



Leadership skills in
IA embrace logic and
emotional intelligence
to ensure sustainable
decision making.



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FASTIPS

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Leadership in Impact Assessment

Leadership in Impact Assessments (IAs) should be transformative: i.e., it should exert a positive influence on project and planning or program teams and generate willingness to embrace sustainable outcomes. The key to meaningful outcomes in IA is building trust with diverse disciplinary experts. IA leadership extends the IA process from a technical and regulatory process into a positive approach to achieve wider and more sustainable societal outcomes.

The impact of IA is largely dependent on the competence, values and knowledge of its professionals and their willingness to influence and advocate for equitable and balanced development. This requires transformative leadership to guide, influence, and enable the integrated work of the IA team and its outcomes.

WHY NEEDED AND WHAT MAKES A GOOD IA LEADER?

An IA leader inspires and generates energy and creativity in his or her team. It unleashes the capacity to think and act outside of the box, to be bold, brave, compelling, and courageous.

IA is at the crux of key discussions in the world of development proposals with the potential to positively influence a strategic change in project culture. IA must ultimately seek to inject knowledge, vision, and strategic purpose playing a major leadership role in how environmental and social founded decisions (and trade-offs) are made.

This is rarely achievable through the collection of data, assessment of baseline impacts, by following IA procedures correctly, or including extensive mitigation measures through a managerial role. It is the positive influence that the IA leader brings to the various tiers of decision-making that ultimately determine project outcomes and generates an ethos towards greater sustainability within the project team. Transformative leadership skills position IA teams to become central to project development, design, IA practice, and investment decisions. This requires the use of emotional intelligence and logic, to influence outcomes, and advise early on strategic alternatives. The Seven Seismic Shifts Model¹ adapted to IA leadership,² requires aspiring IA leaders to transition from³:

Specialist to Generalist: “Specialists” focus on specialized aspects of IA. “Generalists” show a wider understanding of how IA can integrate with investment appraisal, planning, environment and social governance (ESG), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), engineering design, and construction management. IA generalists need an understanding of a wide span of subject areas as well as knowledge of project management, Geographical Information System tools, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and international IA models.

Assessor to Integrator: “Integrators” actively seek to integrate the IA activities within the overall framework of development systems and broader project decision-making platforms. The objective is to internalize IA into project planning and delivery in order to achieve, appropriate trade-offs that address complex or significant impacts.

Tactician to Strategist: “Strategists” understand the broader picture of the project’s role, and primary functions. They must be able to visualize challenges that may constrain IA practice, quickly understand the complex systems of interaction between the IA and project teams, as well as anticipate and influence the likely reactions of key stakeholders.

Bricklayer to Architect: “Bricklayers” manage the distinct elements of the IA processes (the bricks). The “Architect” understands the collective role of bricks, but also understands their use in design. As

an architect, the IA leader understands what assets are available to the project (human, technical, financial) and how the project's strategy, structure, processes, and individual capabilities all fit together—and interact at critical decision points.

Problem Solver to Agenda Setter: “Problem solvers” anticipate risks and have the skills to provide alternative designs or adaptive mitigative responses. The “Agenda Setter” has moved upstream in the project development process, showing ability to influence early project design and alternatives, and willingness to exert influence to improve design.

From Functionary to Diplomat: The “Diplomat,” mediator, or broker acts as spokesperson and communicator, engaging in and influencing actions, with internal and external stakeholders, to secure positive sustainable outcomes.⁴ IA leaders are often brokers between proponents and the regulating agency, providing a diplomatic bridge between the parties when statutory guidance is lacking or where regulations do not clearly apply. IA diplomacy demands the application of leadership skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution and networking.

Cast Member to Lead Role: An IA report may comply with regulations, be technically competent and conform to required standards—but does it promote sustainable development? This is an important question for IA leadership. An IA leader must play a lead role in guiding the final social and environmental outcomes of a project, ensuring a project's sustainability.

The following tips may help IA professionals embrace leadership behaviours that will promote the core values of sustainability.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. Leadership in IA goes beyond IA management.
2. Leadership skills are applied to enact and deliver positive outcomes toward improved broad sustainable performance.
3. Leaders need to be comfortable influencing executive-level investment decisions.
4. Leaders do not lead all aspects of a study but enable others to take responsibility for their specific parts.
5. Transformative leadership through inter- and trans-disciplinary skills will influence and change IA practices and promote responsible behaviors that respect people, their culture, and environments.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. Instill in teams a set of core values that will ensure sustainable outcomes.
2. Act as an advocate for environmentally-inclusive design and social innovations.
3. Adopt a systemic perspective, recognizing the interconnection between IA and all forms of development.
4. Break the rule “we have always done it this way.” Be flexible, be inclusive, address internal conflict, and act confidently in the expectation of finding sustainable opportunities.
5. Become a generalist, a strategist, an integrator, an architect, a diplomat, an agenda setter willing to play a lead role in promoting sustainable development.

FURTHER READING

¹ Watkins, M.D. (2012). How Managers Become Leaders, *Harvard Business Review*, June 2012, 90(6): 64-72, 144.

² Marshall, R. (2019). 7 Ways to demonstrate Leadership in EIA. Leading Green website, 16 December 2019, posted online at <https://www.leading-green.com/2019/12/16/eia-leadership-training/>.

³ Marshall, R. and Partidário, M.R. (2022). The importance of leadership in Impact Assessment (Chapter 5), in Fonseca, A. (Ed.) *Handbook of Environmental Impact Assessment*. Edward Elgar.

⁴ Partidário, M.R. and Sheate, W.R. (2013). Knowledge brokerage—potential for increased capacities and shared power in impact assessment. *Environ Impact Assessment Review*, 39: 26-36.

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