

# ACTION CENTRED LEADERSHIP



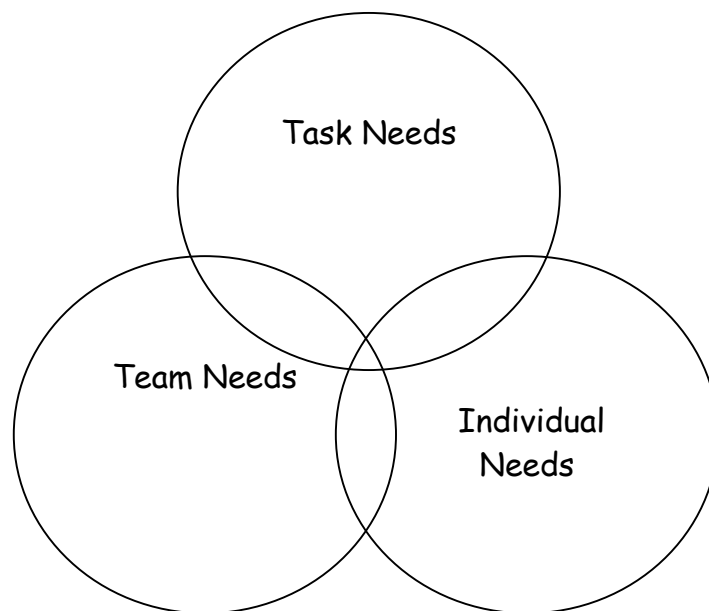
IN COMMAND

Action Centred Leadership (ACL), sometimes referred to as the functional approach to leadership, was developed by Professor John Adair from an idea that originated in the USA and was used in the town-planning process. Adair's basic premise is that ACL suggests that functions or actions define leaders.

Adair states that the leader has to concentrate on 2 main areas or functions and it his or her responsibility to ensure that these functions are carried out, not necessarily by doing them themselves but by appropriate delegation and empowerment:

- Task-related and Problem-solving functions
- Group-maintenance and Social functions

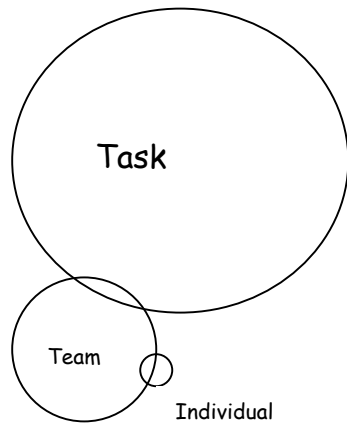
Adair developed the original idea and suggested that a leader need to be aware of 3 interdependent areas of need – the famous 3 circles. It is a task of a leader to appropriately balance these 3 areas of need in order to contribute to a successful outcome:



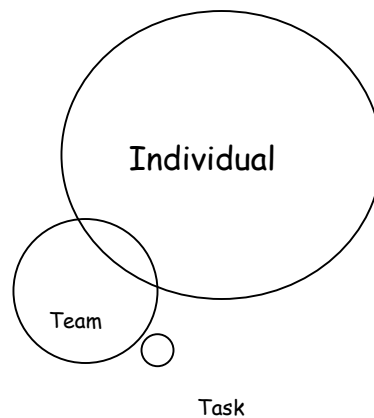
**Adair's Areas of Need**

One flaw in the way in which this is presented is that the 3 circles are always drawn the same size which may give the impression that the leader needs to devote equal time and effort to each need – and in a utopian world that may be the case.

What is more likely is that the effort devoted to each need is likely to change with the leader's position in the organisation – does the CEO of a large corporation spend much time thinking about the needs of her individual workers? Unlikely but does the man on the shop floor spend much time thinking about the task needs? Perhaps the industrial actions of the 1970s provide a good example: Did the Chairman of British Leyland concentrate too much on the strategic part of the business and neglect the needs of the workers, did the infamous 'Red Robbo' concentrate too much on the individual needs? Perhaps their individual 3-circle diagrams looked like this:



Chairman



'Red Robbo'

Obviously both these individuals look at a situation from opposite ends of the telescope and so perhaps it is the role of junior and middle management to provide the balance of the needs. That said, it's like being on a mountain: the CEO at the top has a great view but really ought to wander down and visit base-camp every so often to keep in touch with the folk that she is leading. On the other hand the folk manning base-camp need to make the effort to climb up and take a more strategic view once in a while. Professor Adair issues a stark warning though: *"It is the leader who should get the sack if the task is not achieved, or the group disintegrates into warring factions, or the individuals' lapse into sullen apathy"*.

Within ACL or functional leadership theory there is a list of functions that the leader must undertake in each of the 3 'needs'. At *In Command* we use the 10 Principles of War as our framework and so each of these functions can be related to a principle of war:

### Task

- Achieving objectives – *Offensive Action*
- Defining group tasks - *Flexibility*
- Planning - *Selection & Maintenance of the Aim*
- Allocation of resources – *Sustainability*
- Organisation of duties - *Cooperation*
- Control quality - *Surprise*
- Check performance – *Concentration of Force*
- Review progress - *Selection & Maintenance of the Aim*

## Team

- Maintaining morale – *Maintenance of Morale*
- Building team spirit - *Sustainability*
- Cohesiveness of group as a working unit - *Security*
- Setting standards – *Concentration of Force*
- Maintaining discipline - *Security*
- Systems of communicating within the group - *Cooperation*
- Appointment of sub-leaders – *Concentration of Force*

## Individual

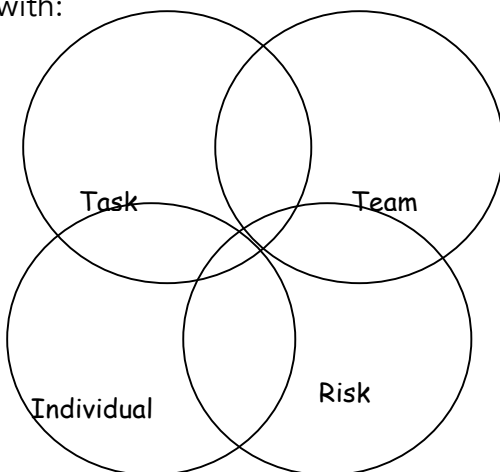
- Meet the needs of the individual within the group – *Maintenance of Morale*
- Attending to personal problems - *Maintenance of Morale*
- Giving praise and status - *Maintenance of Moral*
- Reconciling conflicts between group needs and needs of the individual - *Flexibility*
- Training the individual – *Concentration of Force*

Adair identified 6 sub-functions that a leader needs to perform in order to meet the needs of Task, Team and Individual:

- Planning
- Initiating
- Controlling
- Supporting
- Informing
- Evaluating

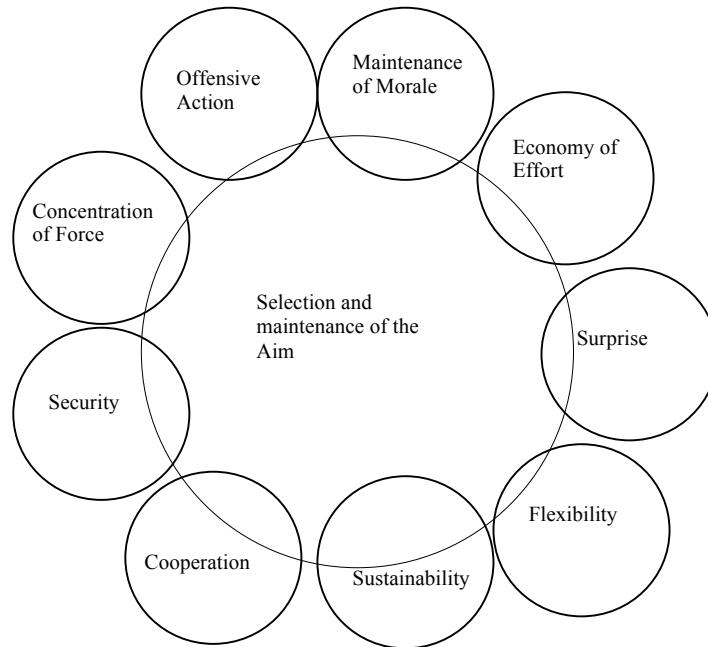
These can be remembered by using the mnemonic PICSIE.

The thinking leader of course will have realised that any number of circles can be added to the original 3 depending on what the leader is particularly concerned with:



Of Course any organisation can add as many circles as it wants to suit it's particular task, environment or role; indeed each of the principles of war could be represented by its own circle, but it is ultimately the leader's job to ensure that all those working within the different teams that concentrate on each separate part of the business are all melded together to produce the desired output – i.e. *the maintenance of the aim*.

This can be represented by a diagram that looks like a sunflower:



One of the common faults with leaders, especially those who are newly promoted into a role is to fail to concentrate on the bigger picture, they are too ready to get involved in the day to day running of things, especially when things are going wrong.

Of course, what they should be doing is standing back and making sure that the whole organisation stays on-track. Consider it as being the conductor of an orchestra. The conductor's role is to ensure that all the sections of the orchestra work together in order to play the symphony.

The conductor doesn't suddenly jump into the orchestra and start playing an individual instrument because if they did the symphony would soon be out of tune.