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Thoughts from Staff College.....the second in our new series of Faculty blogs

Can we talk about leadership without using the "C" word? John MackMersh

Here at Staff College we think of leadership as the most appropriate 'organising principle' for dealing with wicked problems. By all means use Command & Control to quell any crisis ([see our previous blog by Ian](#)) and Management to solve tame problems but, if your situation is truly wicked, you will eventually be left with the need for leadership – primarily by:

Asking better questions
A 'better question' is a question that does not accept the very assumptions that need to be questioned!

Building a coalition of 'Comrades in adversity'
Wicked problems are embedded in relationships so do not respond well to single handed actions – 'heroic' and 'naïve' may be too close for comfort in a wicked situation.

Making choices
Leadership requires decision making without access to the rational tools of management – in a wicked situation you cannot be 'led by the science' – or data or best practice – only informed by such methodologies. Often, the only judge of how effective a leader has been is historical perspective.
Taking an 'experimental stance'
Actions must be carried out even in the absence of certainty. If the word 'experimental' is too unnerving try 'emergent' – a trendier term – but less truthful!

Karl Weick says 'we are always in the middle of something'. Those of you who have attended our training may remember the exercise where you talk about your leadership 'Past, Present and Future' – well, take a nice deep breath – this is your leadership 'present'.

So, no matter the cause of any wicked problem you are required to lead on today:

• Ask a lot of questions about it – not just those starting with 'how do I….?'
• Ask those questions in the 'company' of others.
• Make the choices.
• Stay close to the consequences of your decision and be prepared to adapt.

<u>And remember, whatever you decide to do – it's not final – we are all still in the 'middle'!</u>