

LEADERSHIP CIRCLES

LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES



FACILITATOR GUIDE

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FACILITATOR GUIDE

WHAT ARE LEADERSHIP CIRCLES?

Leadership Circles are small, structured groups that bring leaders together for open, recurring conversations. As a facilitator, your role is not to teach or provide answers, but to guide the process so participants can reflect, share experiences, and learn from one another.

EACH CIRCLE FOCUSES ON THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA'S LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES

- **Adaptive** – flexibility and resilience in change
- **Culture Builder** – shaping supportive, thriving environments
- **Emotionally Intelligent** – understanding and managing emotions in self and others
- **Integrity** – consistency, honesty, and accountability
- **Collaborative** – achieving results together

Your role is to create a safe and structured environment where leaders feel comfortable engaging with these attributes in practice.

PURPOSE & OUTCOMES

Your goal as a facilitator is to help participants achieve both personal and collective growth.

Circles are meant to:

- **Build leadership capacity** by giving participants space to practice reflection and dialogue.
- **Enhance team cohesion** by deepening peer connections.
- **Support problem-solving** by incorporating a range of perspectives and approaches.
- **Encourage reflection** by creating intentional time to pause and think.

Expected outcomes for participants include:

- Stronger leadership relationships
- New insights and ideas they can apply in their roles
- Increased confidence navigating challenges

TIP!

Keep the purpose visible—open each session by briefly naming why the group is meeting.

HOW LEADERSHIP CIRCLES WORK

Each Circle has structure, but plenty of flexibility for discussion to unfold naturally. Your role is to keep the flow moving, encourage balanced participation, and connect insights back to the Leadership Attributes.

Group Size:

- Aim for **5–12 participants**. Larger groups risk losing depth, smaller groups may need extra energy.

Timing:

- Plan for **60–90 minutes** per session.
- Meet **weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly** depending on schedules.
- Each Circle includes **five sessions** (one per Leadership Attribute).

Session Flow:

1	Opening Check-In 5-10 minutes Sample prompt: “What’s one leadership challenge on your mind today?” • Helps set the tone and get everyone’s voice in the room early.
2	Guided Discussion 40-60 minutes • Focus on one Leadership Attribute. • Use 2–3 open-ended questions to start conversation. • Invite quieter voices in, and balance contributions if needed. • Gently redirect if the conversation goes too far off topic.
3	Closing & Reflection 10-15 minutes Sample prompt: “What’s one takeaway or action you’ll carry forward?” • Encourage participants to write down or share next steps.

1 | ADAPTIVE

SESSION PREP

- Send article link: *"5 Principles to Guide Adaptive Leadership"* (Harvard Business Review).
- Review Adaptive Leadership definition.
- Prepare an opening check-in question (e.g., "What's one leadership challenge you're currently navigating?").
- Plan session timing (90 minutes), location, and invitations.

OPENING

5-10 MIN

- Welcome participants, introductions.
- Ask opening check-in question.

Facilitator Note!

Keep this brief—goal is to get everyone's voice in the room early.

ATTRIBUTE OVERVIEW

10 MIN

- Read aloud the **definition**:

“Adaptive leaders act to mobilize others to handle tough challenges successfully, intentionally communicating through ambiguity to build trust and foster quality relationships. Adaptive leaders value learning, creativity, and accommodating multiple perspectives as a way to discover new strategies that can work.”

Review the key elements from the definition:

- **Mobilizing Others** – Engaging team members to tackle challenges together.
- **Building Trust** – Creating reliability and confidence during uncertainty.
- **Intentional Communication** – Communicating clearly and purposefully, especially through ambiguity.
- **Leading Change** – Guiding teams effectively through evolving circumstances.
- **Learning & Adaptation** – Valuing creativity, a variety of perspectives, and continuous learning to find new solutions.

Invite 1–2 participant examples or brief discussion



ADAPTIVE

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

10 MIN

Key Concepts from the HBR Article – “5 Principles to Guide Adaptive Leadership”

Adaptive leadership includes:

- Anticipation of future needs, trends, and options
 - Leaders scan the environment to identify emerging challenges and opportunities.
- Articulation to build collective understanding
 - Communicate these needs clearly to create alignment and support for action.
- Adaptation through continuous learning
 - Adjust strategies and responses as circumstances evolve.
- Accountability and transparency
 - Maintain openness in decision-making and welcome challenges and feedback.

Five Principles to Guide Adaptive Leadership:

1. Ensure evidence-based learning and adaptation
 - Base decisions on data, experience, and lessons learned.
2. Stress-test assumptions
 - Challenge underlying beliefs using scenario planning to prepare for uncertainty.
3. Streamline deliberative decision-making
 - Keep decision processes open, dynamic, and nimble to respond effectively.
4. Strengthen transparency, inclusion, and accountability
 - Foster psychological safety, conduct after-action reviews, and communicate openly.
5. Mobilize collective action
 - Coordinate efforts across teams and encourage dialogue to implement solutions.

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1 | ADAPTIVE

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS, CONT.

10 MIN

Facilitator Prompts:

- Ask participants: "Which of these principles feels most relevant in higher education today?"
- Encourage discussion about how each principle might apply to participants' current challenges or initiatives.
- Invite examples of adaptive leadership in action, especially in academic or administrative contexts.

Facilitator Note!

- Emphasize connections between the principles and the key elements of adaptive leadership: mobilizing others, building trust, intentional communication, and leading change.
- Encourage participants to link the principles to practical actions in their teams or departments.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

35-45 MIN

- What do we mean by adaptive leadership?
- How is adaptive leadership relevant in your role? In higher education?
- What challenges might leaders face in demonstrating adaptive leadership?
- How do leaders demonstrate agility and clarity in challenging situations?
- What strategies help build trust during uncertainty?
- How can leaders bring forward different perspectives to find workable solutions?

CLOSING & REFLECTION

10-15 MIN

- **Ask:** "What resonated with you today?"
- **Preview next session: Culture Builder**
 - **Pre-work:** Read "[*Building Culture From the Middle Out*](#)" by Spencer Harrison and Kristie Rogers. MIT Sloan Management Review.
- Collect informal feedback (quick round: "one word to describe today's session").

2 | CULTURE BUILDER

SESSION PREP

Send article link: [*"Building Culture From the Middle Out"*](#) by Spencer Harrison and Kristie Rogers (MIT Sloan Management Review).

Review Culture Builder definition.

Prepare an opening check-in question (e.g., "What aspects of your team's/department's culture are you most proud of?").

Plan session timing (90 minutes), location, and invitations.

OPENING

5-10 MIN

- Welcome participants, introductions.
- Ask opening check-in question.

Facilitator Note!

Keep this brief—goal is to get everyone's voice in the room early.

ATTRIBUTE OVERVIEW

10 MIN

- Read aloud the **definition**:



A culture builder actively fosters an environment of collaboration, respect, and trust. They promote a sense of respect and mutual support among others, serving as role models and cultivating relationships that instill confidence and create a supportive atmosphere. Their efforts aim to enhance innovation, problem-solving, and overall excellence.



Review the key elements from the definition:

- **Modeling Collaboration** – Demonstrating cooperative behaviors that others can emulate.
- **Fostering Trust** – Encouraging openness, honesty, and psychological safety.
- **Promoting Respect** – Ensuring all voices are heard and valued.
- **Supporting Innovation** – Creating an environment that encourages experimentation and problem-solving.
- **Cultivating Relationships** – Building confidence and mutual support among others.

Invite 1–2 participant examples or brief discussion

2 | CULTURE BUILDER

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

10 MIN

- Summarize the main points from the **Harrison & Rogers** article:
 - Culture is shaped by big-C (formal values and processes) and small-c (daily interactions and behaviors).
 - Middle managers can endorse big-C values and enrich small-c values through celebration, learning, innovation, and empowering employees.
 - Strategies include selection, socialization, rituals, and storytelling.
- **Ask:** “Which of these strategies feels most relevant or feasible in your context?”

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to connect ideas to their own areas.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

30-45 MIN

- How would you describe the culture of your unit/department/team?
- How well does this culture align with the values highlighted in the definition?
- Are there other values that are important in your culture?
- Who is responsible for culture in your organization, and how is it managed?
- Do you agree that middle managers should actively build and enrich culture?
- How can middle managers link big-C culture with small-c culture?

2 | CULTURE BUILDER

CASE STUDY

20 MIN

Scenario

Your department is support-focused and collaborative, but new senior hires, while high performers, do not share the department's values of collaboration and accessibility.

Discussion Prompts

- How might you approach this mismatch in values?
- What are potential impacts on team dynamics and workload distribution?
- How could you help new team members connect with the department's values and norms?

Facilitator Note!

Emphasize exploration of multiple approaches; encourage participants to apply the Culture Builder attribute to real-life decisions.

CLOSING & REFLECTIONS

10-15 MIN

- **Ask:** "What resonated with you today?"
- **Preview next session: Emotionally Intelligent**
 - **Pre-work:** Read "[*How to Manage Decision-Making in Collaborative Leadership*](#)" by Voltage Control.
- Collect informal feedback (quick round: "one word to describe today's session").

3 | COLLABORATIVE

SESSION PREP

- Send article link: “How to Manage Decision-Making in Collaborative Leadership” by Voltage Control.
- Review Collaborative Leadership definition.
- Prepare an opening check-in question (e.g., “What’s one decision-making challenge you’ve faced recently in a collaborative setting?”).
- Plan session timing (90 minutes), location, and invitations.

OPENING

5-10 MIN

- Welcome participants, introductions.
- Ask opening check-in question.

Facilitator Note!

Keep introductions brief. Encourage participants to highlight experiences relevant to collaborative work.

ATTRIBUTE OVERVIEW

10 MIN

- Read aloud the **definition**:

“

A collaborative leader deliberately integrates distinct ideas, voices, and skillsets into conversations and decision-making processes, utilizing multiple perspectives to foster an environment where all can make meaningfully contributions. Collaborative leaders play a critical role in ensuring every voice is heard, leveraging a wide range of strengths to produce more impactful and effective outcomes.

”

Review the key elements from the definition:

- **Welcoming a Breadth of Perspectives** – Ensuring all relevant voices and ideas are acknowledged and considered.
- **Integration of Ideas** – Synthesizing multiple viewpoints into decisions and strategies.
- **Facilitation of Engagement** – Creating space for meaningful participation.
- **Leveraging Strengths** – Using the unique skills and knowledge of colleagues to achieve better outcomes.
- **Collective Decision-Making** – Promoting shared ownership and accountability in team/departmental/interdisciplinary decisions.

Invite 1–2 participant examples or brief discussion

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3 | COLLABORATIVE

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

10 MIN

- Summarize the main points from the **Voltage Control** article:
 - Collaborative leadership brings multiple voices into decision-making, but requires clear processes to avoid ambiguity or delays.
 - Techniques for inclusive decision-making include structured discussions, shared agendas, decision frameworks, and clarifying roles.
 - Awareness of fatigue and disengagement is important; leaders should actively monitor energy and participation levels.
- **Ask:** "Which strategies from the article resonate most with your experience?"

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to connect ideas to their own areas.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

30-45 MIN

- What stood out to you most in the article? Any strategies or examples that resonated with your experience?
- What challenges have you faced in ensuring all relevant voices and perspectives are considered during decision-making?
- What tools or techniques have helped you ensure broad participation in decision-making without sacrificing efficiency?
- How does your definition of collaborative decision-making compare to the approach presented in the article?
- Do you see fatigue in your teams/department or in yourself? How have you addressed it?
- In what ways does your college/department support or hinder collaborative decision-making?

3 | COLLABORATIVE

CASE STUDY

20 MIN

Scenario

You've been appointed to a university-wide steering committee tasked with redesigning the first-year experience (FYE). The committee includes faculty, student affairs staff, enrollment staff, and student representatives. Challenges include siloed departments, disengaged members, lack of shared language, and rising tensions between faculty and student affairs staff.

Discussion Prompts

- What dynamics in this case feel familiar from your own leadership experience?
- How do silos and historical divisions between units affect collaboration at Iowa?
- If you were leading this committee, how would you begin building trust among members?
- What strategies could you use to ensure that all voices are meaningfully included in the process?

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to explore multiple approaches and emphasize practical application of the Collaborative Leadership Attribute.

CLOSING & REFLECTION

10-15 MIN

- **Ask:** "What resonated with you today?"
- **Preview next session: Emotionally Intelligent**
- **Pre-work:** Read "[*How to Raise Your Leadership EQ*](#)" by Jacob J. Ryder, Nicolas C. Burbules, BrandE Faupell, and C.K. Gunsalus. Inside Higher Ed.
- Collect informal feedback (quick round: "one word to describe today's session").

4 EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT

SESSION PREP

- Send article link: “How to Raise Your Leadership EQ” by Jacob J. Ryder, Nicolas C. Burbules, BrandE Faupell, and C.K. Gunsalus (Inside Higher Ed).
- Review Emotional Intelligence definition.
- Prepare an opening check-in question (e.g., “How have emotions influenced a recent leadership interaction?”).
- Plan session timing (90 minutes), location, and invitations.

OPENING

5-10 MIN

- Welcome participants, introductions.
- Ask opening check-in question.

Facilitator Note!

Keep this brief. Encourage participants to share experiences that highlight emotional dynamics in leadership.

ATTRIBUTE OVERVIEW

10 MIN

- Read aloud the **definition**:

“

A leader with emotional intelligence is aware of not only their emotional states, but the emotional state of others and has the social ability to adjust their interactions accordingly to demonstrate empathy and understanding of others, which strengthens trust and communication.

”

Review the key elements from the definition:

- **Self-Awareness** – Recognizing your own emotions and their impact on others.
- **Social Awareness** – Understanding the emotions of others in the workplace.
- **Empathy** – Responding to others’ emotions in a thoughtful and supportive way.
- **Relationship Management** – Adjusting interactions to strengthen trust, communication, and collaboration.
- **Active Listening & Mindfulness** – Separating personal emotions from professional interactions and practicing intentional presence.

Invite 1–2 participant examples or brief discussion

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4 EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

10 MIN

- Summarize key points from the **Ryder et al.** article:
 - Components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, awareness of your emotions on others, awareness of others' emotions, and adjusting interactions.
 - Emotional intelligence enhances trust, communication, productivity, and negotiation.
 - Development strategies include mindfulness (pausing before reacting), generous attributions, and identifying underlying conflicts.
 - Emotions are part of work interactions but can be managed within shared norms and boundaries.
- **Ask:** "Which components of emotional intelligence resonate most with your leadership experience?"

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to connect article insights to daily interactions with colleagues and teams.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

30-45 MIN

- What do you think are the most important components of emotional intelligence in leadership?
- How do you recognize your own emotions and their impact on others?
- How do you identify the emotions of others?
- Can you share a time when you adjusted your approach based on someone else's emotions?
- How do active listening and separating your own emotions from work improve interactions and outcomes?
- How would you respond to a supervisor who says, "Emotions don't belong at work"

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4 EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT

CASE STUDY

20 MIN

Scenario

You are a department leader having a conversation with a team member about new projects for next year. Due to low participation in current workshops, you ask them to develop new workshops aligned with strategic priorities. They respond by listing prior times they've had to shift work and point out another staff member with low participation.

Discussion Prompts

- How would you respond in a way that demonstrates emotional intelligence?
- How can you balance acknowledging their concerns with maintaining focus on strategic priorities?
- What strategies would help build trust and constructive dialogue in this conversation?
- How could mindfulness or generous attributions inform your response?

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to practice empathetic listening, acknowledgment of emotions, and intentional response strategies.

CLOSING & REFLECTION

10-15 MIN

- **Ask:** "What resonated with you today?"
- **Preview next session: Integrity.**
- **Pre-work:** Read, "[Why Integrity is the Backbone of Great Leadership](#)" by Cam Cruickshank. Endzone Leadership.
- Collect informal feedback (quick round: "one word to describe today's session").

5 | INTEGRITY

SESSION PREP

- Send article link: “Why Integrity is the Backbone of Great Leadership” by Cam Cruickshank (Endzone Leadership).
- Review Integrity definition.
- Prepare an opening check-in question (e.g., “Share a situation where you had to make a difficult ethical decision”).
- Plan session timing (90 minutes), location, and invitations.

OPENING

5-10 MIN

- Welcome participants, introductions.
- Ask opening check-in question.

Facilitator Note!

Keep introductions brief. Encourage participants to share experiences highlighting ethical dilemmas or moments of integrity in leadership.

ATTRIBUTE OVERVIEW

10 MIN

- Read aloud the **definition**:

“Integrity in leadership refers to the steadfast commitment to the highest professional and scholarly principles characterized by honesty, transparency, and consistency in decision-making and actions. A leader demonstrating integrity exercises responsible stewardship of resources, acting with sincerity, fairness, and respect for others in all endeavors.”

Highlight the key elements:

- **Honesty** – Being truthful and transparent in communication and actions.
- **Consistency** – Aligning values, decisions, and actions even when no one is watching.
- **Accountability** – Owning mistakes and encouraging feedback loops.
- **Fairness & Respect** – Treating others equitably and honoring commitments.
- **Responsible Stewardship** – Managing resources and authority ethically and responsibly.

Invite 1–2 participant examples or brief discussion

5 | INTEGRITY

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

10 MIN

- Summarize key points from the **Cruickshank** article:
 - **Core Themes:** integrity is vital during crises; align values, actions, and decisions; difficult decisions reveal character; integrity is contagious to teams/departments.
 - **Consequences of Integrity Breakdown:** loss of trust, motivation, culture, credibility, and long-term reputation.
 - **Five Practices to Strengthen Integrity:** (1) Anchor in your values, (2) Own mistakes publicly, (3) Be transparent, (4) Prioritize people over optics, (5) Create feedback loops.
- **Ask:** "Which of these practices resonate most with your leadership experience?"

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to connect practices to their own leadership context, particularly in higher education settings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

30-45 MIN

- How do you personally define integrity in leadership, and how does it show up in your daily decisions?
- What are the risks of compromising integrity for short-term gains in a leadership role?
- In a public university, how can leaders maintain transparency during budget cuts or policy changes?
- How does integrity influence trust between administration, faculty, staff, and students?
- What systems or practices can ensure active, meaningful feedback loops in a large institution?
- Can you recall a time when you had to choose between what was right and what was easy? What guided your decision?
- How can leaders model integrity in environments where it may not be the norm?

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5 | INTEGRITY

CASE STUDY

20 MIN

Scenario

The university is selecting a vendor for a campus-wide initiative. The top candidate offers the best financial terms and fastest implementation timeline. However, media reports raise concerns about the vendor's labor practices and transparency. Leadership is under pressure to move quickly, but some worry this decision may compromise values and public trust.

Discussion Prompts

- What should the leadership team prioritize in making this decision?
- How does integrity factor into vendor selection and public accountability?
- What are the potential long-term consequences of choosing a vendor with questionable practices?
- How can leaders balance urgency with ethical responsibility?
- What role should transparency and stakeholder engagement play in this process?

Facilitator Note!

Encourage participants to consider ethical decision-making frameworks, organizational values, and public trust while discussing potential actions.

CLOSING & REFLECTION

10-15 MIN

- **Ask:** "What resonated with you today?"
- Encourage participants to fill out the Leadership Circles Series Reflection at the end of the Participant Workbook.
- Collect informal feedback (quick round: "one word to describe today's session").
- Discuss how the group will or will not stay connected following the leadership circles series.