ethos, though rooted in military practice, has clear relevance for the business world. Many civilian organizations have adopted aspects of the military approach, such as adventurous training exercises, but these are adapted to be less hazardous.

(Adapted from: the British Army, n.d., p.12)

What Leaders Are, Know, and Do According to the British Army:

1. **What Leaders Are**: Leaders are defined by their character and values, which form the bedrock of the British Army's leadership framework. A strong sense of duty, integrity, and ethical responsibility is expected of leaders, shaping who they are at their core. Leaders must exhibit resilience, courage, and self-discipline, as well as empathy and humility. These attributes foster trust within the team, ensuring that leaders are respected and able to motivate others. In essence, "what leaders are" refers to the intrinsic qualities and values that guide a leader's behavior, influencing both their decision-making and their interactions with others.

2. **What Leaders Know**: Knowledge is a fundamental component of effective leadership in the British Army. Leaders must be proficient in both technical skills relevant to their roles and broader tactical and strategic understanding. This knowledge enables leaders to make informed decisions and address complex situations confidently. They must also understand human psychology, communication, and team dynamics to lead diverse groups effectively. The "know" component underscores the importance of continuous learning and self-improvement, as leaders are expected to adapt their knowledge base to the changing demands of the environment and the needs of their team.

3. **What Leaders Do**: The actions of a leader encompass a range of responsibilities, from developing oneself and others to managing team dynamics and accomplishing objectives. Army leaders focus on building cohesive and high-performing teams, fostering an environment of mutual respect and shared purpose. They actively engage in mentoring and coaching, empowering their team members to grow and take on new challenges. Achieving results is crucial, but the process is equally significant, with a focus on ethical decision-making and a commitment to the collective mission. Leaders demonstrate accountability and model the behavior they expect from others, leading by example in every task and interaction.

2.6 Leadership Behaviours and Styles

Leadership styles can be grouped into different categories, each with distinct behaviours:

- **Transformational**: Shapes the organisational culture.
- **Transactional**: Reinforces and sustains the culture.
- **Servant**: Supports the culture through service-oriented leadership.
- **Shared Leadership**: Team-based approach to leadership.
- **Toxic, Narcissistic, Destructive, Unethical, or Bad**: Negative or harmful styles of leadership.

Transformational Leadership involves 'transforming' the organisation and is sometimes called 'charismatic leadership' due to its focus on the leader's personal qualities. Transformational leaders aim to expand and uplift the interests of their followers, creating awareness and fostering acceptance of the organisation's vision, purpose, and mission. This leadership style is connected to fulfilling employees' higher-level needs for self-esteem and self-actualisation and motivates them to focus on common goals rather than personal interests.

Transactional Leadership is often termed 'managerial leadership' and focuses on achieving tasks and meeting objectives. It is essentially an 'exchange' or transaction between leader and followers. Transactional leadership, while reaching similar outcomes as transformational leadership, approaches them from a different perspective, focusing on the quality of relations between leaders and group members rather than the individual leader's traits. This style promotes compliance through rewards for achievements and penalties for shortcomings. Unlike transformational leaders, transactional leaders are not focused on changing the future. This approach is particularly effective in crisis situations, emergencies, or projects that require specific, predefined actions. Although transformational leadership tends to foster greater commitment and cooperation, both styles have their advantages in different contexts. In practice, senior managers with a transformational outlook may delegate the realisation of the vision or mission to transactional leaders who ensure its execution—a process sometimes referred to as 'cascading.'

Servant Leadership, while less frequently discussed, centres on leading by serving followers. This philosophy differs from traditional leadership models, where the leader's primary concern is the success of the organisation and customer satisfaction. Servant leadership emphasises empathy and developing the potential of followers, a style often exemplified by certain religious or political leaders.

Shared Leadership recognises the challenges of concentrating all leadership responsibilities in a single person, acknowledging the value of collective knowledge. Shared leadership is team-based and complements traditional hierarchical leadership, enhancing overall effectiveness.

Toxic Leadership highlights the limitations of transformational leadership. While transformational leadership can be inspiring and encourage strong emotional involvement, it can also lead organisations toward negative or destructive outcomes. This is evident in the case of dictators who, despite their charisma and transformational qualities, ultimately harm their followers—such as Adolf Hitler. Such leaders are often described as 'toxic,' 'narcissistic,' 'unethical,' 'bad,' or 'destructive.' Toxic leadership can emerge when conditions allow it and can occur in ordinary workplaces at various hierarchical levels, though perceptions of toxicity are subjective and open to interpretation.

Table 3 illustrates the behaviours associated with transactional and transformational leadership. These behaviours differ across hierarchical levels, with transformational leadership generally seen as effective across all levels, while transactional leadership is more effective at lower levels and less so at the highest levels.

Transactional Leader	Transformational Leader
Contingent Reward: Contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good behaviour, recognises accomplishments.	**Idealised Influence**: Provides vision and sense of mission, instils pride, gains respect and trust.
Management by Exception (Active): Watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, takes corrective action.	**Inspirational Motivation**: Communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, expresses important purposes in simple ways.
Management by Exception (Passive): Intervenes only if standards are not met.	**Intellectual Stimulation**: Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem-solving.
Laissez-faire: Abdicates responsibilities, avoids making decisions.	**Individualised Consideration**: Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, and advises.

Table 3: combines all relevant behaviours for both leadership styles as adapted from Robbins, Judge, & Campbell (2017, p.343).

Leadership styles can complement one another, and an effective leader often incorporates aspects of multiple styles. The concept of ‘shared leadership’ recognises the challenge of expecting a single person to embody all the knowledge required for effective leadership. This approach is team-based and strengthens traditional, vertical forms of leadership.

One early framework for understanding leadership focused on whether leaders exhibited an ‘autocratic’ or ‘democratic’ style, primarily based on the degree of participation involved. The suitable level of participation varies depending on the nature of the work and the attributes of team members. ‘Consideration’ refers to behaviours that prioritise people, while ‘initiating structure’ describes behaviours that emphasise task completion. Both task-focused and socio-emotional leadership are essential for fostering team cohesion and achieving goals, with different skills required depending on the specific circumstances.

2.7 Role Model Leadership in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

A role model leader inspires others through their distinct qualities and values, encouraging colleagues and followers to emulate their approach. In the context of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), role model leadership extends beyond setting an example; it includes fostering a safe, positive, and proactive work environment. OHS leaders should exemplify behaviours and attitudes that promote safety, responsibility, and continuous improvement within the workplace.

Role models in OHS leadership demonstrate dedication to safety and well-being, inspiring others to prioritise these values in their daily activities. They set a high standard by adhering to strict safety protocols and displaying a commitment to achieving organisational safety goals. Moreover, they instil confidence in others to act with similar diligence and care, especially when navigating complex health and safety challenges.

How to Be a Role Model Leader in OHS

Becoming a role model in OHS requires leaders to embody traits that inspire trust, integrity, and a sense of accountability. Effective OHS leaders don't just issue directives; they show by example, taking responsibility for their own actions and decisions. By displaying courage and a willingness to take calculated risks when necessary, they instil confidence in their teams, who in turn feel empowered to adopt proactive approaches to safety. Recognising and appreciating the efforts of employees reinforces their commitment to organisational goals, especially in challenging times.

Self-awareness is particularly vital for OHS leaders, as it allows them to recognise how their behaviours impact others and helps them to model constructive behaviours for safety and health. Leaders who understand their own strengths and limitations are better equipped to communicate effectively, motivate teams, and inspire others to improve both personally and professionally. In OHS, self-aware leaders are likely to encourage an environment where employees feel safe to express concerns and contribute ideas for improving safety protocols.

Key Qualities of a Role Model Leader in OHS

1. **Integrity** – An OHS role model leader speaks and acts truthfully, prioritising safety and well-being above all. Integrity fosters trust, a crucial component in safety-critical environments.
2. **Optimism** – A positive outlook is essential in challenging OHS situations, as it motivates teams to stay focused and resilient, even when facing setbacks.
3. **Collaboration** – Working together effectively in OHS is crucial for identifying risks and finding practical solutions. An open-minded leader who values diverse perspectives enhances team cohesion.
4. **Listening** – A strong leader listens carefully to safety concerns and suggestions, fostering an inclusive culture that encourages everyone to contribute to improving safety standards.
5. **Empathy** – Understanding and addressing the diverse needs of employees strengthens the leader's ability to provide meaningful support and solutions that benefit the team.
6. **Commitment** – OHS leaders are dedicated to advancing health and safety practices, often going beyond the minimum requirements to ensure a safer workplace.

Role Model Examples in OHS Leadership

- **Mentors**: Experienced OHS professionals who share insights and strategies with others to foster a safer workplace. Their advice often shapes future OHS policies and best practices.
- **Coaches**: Leaders who provide practical training and support, enhancing employees' safety skills and teamwork. Their empathetic approach encourages open communication and a learning mindset.

- **Parents and Teachers**: Although typically outside the workplace, parents and teachers exemplify resilience and dedication, qualities that OHS leaders emulate to inspire commitment and perseverance in their teams.

Summary

In the field of Occupational Health and Safety, role model leaders inspire others by upholding high standards of safety and integrity. Positive role models in OHS settings encourage self-awareness, collaboration, and accountability, qualities that support a culture of safety and continuous improvement. Role model leaders in OHS are not only admired for their technical knowledge but also for their dedication to creating safe and supportive environments.

2.8 Real-Life Examples of Successes and Failures in Organisational Health and Safety Due to Leadership

Successes

1. **Alcoa (Aluminium Company of America)**
   Under the leadership of CEO Paul O'Neill in the 1980s, Alcoa achieved remarkable improvements in health and safety, becoming a renowned case of safety excellence. O'Neill placed worker safety at the top of Alcoa's priorities, famously telling stakeholders that worker safety was the company's primary goal, even above profits. His insistence on rigorous safety protocols and transparent reporting empowered employees at all levels to prioritise safety without fear of repercussions. As a result, Alcoa's injury rate plummeted, and employee morale improved. This example demonstrates how a commitment to health and safety from the very top can create a culture of safety and yield impressive results.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCEDbCH0HK0

2. **Toyota's Andon Cord System**
   Toyota's leadership in establishing the "andon cord" system is another example of successful safety leadership. Invented by Taiichi Ohno and Eiji Toyoda, in the period between 1948 and 1975, the TPS was the "miracle" by which the Japanese car manufacturing industry was able to catch up with, and overtake, the behemoth of the pot-war US automotive industry. After the war, the manufacturing capability of Japan was almost completely destroyed: factories were bombed out, machines broken or destroyed, and many of the workforce, in particular engineers, had been killed. Japan had very little in terms of people, resources, money, or political influence. But, with the help of a certain chap called W. E. Deming who influenced and taught on statistical process control (SPC) and standardisation, Toyota worked on ways to do more with less: reduce waste whilst maximising efficiency and quality. This was the birthplace of Lean.
   Employees on the production line are empowered to pull a cord to stop operations whenever they spot a safety risk or quality issue, allowing the problem to be addressed immediately. This leadership-driven culture of continuous improvement and open communication makes safety everyone's responsibility, leading to lower accident rates and higher product quality. Toyota's approach illustrates how empowering employees can create a proactive, safety-conscious work environment.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4b1KiBmdF0
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVccMINnN9M

3. **DuPont**
   DuPont, a chemicals and manufacturing company, has long been known for its stringent safety culture. The company's "Safety, Health, and Environmental Protection Policy," promoted actively by leadership, emphasizes safety training, accountability, and continuous improvement. DuPont leaders created the DuPont STOP (Safety Training Observation Programme), which encourages employees to observe and report safety issues proactively. This leadership-driven safety culture has helped DuPont maintain low injury rates, particularly impressive in an industry with inherent hazards.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlSurI-7MUQ
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFSnv-VKos4
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1GUC_o_UY8

Failures

1. **BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill**
   The 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico is a striking example of the catastrophic consequences of poor safety leadership. Investigations revealed that BP's leadership prioritised cost-cutting and speed over safety. Warning signs about safety risks were ignored, and safety protocols were not followed. Leadership decisions led to inadequate safety measures, resulting in an explosion that caused 11 fatalities, severe environmental damage, and extensive financial and reputational harm to BP. This case highlights how disregarding safety for profits can lead to devastating outcomes.

2. **Texas City Refinery Explosion (BP, 2005)**
   BP's Texas City Refinery explosion in 2005, which killed 15 workers and injured over 170, is another example of how insufficient safety leadership can lead to tragedy. A report later found that BP's leadership had ignored safety warnings and deferred maintenance to cut costs. Inadequate attention to risk assessments, ineffective safety culture, and poor hazard management contributed to this disaster. BP's failures here illustrate the impact of leadership decisions on organisational safety culture and employee well-being.

3. **Union Carbide Bhopal Gas Tragedy**
   The 1984 Bhopal gas leak in India is one of the worst industrial disasters, with thousands of fatalities and long-term environmental and health impacts. Union Carbide's poor safety protocols, inadequate safety equipment, and lack of maintenance were exacerbated by the leadership's weak commitment to safety, particularly in overseas operations. Leadership failed to address safety concerns, allowed safety equipment to deteriorate, and reduced skilled workforce levels to cut costs. The lack of accountability and commitment to safety at the leadership level turned preventable issues into a catastrophic event.

4. **Pike River Mine Explosion, New Zealand**
   In 2010, the Pike River Mine explosion in New Zealand resulted in the deaths of 29 miners. Investigations found that leadership failures and systemic safety negligence contributed to the disaster. Pike River's management was found to have ignored safety concerns raised by workers and experts, prioritising production targets over necessary safety precautions. Poor communication, inadequate risk management, and a weak safety culture led to fatal oversight. This tragedy highlights the risks of neglecting worker safety in pursuit of productivity.

Key Lessons

These cases underline the profound impact that leadership can have on an organisation's health and safety culture. Successful leaders, such as those at Alcoa and Toyota, have shown that prioritising safety not only protects employees but also enhances productivity, morale, and reputation. Conversely, failures like those at BP and Union Carbide highlight how neglecting safety leadership can lead to disastrous outcomes. In every instance, leadership decisions set the tone for the company's safety culture, demonstrating that when health and safety are valued and integrated at the leadership level, the entire organisation benefits.