

# H4 Consulting Brief

## Leadership in Focus

Publicly funded organisations are expected to be efficient and consistent. The goal is to apply a predetermined set of rules and processes as efficiently and predictably as possible. Leaders in these organisations tend to divide the work into smaller tasks that can be allocated to specialist teams. These smaller tasks and teams are often managed in relative isolation, without a clear sense of how their tasks fit together to make a bigger picture.

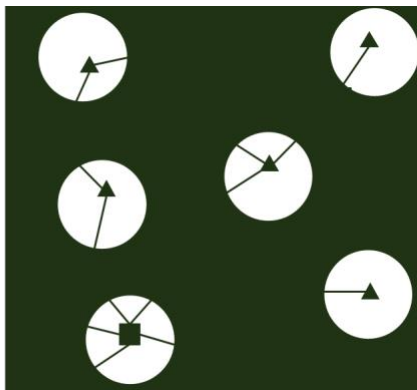
Organisations geared toward delivering standardised services with uniform outputs tend to emphasise strict decision rules and high degrees of specialisation. Workers develop deep expertise in their domains that can help to maintain consistent quality standards. Clearly delineated and compartmentalised work also tends to facilitate incremental efficiency improvements.

For leaders, many of whom have been promoted from direct operational experience, it also makes sense to compartmentalise. Both delegation and oversight are easier to manage when the boundaries of a specific team's duties are clearly defined. These leaders often interpret their roles as being, in part, to filter out unnecessary distractions and help workers to focus on performing a specific set of defined tasks.

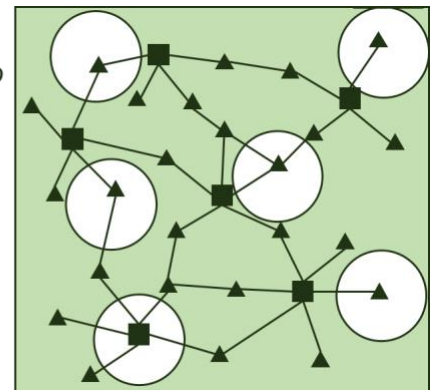
In practice, modern publicly funded organisations are increasingly held accountable for quality of outcomes, rather than consistent delivery of standardised services. Novel or wicked problems demand complex and interconnected, person-centred service and policy responses. This requires new ways of working, in which workers need the information and authority to engage flexibly across different services and processes, collaborating across very different professional backgrounds and expertise.

Managing interdependent work as a series of separate tasks tends to result in disconnected services that do not meet community expectations. Workers, blind to the bigger picture, focus on optimising tasks rather than making connections to solve complex problems.

when leaders only spotlight individual tasks, workers tend to focus on their immediate responsibilities



when leaders also illuminate a shared vision of the organisation as a whole, workers see their place in the bigger picture



Part of the work of leadership is to take broad policy directions and translate them into meaningful and measurable work. The best leaders do this not by obscuring inherent complexity, but by illuminating a shared vision that makes sense of that complexity.

Augmenting task-based management with principles-based leadership can help workers to understand their place in the bigger picture. Task-based management can be an important tool to spotlight particular functions but should not be used as blinkers to hide important context from workers.

Principles-based leadership gives workers a sense of shared purpose that encourages the flexible collaboration required to understand and solve novel and complex problems.

Principles-based leadership can make sense of the interconnected and collaborative environment in which task-based management occurs. A shared vision can guide both design and delivery, empowering workers to manage both task execution and process integration.

Workers who are supported to focus on their work in context, rather than in isolation, are more able to tackle complex and novel problems successfully, building their confidence and capability.

Principles-based leadership shares both information and power so that workers can operate as part of an effective network, rather than a series of isolated units. That requires a bit less effort on micromanagement, and a bit more on painting the bigger picture.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: [info@h4consulting.com.au](mailto:info@h4consulting.com.au)  
Find additional resources at [www.h4consulting.com.au/resources](http://www.h4consulting.com.au/resources)