



# MOBILE LEADERSHIP

A key to success for life science in the coming decade



## Part 3 – The skills of gaining team commitment and trust

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Closely related to the mobile leadership *mindset*, are the *skills* needed to work in a cross functional environment.

There is overlap between this skillset and those that many functional team leaders have been trained in earlier in their careers. But there are some specific capabilities over and above that required for traditional line management.



An incoming leader will often have to address team performance problems – and in a cross functional situation these are much more likely.

Lencioni’s ‘5 dysfunction of teams’<sup>1</sup> (see left) illustrates the typical challenges to building cross-functional collaboration, which successful delivery depends upon. Without direct authority, the leader must address these and build an effective team.



To begin to address these you first need to establish some trust. This isn't rocket science, nor some inexplicable charisma. Check out the 'Trust equation'<sup>2</sup> which explains well some of the key factors that begin to build a trusting team. For example, it clearly highlights your *credibility* as a factor. But how do you gain such credibility when you are not an expert in all the fields you may be leading?

First and foremost it is up to the leader to reinforce the teams goals and demand a level of customer focus in an authoritative (if friendly) way (we talk more about this in article 5 of the series). But beyond setting out the team's critical tasks, when it comes to inspiring a mindset away from just "self" and more towards others, we need a different style.

The key role of the mobile leader is to *facilitate* discussions that create alignment and gain commitment for the desired delivery. Sounds simple and obvious, but like many such statements, it can be a real challenge to achieve.

Good facilitation skills are founded on a number of key skills, encompassing active listening, critical thinking and a focus on win-win outcomes. Many leadership development programmes include active listening components and the powerful benefits of suspending your own agenda, seeking to understand and good summarization. In the cross functional arena, the mobile leader must also be comfortable with the team experts who have specialist knowledge that he doesn't possess and cannot control.

Leadership style assessments will classify peoples' preferred roles as things like *drivers* or *harmonisers*. Experienced team leaders often gravitate towards cross functional, project-based roles because they suit the harmoniser role – a natural affiliation to a facilitative style – coordinating views, bringing a consensus approach. This is essential but only one half of the dual role the leader must play: a facilitative empowering style with the team and an uncompromising tough stance with project goals.

This balance is essential in dealing with conflict. Rather than smoothing it over or avoiding it, conflict must be taken on and used to generate problem-solving ideas and to increase quality.

The Thomas-Kilman<sup>3</sup> model emphasizes how leaders and teams need to flex between styles of conflict management. This is something that leaders need to facilitate and direct.



The capabilities we have described, if practiced by a skilled mobile leader, will build trust over time and increase commitment. It gives the leader a platform for what he or she may find most difficult of all - holding expert team members to account for their commitments and deliverables to a project.

With a trusting and committed team the leader is able to develop it from being 'very good' to 'excellent'. This is typified by the team using mature processes fluently and efficiently. Analytical problem-solving and decision-making; developing business cases for key strategic changes and making influential arguments for senior management; powering innovation to come up with genuinely new alternatives. Check out Harvard's guide to critical thinking skills<sup>4</sup>.

This highlights that all of these key skills can be developed and form part of the training provided for these critical leaders. Of course, as noted in article 2, understanding the theory is one thing- developing experience is another and this is why it is so important to consider how such training is delivered (explored further in article 4) . It is practice and experience that allows you to develop the finesse of juggling all of these different aspects at the same time and earns the credibility that will enable you to build the trusting relationships across functions, facilitate often challenging discussions with conflicting views and opinions with a focus on achieving alignment on what needs doing and ultimately generate the commitment required.

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### Have you thought about:

- How are you building strong facilitation skills in your leaders?
- Are your leaders able to suspend their own agenda for the greater good?
- What challenges are you facing due to a lack of commitment?

**Volt Pharma Associates can help you explore these and many related development areas.**

Google these references:

1. Lencioni's 5 dysfunctions of a team
2. HBR: How trustworthy are you?
3. Thomas, K. W., and Kilmann, R. H. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument
4. HBR: A short guide to building your team's critical thinking skills