

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR FOOTBALL CLUBS

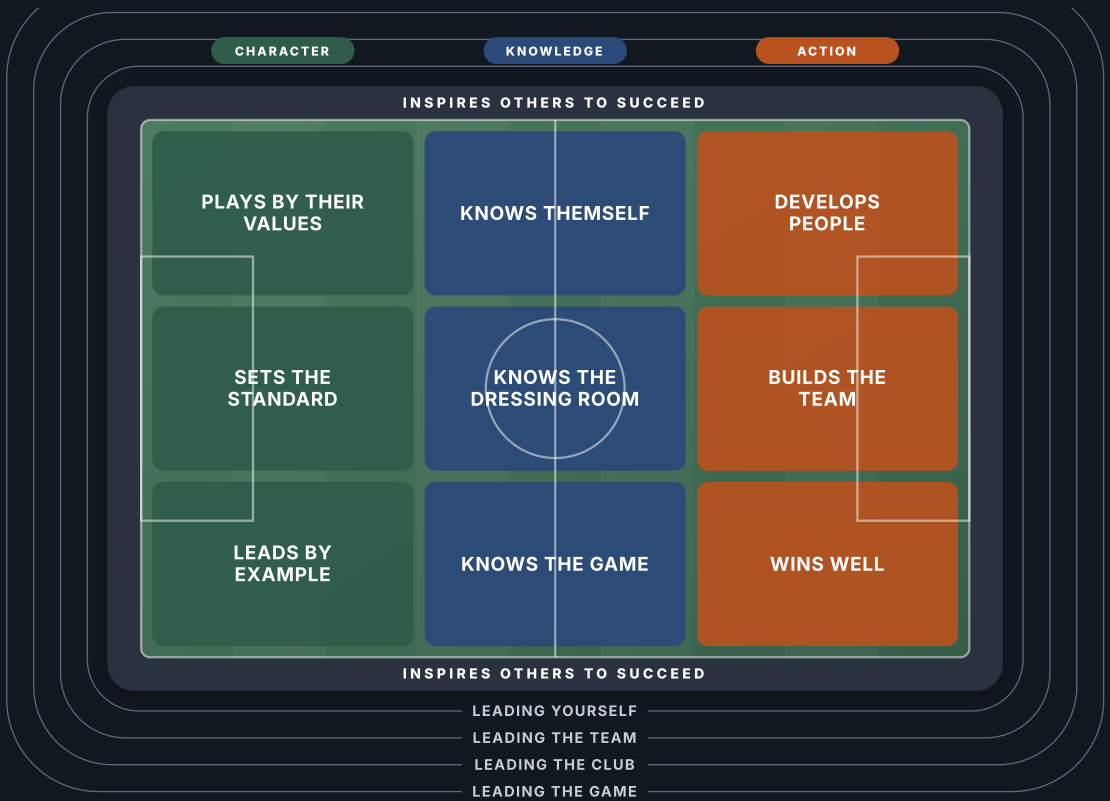
WINNING WELL

Character. Knowledge. Action.
The leadership that earns a dressing room's trust, builds a football club and wins the right way.

EXAMPLE FRAMEWORK · 2026

MAPPED TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

Winning Well describes the leadership a football club needs at every level: the character leaders bring, the knowledge they apply and the actions they take, set out as behaviours anyone in the building can see, practise and develop. It is written for players and captains, coaches and managers, backroom staff, academy staff, directors, owners and boards, because leadership in football is not a title. It is how a person conducts themselves and what they make possible for others, whatever their role.

It is an example framework written for club adoption. Any club, from the Premier League and the Women's Super League to the National League and the academies, may adopt it as it stands or make it their own; the final pages say how. It is written in the third person so that it can be adopted without rewriting.

National Leadership Framework

Winning Well is mapped, dimension by dimension and competency by competency, to the National Leadership Framework (NLF), an evidence-informed standard for leadership developed from a review of frameworks across sectors and more than a thousand academic and practitioner sources. The NLF encourages organisations to translate its concepts into their own language and context while keeping their integrity. That is what this framework does for football. The NLF's framework, wording and logo are the intellectual property of the National Leadership Framework CIC; the alignment annex on page 37 shows the mapping in full.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

CONTENTS

	Foreword	04
1.0	**Purpose of the framework**	06
1.1	Why leadership matters in football	08
1.2	The standards of the game as leadership conduct	09
1.3	What leadership is, and is not	10
2.0	**The definition and the principles**	11
2.1	The pitch: the framework at a glance	12
2.2	Using the framework	13
2.3	Routes to failure	14
3.0	**Character: the badge on the front**	15
3.1	Plays by Their Values	16
3.2	Sets the Standard	18
3.3	Leads by Example	19
3.4	Your values, your club	20
4.0	**Knowledge: reading the game**	21
4.1	Knows Themself	22
4.2	Knows the Dressing Room	23
4.3	Knows the Game	24
5.0	**Action: how you play**	25
5.1	Develops People	26
5.2	Builds the Team	27
5.3	Wins Well	28
6.0	**Four levels of leadership**	29
6.1	Leading Yourself	30
6.2	Leading the Team	31
6.3	Leading the Club	32
6.4	Leading the Game	33
7.0	**The game beyond the first team**	34
7.1	Leadership in practice	35
7.2	How leadership supports the standards of the game	36
7.3	Alignment to the National Leadership Framework	37
8.0	**Sources and the LMA cross-check**	38
8.1	Making this framework your own	39

How to read the behaviours. Every behaviour begins with an active verb and describes conduct another person could see. Where rules, regulations, selection or authority appear, the behaviour is always what the leader does as a person in that context: explains, models, reports, thanks, trusts. The processes belong to the club's policies; the leadership belongs to its people.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

LEADERSHIP IS WHAT THE DRESSING ROOM SEES

Everyone in football knows a leader when they see one. The captain who speaks to the referee with respect and to a struggling teammate with care. The manager who takes the blame in the press room and gives the credit in the dressing room. The kit manager whose standards never slip. The chair who tells a popular manager a hard truth. The academy coach who still gives a late developer his chance. None of them needs a title to lead, and all of them are watched.

Football has learned, sometimes painfully, that results do not excuse everything. Clubs with a century of history have been lost to owners who treated them as assets. Young players have been failed by adults the game trusted. The reviews that followed, and the Football Governance Act that came out of them, share a single finding: the rules were often in place, and the conduct of leaders decided whether they meant anything. A club with a good culture is not one with a good policy. It is one whose leaders, at every level, behave well when it is hardest.

This framework describes that leadership in plain words. It sets out the character leaders bring, the knowledge they apply and the actions they take, as behaviours anyone can see, practise and develop, from a first-year scholar to the board. It applies to the Premier League and to the National League, to the men's and the women's game, to the first team and the academy, because the leadership a football club needs is the same whatever its budget. It also reaches down the pyramid, because the people who lead at the top are role models for everyone who plays, and because tomorrow's leaders are in today's academies, grassroots clubs and school playgrounds.

It is mapped to the National Leadership Framework, a rigorous standard for leadership used across sectors, and it draws openly on the work of the League Managers Association, which has invested more than any body in the game in understanding what leadership in football demands. It is written so that any club can make it its own.

Winning matters. Winning well matters more, because it is the only kind that lasts.

LMA
LEAGUE MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

This framework draws on the published leadership work of the League Managers Association.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

> *You can't make people do what you want. Instead, great leaders exert an influence, authority and authenticity that make their teams want to follow them.*

RICHARD BEVAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, LMA, THE LEADERSHIP GUIDE

LMA
LEAGUE MANAGERS ASSOCIATION



Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Winning Well gives everyone in a football club a shared language and a clear standard for leadership. It rests on a simple belief: that sustained success in football depends on leadership, that leadership exists at every level of a club, and that it can be described, seen, coached and developed like any other skill in the game.

The framework has been shaped by leadership research, by the standards the game has set for itself on governance, welfare and conduct, and by the lived experience of leaders in the game, most directly through the League Managers Association's published work. It recognises that leadership is a lifelong journey. A player becomes a captain, a captain a coach, a coach a manager or a sporting director, and each step brings different demands. Much of what is described here will be familiar: leadership in football begins long before anyone is given an armband.

At its core, the framework exists to strengthen leadership practice by making clear the values, knowledge and behaviours that enable individuals and teams to lead well. It establishes a shared understanding of what good leadership looks like in a club, and a consistent way of developing it at every stage of a career in football, including the career after playing.

For the individual, it supports growth through reflection, feedback, coaching and mentoring. It helps a leader at any stage recognise strengths, identify what to work on and strengthen their practice over time, in the same way a player works on their game.

For the club, it gives a clearer picture of its leadership culture. By seeing strengths, patterns and gaps across the building, a club can develop leaders where it matters, judge its readiness for change and show its board, the league, the regulator and its supporters how it leads.

> *"Many of us find ourselves called upon to be leaders at some point in our lives.*
>
> GARETH SOUTHGATE, DEAR ENGLAND: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP (2025)

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



THE FRAMEWORK IS INTENDED TO

- Establish a shared understanding of effective leadership from the academy to the boardroom
- Strengthen a club's culture through common values and expectations, in the same words everywhere
- Support reflection, self-assessment, coaching and growth at every stage of a career in football
- Inform how a club recruits, appoints captains and coaches, develops people and plans succession
- Make clear the behaviours expected of leaders, and the behaviours that undermine leadership
- Show how leadership supports the standards of the game: FA rules, safeguarding, financial sustainability and inclusion
- Connect the professional game to the academy and the grassroots, as role models and as makers of opportunity
- Give boards, the league and the regulator evidence of leadership, in the game's own language

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

1.1 WHY LEADERSHIP MATTERS IN FOOTBALL

Football is the most visible leadership laboratory in public life. Every weekend, in front of crowds and cameras, managers and captains make decisions under pressure, manage talented and difficult people, absorb criticism and set a tone that a whole club copies. The LMA Leadership Guide notes that in order to win and succeed a manager first has to survive, and that survival depends on leadership long before it depends on luck.

Because culture decides results. The LMA guide's account of Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United describes a culture so strong you could almost smell it at the training ground, built on standards set and expected, on the team being bigger than any one person and on the manager being a living example to his players. Culture changes behaviour, and leaders shape culture. Tactics are copied within a season; a culture takes years to build and a few bad appointments to lose.

Because everyone is watched. Howard Wilkinson's advice to first-time managers was simple: they're watching you. Players read a coach's honesty, composure and fairness in days. Young players read senior players the same way. Supporters read the club. What leaders do in defeat, in selection and in private is the real curriculum of a club.

Because the stakes are human. Football holds thousands of children in its academies and releases most of them, asks adults to put their bodies on the line and ends most careers before thirty-five. The game's own reviews into abuse and into club failure showed what happens when leaders treat results as the only measure. The duty of care is not a department; it is how leaders behave.

Because leadership is shared. The LMA guide describes distributed leadership between manager, assistant, first-team coach and sporting director, and the role of captains and senior players in setting the tone. A club led by one voice is fragile. A club with leaders in every part of the building, holding each other to the same standards, lasts.

Because the game is bigger than the club. Professional players and managers are role models for every child who plays. Gareth Southgate's Richard Dimbleby Lecture in 2025 argued that young people are looking for direction and too often finding it in the wrong places, and that the game's leaders must set the right tone. The opportunities leaders create or deny also shape who leads the game next; the Football Leadership Diversity Code exists because the game's leadership has not looked like its players. Section 7 is about that trickle-down, and about the responsibility that comes with being watched.

> *"I have a responsibility to the wider community to use my voice, and so do the players.*
>
> GARETH SOUTHGATE, DEAR ENGLAND, THE PLAYERS' TRIBUNE, JUNE 2021

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

1.2 THE STANDARDS OF THE GAME AS LEADERSHIP CONDUCT

Football is regulated because what it does matters to the people in it, especially the young, to the communities whose clubs they are, and to the public who follow it. The lesson of the last decade, from the collapse of historic clubs to the reviews that led to the Football Governance Act 2025, is that the health of the game depends less on the rules it writes than on the conduct of its leaders. This framework is how a club meets that expectation through people.

The standards the game has set for itself increasingly speak the language of culture and conduct. FA Rule E3 requires every participant to act in the best interests of the game and never to bring it into disrepute, and treats abuse that refers to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability as an aggravated breach. The Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards, under Football's Safeguarding Children Policy and The FA's Safeguarding Children Regulations, bind every club. The Football Leadership Diversity Code sets targets for who gets hired to lead. The Owners' and Directors' Test, now with statutory force, decides who may own and run a club. The Elite Player Performance Plan governs how young players are developed. UEFA's Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations and the leagues' own financial rules govern how a club may spend. The Laws of the Game, kept by the IFAB, govern the match itself.

Policies, rules and welfare officers are essential. They are the architecture of a safe and sustainable game. But architecture does not act; people act. A safeguarding policy is only as good as the coach who explains it and the captain who reports a concern. A betting rule is only as strong as the senior player who will not look away. A diversity code is only as real as the chair who asks why the shortlist looks the way it does. A financial rule is only as sound as the owner who declines the deal that would break it.

That is why this framework keeps leadership and management distinct. Running the process is management. Explaining the rule, modelling it, reporting early, thanking the person who spoke up, acting on a review's findings when it is costly: that is leadership, and it is what turns a well-governed club into a well-led one. The annex on page 36 shows, competency by competency, how the behaviours in this framework support each of these expectations. Clubs outside England substitute their own association's and league's rules.



THE STANDARDS THIS FRAMEWORK ANSWERS

- **FA Rule E3**: the best interests of the game, no disrepute, and aggravated breaches for discrimination
- **Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards**, under Football's Safeguarding Children Policy and The FA's Safeguarding Children Regulations
- **Football Governance Act 2025** and the Independent Football Regulator; the Owners' and Directors' Test
- **Football Leadership Diversity Code** (2020); the Elite Player Performance Plan; UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations
- **The Laws of the Game** (IFAB), the FA Respect programme, and the betting and anti-doping rules

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

1.3 WHAT LEADERSHIP IS, AND IS NOT

Leadership, management and authority are three different things. A manager does all three, often in the same hour, and they support one another. But they are not the same, and confusing them is how frameworks lose their way and how clubs mistake control for leadership.

LEADERSHIP

Influencing people, shaping culture, developing individuals and teams, creating purpose and direction, building commitment and enabling performance. Leadership is shared across the club; leading is the part each person plays.

MANAGEMENT

Planning, organising, coordinating, monitoring and controlling: the training schedule, the budget, the medical records, the recruitment list, the fixture schedule. Essential, and not what this framework describes.

AUTHORITY

The legitimate power to decide and the accountability that comes with it: selection, contracts, discipline, transfers, appointments, board decisions. A context in which leadership happens, not a substitute for it.

The rule applied to every line. Processes and authority are contexts in which leadership happens. The leadership is the behaviour of the person in them: how they model their character and how they influence and enable others while doing these things. So this framework never says "monitors compliance" or "picks the team". It says "explains why a rule exists", "uses the authority of their position responsibly", "tells a player they are dropped before they read it".

Everyone can lead. Southgate opens his book on leadership with the observation that many of us find ourselves called upon to be leaders at some point in our lives; in a football club that is true of almost everyone. Leadership is a function of the whole club. It does not depend on formal authority, and nowhere is that clearer than in a captain, who can pick, fine or sign nobody and leads entirely by credibility, example and relationships. The young player who speaks up about a teammate's welfare is leading. The analyst who tells the manager what the data really says is leading. Good followership, contributing to the team's leadership from within it, is itself a form of leadership this framework names and values.

Leadership is grounded in values and shown in behaviour. It can be seen, discussed, coached and developed, like a skill on the training ground. That is why the framework is written as observable behaviours rather than traits, and why development is lifelong and goes well beyond courses.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

2.0 THE DEFINITION AND THE PRINCIPLES

THE DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

The combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown in their everyday behaviour, that inspires players, staff and the whole club to succeed, and to win well.

The definition follows the National Leadership Framework's, itself adapted from one proven in the most demanding environments: leadership as the combination of character, knowledge and action that inspires others to succeed. It keeps the three parts and the insistence that leadership is shown in behaviour, and it names the people and the purpose: players, staff and the whole club, succeeding and winning well. The LMA guide's own account is close: leadership is guiding people towards a vision, towards better skills and towards improvement, and you cannot make people do what you want; they must want to follow.

The three domains are deliberately few. Character is what a leader stands for: the values they play by, the standards they set and the example they give. Knowledge is what they understand: themselves, the dressing room and the game. Action is what they do: develop people, build the team and win well. Three domains were chosen because more would overlap; adding domains for coaching, recruitment or governance would blur the line between who a leader is, what they know and what they do.

Each domain has three dimensions, nine in all. Beneath them sit 35 competencies and 349 observable behaviours. Around the pitch, on the band every player sees, is the purpose of all of it: to inspire others to succeed.

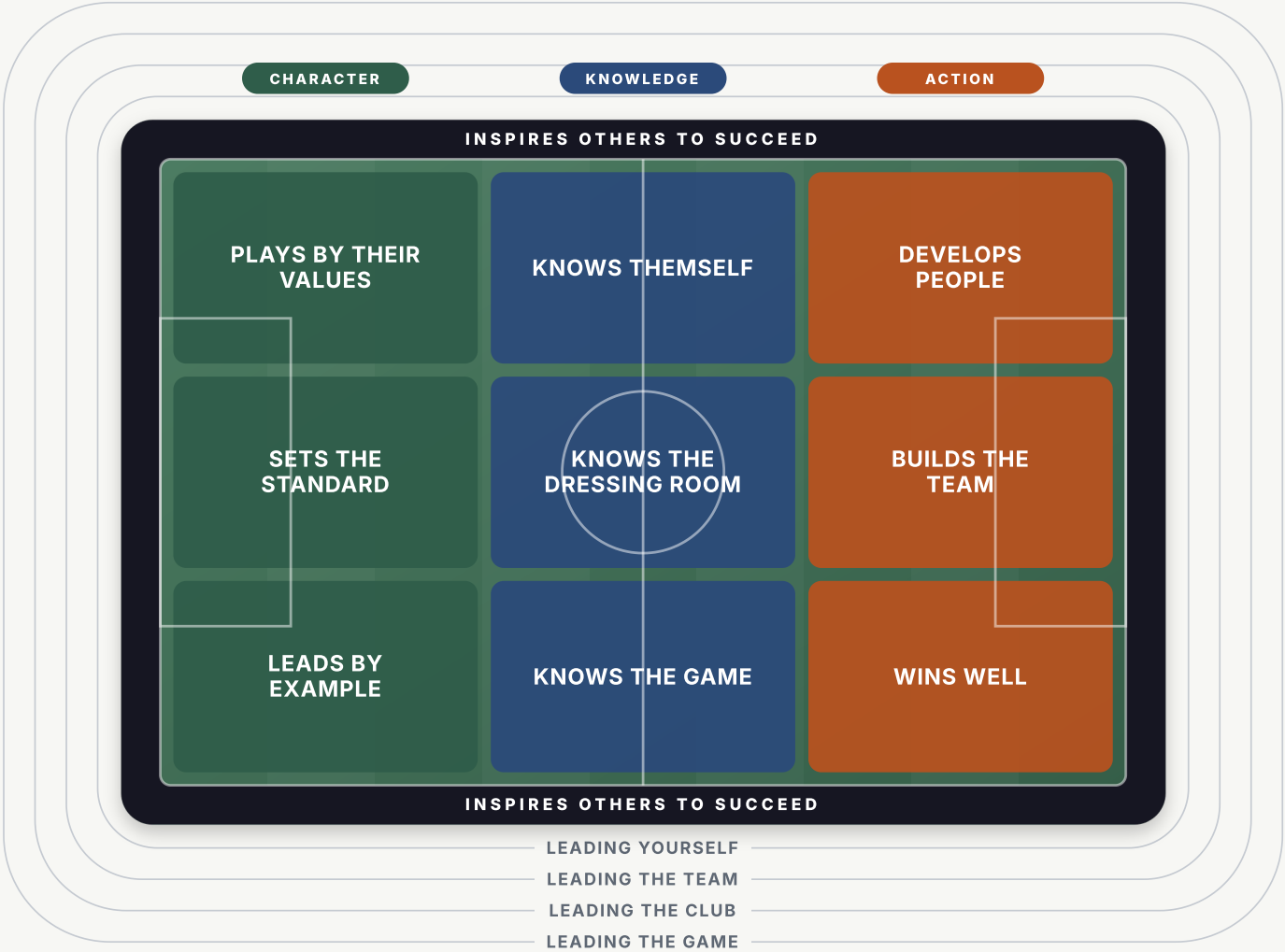
EIGHT PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN THE FRAMEWORK

1. Leadership, management and authority are separate, mutually supporting functions.
2. Leadership is shared across the club; leading is individual.
3. Everyone can contribute to leadership, at every level, whatever their authority.
4. Leader development is lifelong, grown through experience, relationships and reflection.
5. Development goes beyond courses: it needs practice, feedback and a culture that supports learning.
6. Leadership practice is informed by evidence, evaluation and proportionate assurance.
7. Effective leadership is grounded in values, which guide judgement, behaviour and relationships.
8. Leadership involves character, knowledge and action, expressed through observable behaviours.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

2.1 THE PITCH: THE FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

The framework is drawn as a pitch. The three thirds are the domains: Character, Knowledge and Action. The nine zones are the dimensions. The band around the touchline carries the purpose that everything on the pitch serves: to inspire others to succeed. The four lines beyond it are the levels of leadership, from Leading Yourself nearest the pitch to Leading the Game at the edge, each a wider view of the same game.



CHARACTER defensive third

The badge on the front. What a leader stands for and does when it is hardest: values, standards and example.

KNOWLEDGE middle third

Reading the game. Knowing yourself, knowing the dressing room and knowing the game and the industry.

ACTION attacking third

How you play. Developing people, building the team and winning well.

FOUR LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP, FROM THE PITCH OUTWARDS

1 LEADING YOURSELF
Every player

2 LEADING THE TEAM
Captains and leadership groups

3 LEADING THE CLUB
Manager or head coach

4 LEADING THE GAME
Owners and chairs

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

2.2 USING THE FRAMEWORK

The framework is a development tool, not a checklist or a league table. It supports reflection, feedback, coaching, honest conversation and leadership development over time. Leadership does not develop in a straight line: a captain, a coach and a chief executive will show different strengths across the dimensions, and the same person will lead differently in a relegation fight and a pre-season tour.

3	9	35	349
DOMAINS	**DIMENSIONS**	**COMPETENCIES**	**BEHAVIOURS**
Character, Knowledge, Action	Three within each domain	Each with a one-sentence descriptor	Observable, active, transferable

Mutually reinforcing. Each behaviour sits where it is most strongly evidenced, but none is meant to be read alone. Composure strengthens decisions, relationships strengthen influence, craft strengthens credibility. Care for the person runs through the whole framework; communication is a competency in its own right and runs through every other. Duplication has been kept to a minimum so the framework stays readable in a dressing room as well as a boardroom.

Levels. The domains stay constant; their application shifts with responsibility, risk and complexity. Section 6 shows how leadership changes across four levels, from leading yourself to leading the game. Not every behaviour carries equal weight at every level, and misjudging behaviour against the moment is one of the ways a dressing room turns toxic: the hairdryer that works once becomes the culture that silences everyone.

Everyone. The framework applies to every person in the building. All of them shape the culture, the performance and the reputation of the club through the influence they have on others every day. It also applies, with the emphasis adjusted, in a Sunday league side, a grassroots junior club and a school team, because the behaviours are the same; only the stakes change.

Men's and women's game. The framework is written for both, and for the academy as much as the first team. Where it says manager, read head coach as the club prefers; the dressing room is the same room in every part of the game.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

2.3 ROUTES TO FAILURE

Football has its own well-worn routes to failure, and every one of them has preceded a conduct scandal, a welfare failure, a points deduction or a collapsed dressing room somewhere in the game. Each is listed with the competencies written against it.

WIN AT ALL COSTS

Results used to excuse any conduct; the lesson of every review into the game's failures.

- 31 Builds a Winning Culture
- 01 Stands Up for What Is Right
- 05 Serves the Game

SELECTION BY FAVOUR

Places decided by agent, reputation or friendship rather than merit.

- 03 Respects Everyone in the Building
- 09 Acts Like a Pro
- 34 Makes the Big Calls Well

THE HAIRDRYER

Shouting, humiliation and fear as a coaching method.

- 08 Knows Where the Line Is
- 15 Stays Composed Under Pressure
- 26 Gives High Support and High Challenge

BANTER THAT EXCLUDES

Discrimination and bullying passed off as humour; initiation rituals.

- 08 Knows Where the Line Is
- 03 Respects Everyone in the Building
- 20 Understands Every Background in the Squad

THE BOMB SQUAD

Players frozen out, trained apart and left to find out from the press.

- 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player
- 02 Keeps Their Word
- 27 Gives People Their Chance

DROPPING WITHOUT A WORD

A player who learns their fate from a team sheet, a group message or a journalist.

- 02 Keeps Their Word
- 30 Gets the Message Across
- 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player

OWNER AND AGENT PRESSURE

Decisions bent to money, ego or the last day of the window.

- 01 Stands Up for What Is Right
- 04 Stays Loyal, Speaks Up
- 09 Acts Like a Pro

BETTING, DOPING AND CORRUPTION

Rules broken or ignored because everyone else looks away.

- 07 Plays Within the Rules
- 01 Stands Up for What Is Right
- 11 Owns the Result

FAILING THE YOUNG

Academy players released without care, or harmed by the adults meant to protect them.

- 07 Plays Within the Rules
- 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player
- 27 Gives People Their Chance

THE CULT OF THE MANAGER

One person's ego above the club; the dressing room silenced.

- 10 Stays Humble, Keeps Learning
- 29 Shares the Leadership
- 28 Creates a Dressing Room That Speaks Up

THE DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOURS THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK NAMES

narcissistic · authoritarian · abusive · manipulative · arrogance · unpredictable · intimidating · self-serving · incompetence (refusing to delegate or learn) · micromanagement · bullying · paranoia · favouritism · deceitfulness · lack of accountability · resistance to change · lack of empathy · isolationism

> **A note on judgement.** Not every behaviour is needed in equal measure in every moment. A manager at half time in a cup final needs composure, clarity and belief more than a development conversation; a manager on a quiet Tuesday should be having that conversation. Reading the moment is itself part of the framework.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



3.0

WHAT A LEADER STANDS FOR

CHARACTER

the badge on the front

Character is what a leader stands for and what they do when it is hardest: when the result has gone, when the star player has crossed a line, when the owner wants a different answer in the last week of the window. In football everyone can see it. Players know within a week whether a manager's words and actions match, and supporters know within a season.

The League Managers Association's Leadership Guide puts it plainly: culture changes behaviour, and great leaders shape culture. The culture of a dressing room, a club or the game is the sum of its leaders' character, made visible in small daily acts long before it shows in the table.

This domain carries the values a leader plays by, the standards they set and keep, and the example they give. It is anchored on standards the game already recognises: The FA's own values of progressive, respectful, inclusive, determined and excellent; the Laws of the Game; FA Rule E3 on conduct; and the Football Leadership Diversity Code.

THREE DIMENSIONS

PLAYS BY THEIR VALUES	Moral courage, honesty, respect, loyalty, service and care, kept under pressure.
SETS THE STANDARD	The rules of the game, decency and professionalism, upheld and explained.
LEADS BY EXAMPLE	Humility, accountability, earned influence and putting the team first.

> *Make the right impression, because without the respect and trust of the players you will achieve nothing.*
>
> HOWARD WILKINSON, LMA CHAIRMAN, THE LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

NLF dimension carried: **Values-Driven**

CHARACTER

Leaders play by their values when it costs them. Football is full of moments when the easier path is to look away, bend a truth or protect a result; this dimension is what a leader does in those moments. It is the moral basis of a leader's authority and the reason a dressing room trusts them.

> *The game's own words for this dimension are The FA's values, the Respect programme and the Laws of the Game: fair play, respect for opponents and match officials, and the club above the individual.*

01 STANDS UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES MORAL COURAGE

Leaders act on what is right when it carries a cost, whether that means challenging a culture, a decision, an owner or a star player.

- Chooses the right course when results, reputation or a relationship tempt an easier one
- Makes unpopular decisions on selection, discipline and conduct, and stands by them in public
- Resists pressure from owners, agents, sponsors or supporters to act against the club's values, including in a transfer window
- Challenges abusive, discriminatory or dishonest behaviour from anyone, however senior or valuable to the team
- Reports racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse, in the stands, the dressing room or online, and stands with the person it was aimed at
- Speaks for players and staff who cannot safely speak for themselves, including the young and the newly arrived
- Challenges practices in the club or the game that treat people unfairly, from selection bias to unequal access
- Raises a welfare, safeguarding or integrity concern early, knowing it may cost a result, a relationship or a job
- Acts on principle despite fear of the dressing room's reaction, the media's or the board's
- Backs others who show courage, publicly and afterwards, so that speaking up is seen to be safe

Works against: intimidating, abusive, favouritism, deceitfulness, self-serving

02 KEEPS THEIR WORD

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES INTEGRITY

Leaders are honest and consistent, so that what they say in a selection conversation, a contract talk or a press room matches what they do.

- Tells players, staff and the board the truth, including about selection, contracts and form
- Holds the same standards on a Tuesday at the training ground as on a Saturday in front of cameras
- Holds themselves to every standard they set for the squad, from timekeeping to language
- Follows through on what they promise a player, a parent, a colleague or a partner club
- Explains the reasons for decisions openly, so that even those who lose out understand why
- Keeps personal conduct in line with the club's values and the game's codes, in and out of season
- Keeps to their principles when a result, a transfer or a sponsor pulls the other way
- Deals honestly with agents and other clubs, including about a player's availability and the club's intentions
- Builds a culture of honesty by setting expectations and showing them first

Works against: deceitfulness, manipulative, unpredictable

03 RESPECTS EVERYONE IN THE BUILDING

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Leaders treat the kit manager, the academy scholar, the opponent and the official with the same fairness and courtesy as the captain.

- Treats every member of the building with courtesy, from the groundsman to the record signing
- Assumes good intent in others before judging a mistake, a missed session or a poor performance
- Applies the same standards and consequences to the record signing and the academy graduate
- Opens access to coaching, game time, facilities and progression on merit, not favour
- Encourages every voice in the room, including the young, the quiet and those speaking a second language
- Values the different backgrounds, cultures and experiences in a modern squad as a strength
- Addresses behaviour that belittles, excludes or humiliates, however it is dressed up
- Shows respect to opponents, match officials and supporters, in victory and defeat, on the pitch and on social media
- Builds a culture of respect wherever they have influence, from the changing room to the car park

Works against: arrogance, favouritism, bullying, lack of empathy

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

NLF dimension carried: **Values-Driven**

CHARACTER

04 STAYS LOYAL, SPEAKS UP

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES LOYALTY

Leaders commit to the club and its people, and show that loyalty by challenging constructively rather than by silence.

- Shows consistent commitment to the club's purpose, values and people, in good runs and bad
- Defends colleagues' interests and wellbeing when they are not in the room, including with the media
- Backs teammates' and colleagues' ideas in team meetings and wider forums, with judgement about how far
- Challenges coaches, captains and directors constructively when they believe a decision is wrong
- Balances loyalty to an individual against duty to the team when the two pull apart
- Puts the club's purpose first when loyalties to a friend, a former teammate or an agent conflict
- Refuses the blind loyalty that covers up misconduct, cheating or abuse
- Supports the team's decision in public once it is made, while keeping the proper channels open for genuine concerns

Works against: self-serving, deceitfulness, paranoia

05 SERVES THE GAME

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES SERVICE

Leaders look after the club, its resources, its reputation and the game's future, including the players and leaders who will come after them.

- Puts the club's purpose ahead of personal status, contract, profile or convenience
- Uses the club's money, time and facilities responsibly, with an eye to its long-term health and the financial rules it plays under
- Protects the club's interests and integrity against agendas that would damage it
- Represents the club and the game in a way that enhances their reputation, on and off the field
- Promotes practices that sustain the club's community, its facilities and the environment it plays in
- Invests time in developing players, coaches and staff who will carry the club forward
- Gives time to the community, the grassroots and the lower leagues that feed the game
- Chooses the game's long-term good over a short-term result or windfall
- Creates and protects pathways so that the next generation of players, coaches and leaders can come through

Works against: self-serving, narcissistic, isolationism

06 CARES FOR THE PERSON, NOT JUST THE PLAYER

CARRIES NLF: EMBODIES HUMANITY AND COMPASSION

Leaders show kindness, patience and attention to the whole person, especially when someone is injured, dropped, released or struggling.

- Listens to players and staff about their lives, not only their performance, and responds with empathy
- Shows appreciation for effort and contribution beyond what the role or the result requires
- Offers support before being asked when someone is injured, dropped, homesick or in difficulty
- Notices signs of distress, burnout or vulnerability and responds with care, involving the right support
- Handles academy release and the end of a contract face to face, with time, honesty and a plan for what comes next
- Chooses words and tone that build people up, in the dressing room, at half time and in review
- Shows patience with different personalities, cultures and emotional responses in the squad
- Treats honest mistakes, in a game or at work, as something to learn from rather than to punish
- Stays in touch with players who are injured long term, released, out of contract or retiring, so that no one disappears from the club
- Creates a climate of care in which people feel safe to say they are not all right

Works against: lack of empathy, abusive, intimidating

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

3.2 SETS THE STANDARD

NLF dimension carried: **Upholds the Highest Standards**

CHARACTER

Leaders set the standard by what they accept and what they refuse. The Laws of the Game, The FA's rules, the league's regulations, the betting and anti-doping rules, safeguarding and the codes of conduct are obligations the whole club shares; leaders make them live by example and by explaining why they exist.

> *FA Rule E3, the betting rules, the Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards and the Owners' and Directors' Test all depend on leaders who hold the line and say why.*

07 PLAYS WITHIN THE RULES

CARRIES NLF: ACTS LAWFULLY

Leaders uphold the laws and regulations of the game and the law of the land, from anti-doping and betting rules to safeguarding, agents and employment, and explain why they matter.

- Acts within the Laws of the Game, the FA's rules, the league's regulations and the law of the land, and makes those expectations clear to others
- Uses the authority of their position responsibly, so that selection, discipline and recruitment decisions are fair and can be explained
- Promotes anti-doping, the betting rules and fair play by personal example and plain words about why they matter
- Challenges rule-breaking, from doping and betting to tapping up and match manipulation, through the proper channels
- Reports and acts on breaches promptly, protecting the people affected and the club's standing
- Promotes safeguarding, equality and welfare duties as obligations the whole building shares, not the welfare officer's alone
- Keeps honest, careful records of selection, welfare, medical, disciplinary and agent dealings, so that decisions can be trusted and checked
- Explains why a rule exists, so that players and staff own it rather than merely comply

Works against: deceitfulness, lack of accountability, abusive

08 KNOWS WHERE THE LINE IS

CARRIES NLF: ACTS APPROPRIATELY

Leaders keep conduct decent in a culture built on banter and intensity, and step in when a line is crossed.

- Adjusts language and behaviour to the setting, from the dressing room to a school visit to a sponsor's dinner
- Considers how their conduct reflects on the club and the game before acting, including online
- Avoids snap judgements and public criticism of players, officials and colleagues
- Challenges language and behaviour that are discriminatory, degrading or unsafe, including when passed off as banter
- Steps in to stop the mistreatment of anyone in the building, including initiation rituals and humiliation
- Uses their voice and standing to bring in people and views the room usually ignores
- Keeps intensity and emotion within limits that never humiliate a person
- Treats match officials with respect, on the touchline and in the press conference, whatever the decision

Works against: bullying, abusive, intimidating, arrogance

09 ACTS LIKE A PRO

CARRIES NLF: ACTS PROFESSIONALLY

Leaders hold themselves to professional codes, keep boundaries clear and represent the club responsibly, on camera and off it.

- Aligns decisions and conduct with professional codes, the club's values and the game's expectations
- Upholds codes of conduct and disciplinary standards consistently, whoever is involved
- Keeps appropriate boundaries with players, staff, agents and media, avoiding over-familiarity and conflicts of interest
- Makes impartial decisions on selection, recruitment and discipline, free from favouritism or outside influence
- Models professional standards in preparation, punctuality, appearance and conduct, every day
- Represents the club responsibly in interviews, on social media and in public, especially after a defeat or a refereeing decision
- Keeps the supporters' trust by treating the club's history, colours and community as more than a brand
- Encourages professional standards in others, including young players learning what a professional does

Works against: favouritism, unpredictable, self-serving

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

NLF dimension carried: **Models Exemplary Behaviours**

CHARACTER

Leaders are watched. Howard Wilkinson's advice to new managers in the LMA guide, "they're watching you", applies to every captain, coach and director. This dimension is character made visible: owning the result, staying humble, earning the room and putting the team before oneself.

> *In a game where the manager's face is on the back page and the captain's is on the big screen, the example set in defeat is the standard the whole club learns from.*

10 STAYS HUMBLE, KEEPS LEARNING

CARRIES NLF: DISPLAYS HUMILITY

Leaders admit what they do not know, ask for feedback and treat every season as a chance to improve.

- Admits mistakes and limits openly, to the squad and the staff, and learns from them in view of others
- Seeks feedback from players, staff, peers and mentors, and acts on it
- Listens to the analyst, the physio, the youngest player and the groundsman, and takes their ideas seriously
- Asks for help and uses specialists' strengths rather than pretending to know it all
- Thanks the people whose work makes performance possible, including those nobody sees
- Makes room for others to speak, challenge and contribute, in meetings and reviews
- Keeps ego in check after success, avoiding self-promotion and the cult of the manager

Works against: arrogance, narcissistic, incompetence (refusing to learn)

11 OWNS THE RESULT

CARRIES NLF: DISPLAYS ACCOUNTABILITY

Leaders take responsibility for their decisions and the team's outcomes, in defeat as readily as in victory.

- Takes responsibility for their own decisions and performance, without blaming officials, luck or others
- Takes accountability for the team's results and conduct, in the dressing room and in public
- Delivers on what has been agreed with the squad, the staff and the board
- Owns mistakes and failures, puts them right and captures the lessons for next time
- Reports outcomes honestly, owning successes as much as failures and resisting spin
- Builds a culture in which players and staff own their own performance and standards
- Makes clear who is responsible for what, so that accountability is understood before the game, not argued after it

Works against: lack of accountability, deceitfulness, paranoia

12 EARNS THE ROOM

CARRIES NLF: DISPLAYS INFLUENCE

Leaders win respect and trust through credibility and example rather than the title on the door.

- Communicates with calm, clarity and conviction when the team needs certainty, including at half time and after defeat
- Acts decisively with measured confidence, giving the group belief without bravado
- Persuades through reason, evidence and shared goals, not through fear, status or favours
- Reframes setbacks as something the group can learn from and come back from
- Involves players and staff in shaping decisions so that they buy in rather than comply
- Builds trust with the board, supporters, media and partners through consistency and openness
- Builds support for change through relationships across the building and the game
- Earns respect through standards and work before expecting it from the title

Works against: authoritarian, manipulative, intimidating

13 PUTS THE TEAM FIRST

CARRIES NLF: DISPLAYS SELFLESSNESS

Leaders place collective success ahead of personal recognition, sharing credit and shouldering the hard moments.

- Gives time to teammates and colleagues without expecting anything back
- Takes on the hard, unglamorous jobs so that others can perform
- Protects players and staff from pressure, criticism and intrusion, even at personal cost
- Looks after their own health and energy so that they can keep supporting others
- Celebrates the team's success rather than their own part in it
- Shares credit publicly with players, staff and those behind the scenes
- Steps back when the team wins, so that others take the acclaim
- Accepts a role, a substitution or a decision for the team's good with grace

Works against: narcissistic, self-serving, arrogance

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

3.4 YOUR VALUES, YOUR CLUB

This framework has no single club's values to carry, so its Character domain is anchored on the standards the whole game recognises. A club adopting it should put its own values in their place. The table shows where the sector's standards sit; the panel shows how a club maps its own.

STANDARD THE SECTOR ALREADY RECOGNISES	WHERE IT LIVES IN THIS FRAMEWORK
The FA's values: progressive, respectful, inclusive, determined, excellent (In Pursuit of Progress, 2018)	Sets the Standard; Plays by Their Values; Develops People
The Laws of the Game and the FA Respect programme: fair play and respect for match officials and opponents	Plays by Their Values; Sets the Standard
FA Rule E3: the best interests of the game, and no abuse of anyone	Sets the Standard; Leads by Example
Football Leadership Diversity Code: leadership that looks like the game	Plays by Their Values; Knows the Dressing Room; Develops People
Football Governance Act 2025: custodianship, heritage and fan engagement	Plays by Their Values (Serves the Game); Knows the Game; Wins Well

MAPPING A CLUB'S VALUES

Take each club value in turn and ask which competencies most directly express it. A value of "respect" sits in Respects Everyone in the Building and Knows Where the Line Is. "Hard work" sits in Acts Like a Pro and Works on Their Own Game. "Together" sits in Puts the Team First and Shares the Leadership. Write the club's value beside the competency on the pages that follow, and the framework reads as the club's own.

A TEST WORTH APPLYING

The LMA guide warns against being more fixated with the name on the back of the shirt than the badge on the front. A club's values pass the test when a new signing could learn them from how people behave in their first week at the training ground without being told. If the values on the wall and the behaviours in the building disagree, the behaviours are the real values.

> *"At a football club, there's a holy trinity: the players, the manager and the supporters.*
>
> BILL SHANKLY, AS RECORDED BY LFCHISTORY.NET

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



4.0

WHAT A LEADER UNDERSTANDS

KNOWLEDGE

reading the game

Knowledge in this framework is not tactical knowledge alone. The LMA built its learning programme around a 360-degree view of the job, "you, your team, the game, the industry", and this domain follows the same logic: leaders read themselves, read the people in the dressing room and read the game and the industry around it.

The LMA guide treats self-knowledge and resilience as the first survival skills in management, because the manager's composure sets the team's. Knowing the dressing room is the craft of managing individuals and a group. Knowing the game is the credibility that earns a hearing and the awareness that keeps a club ahead of where football is going.

None of this knowledge is for its own sake. It is how a leader anticipates what a situation demands and adjusts how they lead.

THREE DIMENSIONS

KNOWS THEMSELF	Self-awareness, composure under pressure and clear thinking.
KNOWS THE DRESSING ROOM	Reading the mood, the group, relationships and cultures.
KNOWS THE GAME	Craft, the industry, the game's direction and how the club works.

> *I don't think many people fully understand the value of observing.*
>
> SIR ALEX FERGUSON, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW, OCTOBER 2013

England Leadership Framework for Football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

NLF dimension carried: **Knows Themself**

KNOWLEDGE

Before leaders can read a game or a group they must read themselves: their values, their triggers, the effect of their mood on a room, and the quality of their own thinking under pressure. The LMA guide describes resilient leaders as stress buffers, not stress amplifiers; that is the aim here.

> *The LMA's own research into the pressures on managers, from results to owners to social media, begins with leaders who understand and look after their own mental health.*

14 KNOWS THEIR STRENGTHS AND TRIGGERS

CARRIES NLF: SELF-AWARENESS

Leaders understand their values, strengths, limits and what sets them off, and how all of it lands on others.

- Identifies their own values, ambitions and motivations, and what drains them, as the foundation of how they lead
- Assesses their strengths and limits honestly against the role they hold and the one they want next
- Recognises their stress patterns and triggers, from a refereeing decision to a hostile press conference, and the effect their reaction has on others
- Notices their own emotions and biases in the moment, including towards favourite players and familiar faces
- Seeks and reflects on feedback about how their leadership lands on the squad and staff
- Identifies blind spots in their leadership and chooses what to work on next
- Reflects on past seasons, games and conversations to adjust how they lead
- Uses profiling tools, 360 feedback and trusted critics to test their self-image against the evidence

Works against: arrogance, unpredictable, narcissistic

15 STAYS COMPOSED UNDER PRESSURE

CARRIES NLF: SELF-MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE

Leaders regulate their reactions when results, media and the board bear down, acting as a buffer for the group rather than an amplifier.

- Thinks before reacting to a result, a decision or a question, avoiding the outburst the group will remember
- Anticipates the moments that trigger them, such as the touchline, the tunnel and the post-match interview, and plans how to respond
- Treats their own mistakes and criticism as fuel for learning rather than reasons for self-doubt
- Speaks to themselves with the same fairness they would show a player after a poor game
- Keeps moving forward when the future is uncertain, such as a long injury list, a takeover or a run of defeats
- Adapts their thinking and approach when the game, the squad or the circumstances change
- Keeps effort, humour and belief going through a losing run or a long rehabilitation
- Turns to trusted people, inside and outside the game, when the demands exceed what they can carry alone
- Absorbs pressure from above and outside rather than passing it on to players and staff

Works against: unpredictable, abusive, intimidating

16 THINKS CLEARLY, REVIEWS HONESTLY

CARRIES NLF: METACOGNITION AND REFLECTIVE THINKING

Leaders separate signal from noise in the heat of a game or a season and review their own reasoning as rigorously as a performance.

- Recognises the habits and biases that shape their reading of a game, a player or a situation
- Notices how a win, a defeat or a crowd changes their assumptions and judgement
- Holds attention and focus under pressure, in the final minutes and in the final weeks of a season
- Separates what matters from noise when reviewing performance, data and opinion
- Interrogates data and video with the analysts rather than accepting the story they expected
- Reviews their decisions and the reasoning behind them after the event, not only the outcome
- Judges when to trust instinct, when to trust the data and when to wait for more
- Weighs others' ideas and challenge on their merits, including from junior staff and players
- Draws coherent conclusions from scouting, analysis, medical and coaching inputs
- Redirects brooding on a result into a plan for the next one

Works against: resistance to change, incompetence, paranoia

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

4.2 KNOWS THE DRESSING ROOM

NLF dimension carried: **Knows Others**

KNOWLEDGE

Every club has a dressing room, and every dressing room has a mood, a hierarchy and a story. Leaders who read it well know who has gone quiet, who really sets the tone, what each player plays for and how a squad drawn from twenty nations holds together. Those who read it badly find out too late.

> *The Football Leadership Diversity Code and the game's work against discrimination are lived or lost in how well leaders know the people in front of them.*

17 READS THE MOOD

CARRIES NLF: SOCIAL AWARENESS

Leaders notice the shift in a room, the player who has gone quiet and the words that do not match the body language.

- Reads emotions in faces, posture and tone in the dressing room, the team bus and the training ground
- Reads how a moment, such as a substitution or a public criticism, will land on the group
- Notices when what a player says does not match how they look or sound
- Notices silence, withdrawal or a change in routine as a sign that something is wrong
- Senses when the mood of the whole group shifts, before and after games and across a season
- Identifies who really influences the dressing room, whatever the armband says
- Notices whose contributions are overlooked, including quieter players and those from other cultures
- Infers underlying concerns from recurring tensions, cliques and flashpoints
- Considers others' perspectives before judging in a heated moment, such as a half-time exchange

Works against: lack of empathy, favouritism, isolationism

18 UNDERSTANDS WHAT MAKES THE GROUP TICK

CARRIES NLF: TEAM DYNAMICS

Leaders know each individual's motivators, strengths and pressures and how the group's habits help or hurt performance.

- Knows each player's and staff member's strengths, weaknesses and potential
- Knows what motivates and demotivates each individual, from game time to recognition to security
- Knows how each person responds to pressure, criticism and setback, and adjusts accordingly
- Matches roles and responsibilities, on and off the field, to people's strengths
- Identifies the interactions, cliques and routines that help or harm the team
- Identifies the unwritten norms of the dressing room, such as who may challenge whom and what is never said
- Identifies gaps, overlaps and blind spots in how the squad and staff work together
- Recognises when workload, travel, injury or life outside the game is limiting someone's contribution
- Reads team climate, cohesion and participation to find what is holding performance back
- Understands how differences of age, background and experience shape challenge and decisions in the group

Works against: favouritism, micromanagement, incompetence

19 KEEPS RELATIONSHIPS STRONG

CARRIES NLF: RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Leaders build trust and repair it early, staying close enough to understand people and far enough to judge fairly.

- Spots where tension, conflict or mistrust is building, between players, between staff or between the two, and acts early
- Explores grievances about fairness, selection and respect before they harden
- Recognises tension between an individual's ambitions and the team's needs and addresses it openly
- Spots the early signs of lost trust, such as a player who stops talking to a coach, and repairs it
- Checks their own biases towards or against individuals before they damage a relationship
- Listens without judgement when a player, parent or colleague raises a concern
- Builds on common ground to strengthen rapport, including with difficult characters
- Communicates with tact in sensitive conversations such as selection, contracts and release
- Keeps the right distance: close enough to know people, far enough to make hard calls fairly

Works against: favouritism, paranoia, isolationism

20 UNDERSTANDS EVERY BACKGROUND IN THE SQUAD

CARRIES NLF: CULTURAL AWARENESS

Leaders adapt to the cultures, languages, faiths and generations in a modern squad so that everyone belongs and performs.

- Understands how national, regional, club and dressing-room cultures shape behaviour and performance
- Understands the differing expectations of generations in the squad, from the academy graduate to the veteran
- Adapts language, humour and non-verbal communication for players and staff from different cultures and languages
- Understands how culture shapes the way people show emotion, confidence and disagreement
- Checks assumptions and suspends judgement when working across cultures, faiths and languages
- Adapts team routines and norms so that dietary, religious and family needs are respected
- Keeps learning about the cultures represented in the squad and the community the club serves
- Anticipates cultural tensions, such as around food, prayer, language groups or celebrations, and addresses them before they divide the group
- Uses the squad's diversity as a source of ideas, resilience and connection with supporters
- Shows confidence, composure and humility in interactions across cultures

Works against: lack of empathy, favouritism, bullying

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

4.3 KNOWS THE GAME

NLF dimension carried: **Knows Their Profession**

KNOWLEDGE

Credibility in football is earned by knowing the craft. Leading in the game also demands an understanding of the industry around the club, of where football is going and of how the club itself works as a team of teams, from academy to first team and from medical to commercial.

> *The Football Governance Act 2025 and the Independent Football Regulator, the Owners' and Directors' Test and UEFA's licensing regulations describe what the game now expects of those who run clubs; this dimension is the knowledge that lets leaders meet it.*

21 KNOWS THEIR CRAFT

CARRIES NLF: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Leaders hold the technical, tactical and professional expertise that earns credibility, and keep it current.

- Demonstrates the technical and tactical knowledge their role demands, so that players and staff trust their judgement
- Applies their expertise with sound judgement when stakes are high, from a final to a medical decision
- Keeps their knowledge current through UEFA and FA coaching qualifications, study, visits to other clubs and other sports, and the latest evidence
- Draws on peers, specialists and research to inform decisions and improve practice across the game
- Aligns professional decisions with the club's standards, its playing philosophy and its values
- Understands how medical, sport science, analysis, recruitment and regulatory requirements fit into planning a season and a transfer window
- Uses performance and outcome data to improve coaching, selection and preparation
- Anticipates how changes in rules, regulation or technology will affect how the team plays and prepares
- Sustains credibility through consistent, competent and ethical conduct season after season

Works against: incompetence, arrogance

22 UNDERSTANDS THE INDUSTRY AROUND THE CLUB

CARRIES NLF: EXTERNAL CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDERS

Leaders read owners, agents, supporters, media, sponsors, governing bodies and the community, and what each expects of the club.

- Understands the FA's rules, the league's regulations, the regulator's expectations and the findings of audits and reviews
- Reads shifts in the game's economics, broadcasting, the transfer market and regulation and what they mean for the club
- Understands what supporters, the local community and partners expect, and lets it inform the club's priorities
- Reads supporter sentiment and the public mood around the club, and considers it in decisions
- Studies rival clubs, other sports and other sectors for threats, opportunities and ideas
- Understands what the FA, the league and the Independent Football Regulator require of the club, and why
- Reads volatility in the game, from ownership changes to injury crises, points deductions and fixture congestion, and leads adaptively
- Understands the partnerships, suppliers and medical and educational networks the club depends on
- Understands constraints on budgets, staffing and facilities and how they affect what the club can sustain
- Keeps abreast of the club's environmental and community obligations

Works against: isolationism, resistance to change

23 SEES WHERE THE GAME IS GOING

CARRIES NLF: STRATEGIC AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Leaders follow the direction of the game: its economics, regulation, technology, demographics and public standing.

- Follows political and economic developments that shape the game, from broadcast deals to the regulator and parachute payments
- Follows demographic and social trends, such as the growth of the women's game, changing audiences and the global market for players, and what they mean for the club
- Understands where power and influence lie across clubs, the leagues, the FA, the PFA and the LMA, agents and broadcasters
- Understands the networks and bodies that govern the game nationally and internationally
- Aligns the club's choices with the game's national priorities, regulatory expectations and public standing
- Uses strategic thinking to weigh the club's long-term choices and trade-offs
- Learns from the game's history and from other clubs' successes and failures
- Follows emerging technology, data and innovation for the opportunities and risks they bring the game
- Understands the club's narrative and reputation and the risks to both
- Stress-tests plans against what might change: relegation, a takeover, an injury crisis, a points deduction

Works against: resistance to change, isolationism

24 UNDERSTANDS HOW THE CLUB WORKS

CARRIES NLF: ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Leaders see the club as a team of teams, from academy to first team and from medical to commercial, and how the parts depend on each other.

- Understands how the club's departments, from academy to first team to commercial, depend on each other
- Understands how decisions really get made at the club, formally and informally
- Understands the governance, assurance and compliance systems that keep the club accountable, and why they matter
- Understands the club's risks, from finances to welfare to reputation, and how they are managed
- Understands how budgets and resources are allocated and the effect on sustainability and performance
- Reads performance indicators across the club to find where the system, not the individual, needs to improve
- Identifies processes that get in the way of players, coaches and staff doing their jobs
- Understands who inside and outside the club influences its direction, and how
- Understands how the club's policies and procedures shape daily life, from welfare to recruitment
- Understands how the club learns, from match review to exit interviews, and whether it does

Works against: micromanagement, incompetence, isolationism

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



5.0

WHAT A LEADER DOES

ACTION

how you play

Action is where leadership becomes visible and results follow. This domain uses the oldest idea in team leadership, John Adair's three overlapping needs of the individual, the team and the task, in a setting that already thinks in those terms: develop people, build the team, win well.

The LMA's LEAD programme is built on the same ground: leading with purpose, high-performing teams, developing individuals, communication and change. This domain carries each of those as observable behaviour.

Winning Well, the final dimension, gives the framework its name. It describes results pursued with purpose, trust, good decisions and partnership, and it is the framework's answer to win at all costs.

THREE DIMENSIONS

DEVELOPS PEOPLE	Working on one's own game, high support and high challenge, giving people their chance.
BUILDS THE TEAM	A dressing room that speaks up, shared leadership, clear messages and a winning culture.
WINS WELL	Purpose, trust, good decisions and partnership, in pursuit of results.

> *"I think it is important to build a structure for a football club, not just a football team.*
>
> SIR ALEX FERGUSON, AS RELAYED BY ANITA ELBERSE, HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL, 2013

Exc… …ship Fra… …IC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

5.1 DEVELOPS PEOPLE

NLF dimension carried: **Develops Individuals**

ACTION

Leaders develop people, including themselves. The coaching conversation, the stretch, the reassurance after a setback and the chance given to an academy player or a young coach are the daily acts by which a club grows its own. Deliberately, the dimension is about people, not only players: the staff and the leaders of the club as well as the squad.

> *The Elite Player Performance Plan's four functions of games programme, education, coaching and elite performance, and the game's duty to players it releases, sit here: development that looks after the whole person and their life after football.*

25 WORKS ON THEIR OWN GAME

CARRIES NLF: DEVELOPS THEMSELVES

Leaders train their own leadership deliberately, with goals, coaching, reflection and the habits that sustain their health.

- Sets specific goals for their own leadership, not only for their technical or tactical knowledge
- Identifies the gaps in knowledge and skill that most limit their leadership
- Builds development into their routine, as a player builds in training and recovery
- Owns their own development rather than waiting for the club to provide it
- Applies what they learn to the next session, the next game and the next conversation
- Seeks coaching, mentoring and peer support, including from outside football
- Seeks feedback from players, staff, peers and mentors on how they lead
- Reflects critically on their conduct, feedback and experience, and acts on it
- Transfers learning across roles and clubs, adapting after promotion, dismissal or change
- Looks after their physical, mental and emotional health so that they can lead for a career, not a season
- Balances ambition with reality, pacing themselves across a long season and a long career

Works against: incompetence, arrogance, resistance to change

26 GIVES HIGH SUPPORT AND HIGH CHALLENGE

CARRIES NLF: PROVIDES SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

Leaders combine honest feedback and stretch with reassurance and care, so people grow rather than shrink.

- Helps players and staff turn their ambitions into goals, plans and learning priorities
- Provides steadiness and reassurance when form dips, selection goes against someone or the season turns
- Gives timely, specific feedback that reinforces strengths and shows the next step
- Sets stretch targets that connect individual improvement to the team's goals
- Helps people reflect on games, sessions and experiences so that they learn from them
- Works with each individual on how best to support their development
- Guides recovery after injury, setback or failure so that confidence and performance return
- Helps people solve problems and sustain performance under pressure
- Promotes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing as part of performance, not separate from it
- Recognises effort and contribution, including the roles the crowd never sees
- Reviews progress regularly, adjusting the balance of support and challenge as the person grows
- Balances the demands of results with time and presence for the people who deliver them
- Keeps feedback about the performance and the behaviour, never the person's worth

Works against: abusive, micromanagement, lack of empathy

27 GIVES PEOPLE THEIR CHANCE

CARRIES NLF: INSPIRES AND ENABLES OTHERS

Leaders create opportunities, back emerging talent and build the next generation of players, staff and leaders.

- Shows belief in players and staff through trust, time and encouragement, especially when they doubt themselves
- Gives progressive responsibility, from the captaincy of a youth side to leading a session, so that confidence and judgement grow
- Mentors others in a way that builds their independence and their own judgement
- Creates opportunities to learn and progress, including game time, coaching badges and roles beyond playing
- Matches emerging talent to the opportunities that will grow it, inside and beyond the club
- Spots emerging strengths and development needs early and plans for the long term
- Builds habits of self-reflection in players and staff so that they keep learning without being told
- Addresses underperformance through honest conversation and a plan, not silence, the bomb squad or exile
- Affirms progress and makes the next step clear, so that people believe in their own development
- Opens mentoring and development to everyone fairly, not only the obvious prospects and favourites
- Encourages players and staff to think about the game, the club and their careers beyond the next match
- Creates leadership opportunities for young people and those under-represented in the game's leadership

Works against: favouritism, micromanagement, self-serving

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

5.2 BUILDS THE TEAM

NLF dimension carried: **Builds Teams**

ACTION

Teams are built, not bought. Leaders build them by making it safe to speak up, by sharing leadership with captains, leadership groups and staff, by communicating with clarity, and by setting the standards and routines that hold through a forty-six-game season.

> *Every review into a failing club culture finds a dressing room that could not speak; a dressing room that speaks up is the practical safeguard, and it is also how teams win.*

28 CREATES A DRESSING ROOM THAT SPEAKS UP

CARRIES NLF: CREATES PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Leaders make it safe to question, disagree and admit mistakes, so problems surface before they cost results.

- Sets clear, respectful norms for the dressing room that rule out ridicule, humiliation and exclusion
- Invites challenge to tactics, selection and plans, and shows that it carries no penalty
- Responds calmly when a player admits a mistake or a staff member brings unwelcome news
- Invites open discussion once everyone understands the plan, the freedoms and the constraints
- Keeps debate about the problem rather than the person, in review and in the heat of the moment
- Gives fair, reasoned and courteous explanations when turning down an idea or a request
- Encourages questions, including from the youngest in the room, to build shared understanding
- Encourages curiosity and creative problem-solving in how the team plays and prepares
- Makes it safe to try things and fail in training, so that players and staff experiment and learn
- Seeks out the perspectives of those least likely to be heard, including new signings and those from other cultures
- Makes sure decisions reflect the group's contributions before moving forward
- Acknowledges constructive challenge publicly as a contribution to the team's success
- Makes it safe to report injury, pain, mental health difficulty or concern without fear for selection
- Protects the dressing room from the noise of social media and the press, and talks to players about what is said about them

Works against: intimidating, authoritarian, bullying, paranoia

29 SHARES THE LEADERSHIP

CARRIES NLF: CULTIVATES TEAMSHIP

Leaders build captains, leadership groups and staff who lead in their own right, and hold each other to the team's standards.

- Treats leadership as something the whole squad shares, not the manager's or the captain's alone
- Makes clear who decides what, from the captain's role on the field to the staff's roles off it, so that nobody is left guessing
- Gives players and staff real influence in solving the team's problems
- Invites dissent, feedback and independent thinking from the group
- Defers to the physio, the analyst, the set-piece coach or the senior player when their expertise should decide
- Balances the authority of the role with openness to challenge before decisions are made
- Builds consensus and commitment around decisions the group has helped shape
- Recognises and celebrates cooperation and co-creation that contribute to results
- Creates opportunities for players and staff to lead in their own areas, from set pieces to community work
- Encourages players and staff to hold each other to shared standards, not to wait for the coach to do it
- Leads collective reflection, after games and across the season, on how the group leads and follows
- Secures commitment once a decision is made, distinguishing honest challenge from undermining
- Builds a leadership group that reflects the whole squad and shares the captain's load

Works against: authoritarian, micromanagement, isolationism

30 GETS THE MESSAGE ACROSS

CARRIES NLF: COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY

Leaders communicate with clarity and conviction, adjusting to the player, the staff room, the boardroom and the press conference.

- Listens fully to players and staff before responding or deciding
- Asks questions to check and deepen understanding, rather than assuming the message landed
- Thinks about what each audience needs before delivering a key message, from a team talk to a release conversation
- Uses clear, simple language in team talks, briefings and reviews, so that every player understands the plan
- Adapts tone and style for the individual, the group, the board and the media
- Gives the context behind a plan, so that people understand why as well as what
- Explains decisions, including selection, honestly, so that people can support them even when they disagree
- Invites questions and feedback to confirm the message has been understood
- Matches words with body language, so that the group believes what it hears
- Chooses the right moment and method, such as a quiet word, a group meeting or a video review, for the message and the person
- Communicates with positivity, passion and belief, so that the group wants to follow
- Says the hard things face to face, not through the media, an agent or a group message

Works against: manipulative, unpredictable, intimidating

31 BUILDS A WINNING CULTURE

CARRIES NLF: BUILDS AND SUSTAINS HIGH PERFORMANCE

Leaders set shared standards, routines and identity that sustain performance through a long season.

- Makes roles, responsibilities and expectations clear across the squad and staff, matched to what each brings
- Agrees shared values and standards of behaviour with the group, so that the group polices them
- Builds healthy competition for places that raises standards without breaking the group
- Builds a collective identity grounded in the club's history, values and community, the badge on the front
- Builds belief and cohesion by solving problems together and celebrating success properly
- Agrees the routines of training, preparation, review and recovery with the group, and adjusts them as the season demands
- Encourages hard, honest debate about performance, grounded in evidence
- Keeps debate about the problem, not the person, so that challenge does not become conflict
- Draws on the group's insight to find ways to improve
- Encourages brave, disciplined risk-taking in how the team plays and prepares
- Adapts their leadership as the season, the opposition and the squad change
- Lifts the group under pressure by reinforcing purpose, resilience and mutual support
- Judges the culture by how the group behaves in defeat and when no one is watching

Works against: authoritarian, favouritism, unpredictable, resistance to change

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

5.3 WINS WELL

NLF dimension carried: **Achieves Outcomes**

ACTION

Results matter in football, and this framework says so. Winning well means giving the team something to play for, trusting people to play their role, making the big calls well and working across the game, so that success is earned in a way the club and its supporters can be proud of and can sustain.

> *The financial sustainability rules of the leagues, UEFA and the regulator describe how a club should win; this dimension describes the leaders who make that real.*

32 GIVES THE TEAM SOMETHING TO PLAY FOR

CARRIES NLF: DEFINES AND ALIGNS PURPOSE

Leaders define a purpose and a plan that people believe in, and connect every session and selection to it.

- Sets out a vision for the team and the club that players, staff and supporters can believe in
- Communicates intent, objectives and priorities so that everyone knows what matters this week and this season
- Connects the goal, the way of playing and the resources available into one coherent plan
- Breaks the vision into achievable objectives and measurable steps, from the season to the block of games to the session
- Involves players and staff in setting goals and standards, so that they own them
- Connects everyday training, selection and recovery to the shared purpose, and says so
- Checks that routine choices, from recruitment to rotation, move the team towards the vision
- Names barriers to the plan honestly, including the ones inside the building
- Balances ambition with the reality of the squad, the budget and the league
- Reviews and adjusts priorities as the season changes, keeping the purpose alive
- Gives the purpose meaning beyond results: who the club plays for and what it stands for

Works against: unpredictable, self-serving, manipulative

33 TRUSTS PEOPLE TO PLAY THEIR ROLE

CARRIES NLF: EMPOWERS OTHERS

Leaders delegate real responsibility within clear boundaries and let specialists do what they know best.

- Makes clear the freedoms, limits and decisions each player and staff member owns, on and off the field
- Checks that players and staff understand the plan and the outcome, and gives them room to ask
- Delegates real responsibility matched to competence, from in-game decisions to leading a department
- Decides which decisions to delegate, share or keep, and explains why
- Hands over responsibility with clear ownership of the outcome
- Gives people the information and context they need to make good decisions without asking
- Shows faith in players' and specialists' judgement through proportionate oversight rather than constant checking
- Steps in only when a deviation threatens the plan, standards or the club's integrity
- Encourages bold, resourceful initiative within the agreed plan, on the field and off it
- Credits good judgement exercised on the field and in the departments, so that people keep using it
- Adjusts the freedom given as confidence, competence and circumstances change
- Lets the captain lead on the field and the specialists lead in their fields

Works against: micromanagement, authoritarian, paranoia

34 MAKES THE BIG CALLS WELL

CARRIES NLF: MAKES EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

Leaders make timely, reasoned decisions on selection, recruitment and strategy, free of ego and open to review.

- Frames problems with the staff and senior players, drawing on scouting, analysis, medical and coaching views
- Distils a complex situation into clear options that serve the plan
- Identifies what is unknown, assumed or missing before deciding
- Balances data and analysis with experience and instinct, knowing the limits of each
- Weighs the feasibility, proportionality, risk and cost of each option, including the human cost
- Considers alternatives and their consequences before committing
- Tests their own reasoning for bias, including loyalty to favourites and fear of the crowd's reaction
- Thinks creatively as well as analytically to find solutions the opposition has not seen
- Makes timely, reasoned and proportionate decisions, avoiding the emotional or ego-driven call
- Watches how a game or a situation develops and adjusts decisions as it changes
- Reviews the outcomes of decisions honestly to inform the next ones
- Learns from feedback, from the staff, the players and the data, to improve future decisions
- Puts the decision behind them once made, and refuses to let a bad call become a bad week

Works against: unpredictable, arrogance, lack of accountability

35 WORKS ACROSS THE GAME

CARRIES NLF: CULTIVATES COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Leaders build partnerships beyond the club, with other clubs, governing bodies, communities and the wider game, for shared benefit.

- Aligns purpose and priorities with partner clubs, governing bodies, schools and community organisations for shared outcomes
- Anticipates risks and dependencies with partners, from loans and dual registrations to shared facilities and medical networks
- Agrees roles, decision rights and ways of working with partners so that joint work actually works
- Makes it safe for partners to raise concerns early, including about welfare and integrity
- Builds trusted networks across the game through honesty, reciprocity and consistency
- Deals fairly and transparently with other clubs in transfers, loans and shared decisions
- Shares timely, accurate information with partners, including the unwelcome kind
- Resolves disputes with other clubs, agents, the authorities and partners constructively, without compromising principles
- Acknowledges partners' contributions and shares credit for shared success
- Draws on the diversity of other clubs, sports and sectors for ideas and learning
- Reviews partnerships honestly and adapts them as circumstances change
- Builds the links between the professional game and the grassroots, so that each strengthens the other

Works against: isolationism, self-serving, paranoia

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



6.0

FOUR LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership grows as responsibility, risk and complexity grow. The domains stay the same; what changes is how they are applied. The four levels follow the LMA's 360-degree view of the job, you, your team, the game, the industry, and the NLF's four levels of Self, Team, Organisation and Strategic. Titles are a guide, not a gate: a League Two club and a Premier League club have the same four levels with different names on the doors.

1

LEADING YOURSELF

Every player, every member of staff, academy scholars, community-trust coaches and volunteers

NLF LEVEL: SELF · LMA 360: YOU

2

LEADING THE TEAM

Captains and leadership groups, senior players, first-team and academy coaches, heads of department such as medical, performance, analysis, recruitment and academy phase leads

NLF LEVEL: TEAM · LMA 360: YOUR TEAM

3

LEADING THE CLUB

Manager or head coach, sporting and technical directors, academy manager, chief executive and senior staff, the club's board and owners in their relationship with the club

NLF LEVEL: ORGANISATION · LMA 360: THE GAME

4

LEADING THE GAME

Owners and chairs, league executives and boards, The FA, the Independent Football Regulator, the PFA and the LMA, and senior club leaders when they act for the game

NLF LEVEL: STRATEGIC · LMA 360: THE INDUSTRY

The levels are not a hierarchy of worth. Leading yourself well is the foundation every other level stands on, and the best managers and chairs keep practising it. With each level comes a wider sphere of influence, greater complexity and heavier consequences, and therefore a greater need for judgement, strategic thinking and accountability for outcomes. A captain and a manager both lead a team; one does it with almost no formal authority, which is why the captain is the running illustration of leadership without power throughout this framework.

A note on owners and boards. The Football Governance Act 2025 created the Independent Football Regulator, with statutory Owners' and Directors' Tests, financial regulation across the pyramid, protection for club heritage and new standards for fan engagement. Owners and boards sit at Leading the Club in their relationship with their own club and at Leading the Game in their responsibility to football. The Act is a reminder that these are leadership obligations, not paperwork.

> *"We have to change from doubter to believer. Now."*
>
> JÜRGEN KLOPP, ON HIS ARRIVAL AT LIVERPOOL, OCTOBER 2015

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

6.1 LEADING YOURSELF

TYPICAL ROLES
Every player, every member of staff, academy scholars, community-trust coaches and volunteers

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
Personal conduct and influence on those nearby

PRIMARY IMPACT
Standards, trust and example in daily life at the club

Leadership begins before anyone is given an armband. At this level it is the choices a person makes every day: how they train, how they treat teammates and staff, whether they tell the truth about an injury, whether they speak up when something is wrong, and what they do when nobody is watching. It is the foundation every other level stands on, and the level the best managers and chairs keep practising.

KEY PILLARS

OWN YOUR STANDARDS

Preparation, effort, conduct and honesty are personal decisions that others see and copy.

KNOW YOUR OWN GAME

Understand what pressure does to you, what you play for and how your mood lands on others.

LEAD FROM WITHIN

Influence without authority: the teammate who sets the tone, backs others and raises concerns early.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER

- Keeping their word to coaches and teammates
- Treating everyone in the building with respect
- Owning mistakes rather than hiding them

KNOWLEDGE

- Knowing their triggers and composure under pressure
- Reading teammates who have gone quiet
- Mastering their own craft

ACTION

- Working on their own game deliberately
- Speaking up, and making it easier for the next person
- Taking responsibility within the game plan

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

02 Keeps Their Word · **03** Respects Everyone in the Building · **11** Owns the Result · **14** Knows Their Strengths and Triggers · **15** Stays Composed Under Pressure · **25** Works on Their Own Game

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Through doing the job well and reflecting on it: honest review of their own performance and conduct, feedback sought from coaches and peers, a mentor among the senior players or staff, and small leadership roles taken early, such as leading a warm-up, captaining a youth side or representing the squad with the PFA delegate. The academy's education programme under the EPPP is where these habits start for scholars.

PROGRESSION
Towards Leading the Team: taking responsibility for others' standards and performance, as a captain, a senior player, a coach or a head of department.

> *I take it more as a responsibility rather than pressure.*
>
> LEAH WILLIAMSON ON THE ENGLAND CAPTAINCY, JULY 2022

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

6.2 LEADING THE TEAM

TYPICAL ROLES
Captains and leadership groups, senior players, first-team and academy coaches, heads of department such as medical, performance, analysis, recruitment and academy phase leads

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
A team, a squad, a department or a leadership group

PRIMARY IMPACT
The climate and performance of the group

At this level a leader creates the conditions in which others perform: clear intent, cohesion, psychological safety and the routines that sustain performance through a long season. Much of the leadership at this level carries little formal authority. A captain cannot pick the team, fine anyone or sign anyone; a captain leads by credibility, example and the relationships in the room. That is the NLF's third principle made concrete.

KEY PILLARS

SET THE ROOM'S TONE

Standards, respect and challenge in the dressing room are set by who speaks first and what they accept.

COACH THE PERSON

High support and high challenge, feedback that is specific and timely, care for the whole person.

SHARE THE LEADERSHIP

A leadership group that reflects the squad, holds each other accountable and lightens the captain's load.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER

- Challenging a senior player's conduct
- Knowing where the line is in banter and intensity
- Earning the room rather than demanding it

KNOWLEDGE

- Reading the mood before the manager arrives
- Knowing what each player plays for
- Keeping the right distance from the group

ACTION

- Making it safe to speak up and admit mistakes
- The coaching conversation
- Agreeing routines and standards the group polices itself

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

08 Knows Where the Line Is · **12** Earns the Room · **17** Reads the Mood · **26** Gives High Support and High Challenge · **28** Creates a Dressing Room That Speaks Up · **29** Shares the Leadership

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Through the UEFA and FA coaching pathway, the LMA's and PFA's programmes and the leagues' coach development schemes; through being coached and mentored; through structured reflection after games and across blocks of the season; and through feedback from the group they lead. Captains develop by being given real responsibility and real support.

PROGRESSION
Towards Leading the Club: integrating departments, developing other leaders and shaping a culture across a whole club.

> *I said I will learn about your culture and try and adapt to your culture.*
>
> SARINA WIEGMAN, DECEMBER 2022

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

TYPICAL ROLES
Manager or head coach, sporting and technical directors, academy manager, chief executive and senior staff, the club's board and owners in their relationship with the club

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
The whole club as a team of teams

PRIMARY IMPACT
Culture, standards, coherence and the development of other leaders

Leading the club means leading a system: first team, academy, medical, analysis, recruitment, commercial, the community trust and the board. The leader's job is coherence, alignment at scale and the development of other leaders, so that one culture runs from the under-nines to the first team and from the boardroom to the kit room. The LMA guide's warning that a manager must survive before they can win applies here: the club that lasts is the club whose leaders build something beyond themselves.

KEY PILLARS

ONE CLUB, ONE CULTURE
Standards, purpose and ways of working that are the same in the academy, the first team and the office.

DEVELOP THE LEADERS
Captains, coaches and heads of department who lead in their own right and could lead elsewhere.

WIN WELL
Results pursued through purpose, trust, good decisions and partnership, within the game's rules, and judged by conduct in defeat.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER
- Telling an owner no
- Serving the club's long-term good over a short-term result
- Owning results publicly without blaming players or officials

KNOWLEDGE
- Understanding the industry around the club
- Understanding how the club really works
- Reading a whole building's morale

ACTION
- Giving the team and the club something to play for
- Trusting heads of department to lead
- Making the big calls on recruitment and appointments well

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

01 Stands Up for What Is Right · 05 Serves the Game · 22 Understands the Industry Around the Club · 24 Understands How the Club Works · 32 Gives the Team Something to Play For · 33 Trusts People to Play Their Role

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Through the UEFA Pro Licence and the LMA's programmes for managers, including the LMA Leaders Programme; through executive coaching for directors; through a mentor outside the club; through learning from other clubs and other industries; and through honest review of the club's culture, including what players and staff say when they leave.

PROGRESSION
Towards Leading the Game: influence on football beyond the club, in the leagues, The FA, the players' and managers' bodies and the wider system.

> *You must always manage the players at your club as if you are going to be there for the rest of your life, yet at the same time know that you may be sacked tomorrow.*
>
> ARSÈNE WENGER, AS QUOTED IN THE LMA LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

TYPICAL ROLES
Owners and chairs, league executives and boards, The FA, the Independent Football Regulator, the PFA and the LMA, and senior club leaders when they act for the game

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
Football as a system: clubs, leagues, governing bodies, the public

PRIMARY IMPACT
The direction, integrity and public legitimacy of the game

At this level leaders act for the game, not only their organisation. They weigh long-term consequences, hold the game's purpose and integrity, keep its legitimacy with supporters and the public, build partnerships across clubs and nations, and decide well in uncertainty. The Football Governance Act 2025 describes what Parliament now expects of those who own and run clubs; this framework describes the leaders who make that conduct real.

KEY PILLARS

STEWARD THE GAME
The pyramid, the grassroots and the next generation are the game's future, not a cost.

LEGITIMACY
Honesty with supporters and the public, integrity in regulation and the courage to act when it is costly.

PARTNERSHIP
Shared outcomes across clubs, the leagues, The FA, the players' and managers' bodies and communities.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER
- Loyalty to the game's integrity over a member club's interest
- Acting on a review's findings when it is costly
- Humility with players, clubs and supporters

KNOWLEDGE
- Seeing where the game is going
- Understanding where power and influence lie
- Stress-testing strategy against what might change

ACTION
- A purpose for the game beyond its competitions
- Trusting clubs within clear rules
- Linking the professional game and the grassroots

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

04 Stays Loyal, Speaks Up
10 Stays Humble, Keeps Learning
23 Sees Where the Game Is Going
31 Builds a Winning Culture
34 Makes the Big Calls Well
35 Works Across the Game

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Through board development and governance programmes; through non-executive roles in other clubs, sports and sectors; through independent review of the board's own culture and decisions; and through listening to the players, coaches, clubs and supporters the decisions affect.

CONTINUING
Continuing: the leaders of the game keep leading themselves, and the game judges them by how they do it.

> *Our players are role models.*
>
> GARETH SOUTHGATE, DEAR ENGLAND, THE PLAYERS' TRIBUNE, JUNE 2021

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



7.0

THE GAME BEYOND THE FIRST TEAM

The professional game does not lead only itself. Every behaviour in this framework is copied downwards: by the academy player watching the first team, by the Sunday league captain watching the professional, by the child watching the big screen. Gareth Southgate's letter to England supporters before the 2021 European Championship said it in four words: our players are role models. Four years later, in the Richard Dimbleby Lecture, he went further: young people are looking online for direction, and the void is being filled by influencers who do not have their best interests at heart. The same responsibility rests on every coach, captain and chair whose conduct a young person sees.

The trickle-down works in two directions. Downwards, professional leaders set the standard of conduct for the whole game, in how they treat referees, opponents, supporters and each other; the FA Respect programme asks of grassroots parents and coaches what the top of the game too often fails to show. Upwards, the game's next leaders are already in grassroots clubs, academies and playgrounds, and whether they get their chance depends on the opportunities today's leaders create, and on a game whose leadership looks like the people who play it, which is what the Football Leadership Diversity Code asks. Competencies 5 and 27, Serves the Game and Gives People Their Chance, carry that responsibility.

Community trusts, the leagues' community programmes and the academies are where that chance is given or withheld. In schools, the Youth Sport Trust's Leadership Framework describes how young people learn to lead through sport: sharing a vision, managing themselves, understanding others and taking action. Those four functions sit under Leading Yourself and Leading the Team in this framework; a young leader in a playground and a captain in a professional dressing room are on the same continuum. The table shows the join.

YST FUNCTION	YST SKILLS	WHERE IT CONTINUES IN WINNING WELL
SHARE VISION	*imagination, courage, communication, encouragement*	Gives the Team Something to Play For; Gets the Message Across
MANAGE SELF	*self-motivation, integrity, resilience, self-discipline*	Keeps Their Word; Stays Composed Under Pressure; Works on Their Own Game
UNDERSTAND OTHERS	*empathy, fairness, respect, cooperation*	Respects Everyone in the Building; Reads the Mood; Cares for the Person
TAKE ACTION	*responsibility, decision-making, problem-solving, evaluating*	Owns the Result; Makes the Big Calls Well; Shares the Leadership

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



7.1

LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

A framework is only as good as its use. These are the places where this one is designed to do its work, so that a club's policies, programmes and everyday conversations reinforce the same behaviours in the same words, from the academy to the boardroom.

RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENTS

Interview and reference questions built on the competencies, so that character and values are weighed with talent and record when appointing managers, coaches, staff and players. The LMA guide's test: recruit on values and character as much as talent.

CAPTAINS AND LEADERSHIP GROUPS

A shared language for choosing, briefing and supporting captains and leadership groups, and for the conversations between captain, manager and sporting director.

COACHING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Self-assessment, feedback from players and colleagues, coaching and mentoring, and development plans at each level, alongside the UEFA and FA coaching pathway and programmes such as LMA LEAD.

ACADEMY AND PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Leadership behaviours taught and recognised in young players from the foundation phase, linked to the EPPP's education programme and to life after football.

CULTURE AND WELFARE REVIEWS

Player and staff surveys, exit conversations and independent reviews that ask about the behaviours in this framework, so that the signs of a failing culture are seen early.

GOVERNANCE AND THE REGULATOR

Board recruitment, evaluation and development against Leading the Game, and evidence to The FA, the league and the Independent Football Regulator of how the club leads.

A MODEL LEADERSHIP POLICY STATEMENT

[Club] defines leadership as the combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown in everyday behaviour, that inspires players, staff and the whole club to succeed and to win well. Leadership is a shared function of the whole club, distinct from management and from the authority of any role, and everyone in the building can contribute to it. [Club] expects leaders at every level, from the youngest scholar to the board, to play by their values, to set the standard and to lead by example. [Club] will review its recruitment, development, welfare and governance policies so that they reinforce this framework, and will develop leaders at every level through practice, feedback and reflection, not training alone.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

7.2 HOW LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS THE STANDARDS OF THE GAME

The FA, the leagues, the regulator, boards and supporters expect certain things of a club's culture. None is delivered by a process alone. This page shows which competencies most directly support each expectation, so that a safeguarding lead, a club secretary, a board or an assessor can see the linkage at a glance. The behaviours remain leadership behaviours: example, explanation and the way leaders approach the rules, not the compliance tasks themselves, which belong to the club's policies. Clubs outside England substitute their own association's and league's rules.

WHAT THE GAME EXPECTS	WHAT IT RESTS ON	COMPETENCIES THAT MOST DIRECTLY SUPPORT IT
FA Rule E3: conduct and the best interests of the game	Participants who never bring the game into disrepute and never abuse others	01 Stands Up for What Is Right 03 Respects Everyone in the Building 08 Knows Where the Line Is 09 Acts Like a Pro
FA Rule E3.2: aggravated breaches	Discrimination by reference to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability challenged and reported	01 Stands Up for What Is Right 03 Respects Everyone in the Building 20 Understands Every Background in the Squad 28 Creates a Dressing Room That Speaks Up
Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards; The FA's Safeguarding Children Regulations	Protecting young players and vulnerable adults; concerns raised early and acted on	07 Plays Within the Rules 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player 28 Creates a Dressing Room That Speaks Up 11 Owns the Result
The betting and anti-doping rules	Rules upheld by example and explained, breaches challenged and reported	07 Plays Within the Rules 02 Keeps Their Word 09 Acts Like a Pro
Football Leadership Diversity Code	Leadership that looks like the game's players and supporters; fair hiring and real opportunity	03 Respects Everyone in the Building 20 Understands Every Background in the Squad 27 Gives People Their Chance 10 Stays Humble, Keeps Learning
Football Governance Act 2025 and the Independent Football Regulator	Financial sustainability, club heritage and fan engagement as leadership obligations of owners and boards	05 Serves the Game 22 Understands the Industry Around the Club 24 Understands How the Club Works 35 Works Across the Game
Owners' and Directors' Test	Fit and proper custodians who serve the club beyond their own interest	05 Serves the Game 09 Acts Like a Pro 11 Owns the Result
Elite Player Performance Plan	Young players developed as people, with education and welfare alongside football	26 Gives High Support and High Challenge 27 Gives People Their Chance 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player
UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations; league financial rules	Winning within the rules the club plays under	05 Serves the Game 24 Understands How the Club Works 34 Makes the Big Calls Well
The Laws of the Game and FA Respect	Respect for match officials, opponents and the game, on and off the pitch	08 Knows Where the Line Is 03 Respects Everyone in the Building 13 Puts the Team First
Fan engagement and the club's community	Supporters and community heard, and the club's heritage treated as more than a brand	09 Acts Like a Pro 22 Understands the Industry Around the Club 35 Works Across the Game 32 Gives the Team Something to Play For
Winning the right way	Results pursued with purpose and judged by conduct in defeat	31 Builds a Winning Culture 32 Gives the Team Something to Play For 34 Makes the Big Calls Well 13 Puts the Team First

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

7.3 ALIGNMENT TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The National Leadership Framework sets out three domains, nine dimensions, 35 competencies and 323 observable behaviours, applied across four levels of leadership (Self, Team, Organisation, Strategic). Winning Well carries every NLF dimension and every NLF competency, one to one, in the game's own language, with the NLF's behaviours considered and translated and 39 behaviours added for football. Its four levels map to the NLF's four. This is the mapping an NLF award assessor would use.

DOMAIN	NLF DIMENSION → WINNING WELL DIMENSION	WINNING WELL COMPETENCIES, EACH WITH THE NLF COMPETENCY IT CARRIES	
CHARACTER	Values-Driven → **Plays by Their Values**	01 Stands Up for What Is Right *Embodies Moral Courage* 03 Respects Everyone in the Building *Embodies Respect for Others* 05 Serves the Game *Embodies Service*	02 Keeps Their Word *Embodies Integrity* 04 Stays Loyal, Speaks Up *Embodies Loyalty* 06 Cares for the Person, Not Just the Player *Embodies Humanity and Compassion*
CHARACTER	Upholds the Highest Standards → **Sets the Standard**	07 Plays Within the Rules *Acts Lawfully* 09 Acts Like a Pro *Acts Professionally*	08 Knows Where the Line Is *Acts Appropriately*
CHARACTER	Models Exemplary Behaviours → **Leads by Example**	10 Stays Humble, Keeps Learning *Displays Humility* 12 Earns the Room *Displays Influence*	11 Owns the Result *Displays Accountability* 13 Puts the Team First *Displays Selflessness*
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Themself → **Knows Themself**	14 Knows Their Strengths and Triggers *Self-Awareness* 16 Thinks Clearly, Reviews Honestly *Metacognition and Reflective Thinking*	15 Stays Composed Under Pressure *Self-Management and Resilience*
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Others → **Knows the Dressing Room**	17 Reads the Mood *Social Awareness* 19 Keeps Relationships Strong *Relationship Management*	18 Understands What Makes the Group Tick *Team Dynamics* 20 Understands Every Background in the Squad *Cultural Awareness*
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Their Profession → **Knows the Game**	21 Knows Their Craft *Professional and Technical Expertise* 23 Sees Where the Game Is Going *Strategic and National Perspective*	22 Understands the Industry Around the Club *External Context and Stakeholders* 24 Understands How the Club Works *Organisational Systems and Processes*
ACTION	Develops Individuals → **Develops People**	25 Works on Their Own Game *Develops Themselves* 27 Gives People Their Chance *Inspires and Enables Others*	26 Gives High Support and High Challenge *Provides Support and Challenge*
ACTION	Builds Teams → **Builds the Team**	28 Creates a Dressing Room That Speaks Up *Creates Psychological Safety* 30 Gets the Message Across *Communicates Effectively*	29 Shares the Leadership *Cultivates Teamship* 31 Builds a Winning Culture *Builds and Sustains High Performance*
ACTION	Achieves Outcomes → **Wins Well**	32 Gives the Team Something to Play For *Defines and Aligns Purpose* 34 Makes the Big Calls Well *Makes Effective Decisions*	33 Trusts People to Play Their Role *Empowers Others* 35 Works Across the Game *Cultivates Collaboration and Partnerships*

Levels. Leading Yourself = Self · Leading the Team = Team · Leading the Club = Organisation · Leading the Game = Strategic.

Coverage. Nine of nine dimensions and 35 of 35 competencies fully carried. 310 of this framework's 349 behaviours translate the NLF's 323 into the game's setting, directly or in concept within the same competency (for example, the NLF's local and regional policy awareness becomes awareness of the game's economics, broadcasting and regulation; service-user sentiment becomes supporter sentiment). No gaps identified.

Acknowledgement. The National Leadership Framework, its wording and its logo are the intellectual property of the National Leadership Framework CIC and are used with acknowledgement. Winning Well is NLF-informed work for football; where NLF concepts are carried they are translated under the NLF's encouragement to adapt emphasis and language to context while preserving the integrity of its core concepts.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

8.0 SOURCES AND THE LMA CROSS-CHECK

SOURCES

1. The National Leadership Framework CIC, The National Leadership Framework, Version 1.1 (2026), and the NLF Criteria Attainment Guide.
2. League Managers Association, The Leadership Guide (Summer 2015, in partnership with the Premier League), ed. Alice Hoey; contributions by Richard Bevan, Howard Wilkinson, Richard Nugent, Jeremy Snape, Steve Radcliffe, Sue Bridgewater, Philip Hopley, Steve Martin, Dominic Irvine, Tom Castley, Stephen Fletcher, Mark Procter and John Neal.
3. League Managers Association, LMA LEAD short course (six modules) and the LMA Leaders Programme.
4. The Football Association, Rules of The Association, Rule E3 (misconduct and aggravated breaches); Owners and Directors Test, Section 19.
5. The Football Association, In Pursuit of Progress: The FA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2018-21 (the PRIDE values); A Game For All (2021).
6. The Football Association, Football's Safeguarding Children Policy and The FA Safeguarding Children Regulations; Premier League Safeguarding Standards; EFL Safeguarding Standards.
7. The Football Association, Football Leadership Diversity Code (October 2020).
8. Football Governance Act 2025 (c. 21), and the Independent Football Regulator.
9. Premier League, Elite Player Performance Plan (2012).
10. UEFA, Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations, Edition 2025.
11. The International Football Association Board, Laws of the Game.
12. Youth Sport Trust, Leadership Framework (2024).
13. Anita Elberse, "Ferguson's Formula", Harvard Business Review, October 2013, and the Harvard Business School Working Knowledge interview of the same year.
14. Gareth Southgate, "Dear England", The Players' Tribune, 8 June 2021.
15. Gareth Southgate, Dear England: Lessons in Leadership (Century, Penguin Random House, 6 November 2025).
16. Sir Gareth Southgate, "The Beautiful Game: Building Belief and Resilience in a Younger Generation", the Richard Dimbleby Lecture, BBC One, 19 March 2025, as reported by the Press Association.
17. Liverpool FC, "10 years ago today: Jürgen Klopp begins his reign", liverpoolfc.com (2025).
18. LFChistory.net, Bill Shankly quotations.
19. England Football, "Leah Williamson on the captaincy", englandfootball.com, 5 July 2022.
20. England Football, "Wiegman taught herself about English culture before becoming England manager", englandfootball.org, 14 December 2022.
21. ESPN, interview with Emma Hayes, 5 February 2025.
22. John Adair, Action-Centred Leadership (1979).
23. Amy Edmondson, The Fearless Organization (2018).
24. Bruce Tuckman, "Developmental sequence in small groups", Psychological Bulletin (1965).
25. Robert Greenleaf, Servant Leadership (1977).

CROSS-CHECK AGAINST LMA LEAD

The League Managers Association's LEAD short course develops the knowledge and skills needed to manage high-performing teams in six modules. Setting them against this framework's dimensions is a useful test that the framework agrees with the body that has invested most in leadership in the game, without borrowing its text.

LMA LEAD MODULE	WINNING WELL DIMENSIONS
Leading With Purpose	Wins Well; Builds the Team
Understanding Your Leadership	Knows Themself; Leads by Example
High Performing Teams	Builds the Team; Knows the Dressing Room
Effective Communication	Builds the Team (Gets the Message Across)
Developing Individuals	Develops People
Leading Change	Wins Well; Knows Themself

LMA
LEAGUE MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This framework draws with gratitude on the published work of the League Managers Association and its contributors, on the rules and standards set by The Football Association, the Premier League, the EFL and UEFA, on the Youth Sport Trust's work with young leaders, and on the National Leadership Framework CIC for the framework, research base and design principles on which this translation rests.

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk

8.1 MAKING THIS FRAMEWORK YOUR OWN

Adopt it as it stands. A club may use Winning Well as published: the definition, the nine dimensions, the 35 competencies and every behaviour, with the four levels mapped to its own roles. Keep the acknowledgement of the National Leadership Framework and the mapping annex, which is what an NLF award assessor will look for.

Make it yours. Put the club's name in the policy statement and the club's values on page 20. Rewrite the foreword in the chair's or the manager's voice and switch from the third person to "we" and "our" throughout if that suits the club. Use the club's own vocabulary, whether manager or head coach, and add the league's and the club's own rules on page 36. Add behaviours the club needs and mark them; do not remove the NLF concepts, or the mapping will no longer hold.

Bring it to life. A framework on a wall changes nothing. Put it into how captains are chosen and briefed, how managers, coaches and staff are appointed and reviewed, how scholars are taught to lead, how welfare and culture are reviewed, and how the board recruits and evaluates itself. Section 7.1 lists the places where it does its work.

Measure it. Ask players and staff, in surveys and exit conversations, whether they see these behaviours. Watch conduct in defeat. Count the chances given to young leaders and to people under-represented in the game's leadership. These tell a club more about its leadership than any trophy.

> *"I'm a builder and I want to put in place a robust program with the right support.*
>
> EMMA HAYES, ESPN, FEBRUARY 2025

National Leadership Framework

A FRAMEWORK ALONE DOES NOT MAKE GOOD LEADERS. PEOPLE DO.

Organisations bring a framework to life through their people processes: recruitment and induction, conversations about practice, development and coaching, recognition, governance, and learning from what goes wrong. The National Leadership Framework supports, guides and assures that work as an independent, not-for-profit, third-party assurance body.

The NLF Awards at Bronze, Silver and Gold give independent assurance that an organisation's leadership policy, development and culture meet a recognised national standard, and a mark it can show its people, its partners and the public.

Interested in an NLF Award, or in adopting this framework? Speak to the NLF: **www.nlf.org.uk**

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk



WINNING WELL

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR FOOTBALL CLUBS · EXAMPLE FRAMEWORK · 2026

The combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown in their everyday behaviour, that inspires players, staff and the whole club to succeed, and to win well.

National Leadership Framework

Mapped to the National Leadership Framework
www.nlf.org.uk

Example framework for football · © National Leadership Framework CIC 2026 · NLF intellectual property, shared as an illustration · www.nlf.org.uk