SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The purpose of the SLDA is to encourage the understanding of the sustainable application of systems leadership theory in diverse work environments.

SLDA Newsletter Volume 2

April 2022

This newsletter will be published at minimum on a bi-annual basis in January and July. Content contributions from members are welcome, please forward these to Clive Dixon via dixonfreelance@icloud.com

Save the date—SLDA Conference 2022

The operating committee are excited to announce that plans are well underway for this years conference which is scheduled to be held from the **9th—11th September 2022** at the Mercure Hotel, Gold Coast QLD. We will be sending out a flyer with more information including how to book soon, for now please save the date.

SLDA Conference / Fees / Website access – proposed structure for 2022/23

In 2020 the Operating Committee communicated its decision to temporarily suspend membership fee payments in light of the ongoing global situation. The members only section of the website has remained accessible to all members and we hope that you have continued to find the resources there useful.

That deferral still remains in place. However, as everyone’s ability to move about more freely increases, we are now able to start to plan events with more certainty. In light of this, we are proposing to reinstate the application of an annual membership fee as from 1st November this year.

We will also be offering more options in the way the cost of membership may be covered. As you know, the annual conference is the primary activity of the Association involving both members and non-members. Registration for attendance at this year’s conference will cover the annual membership fee, allowing existing members to continue to have access to the Association’s resources which includes the member section of website until next year’s membership renewal date of 1 November 2023.

For any non-members who attend the conference and subsequently apply for membership the same benefit will apply. For those who do not register for the conference, the standard membership fee of $50 pa will be payable.

As from the end of this year, we shall be removing the generic member login to the website and issuing individual login details to financial members, allowing you to set your own passwords and maintain stronger security of the members only section of the site.

Mark Potter ***Secretary, Operating Committee.***

Mark is based in Sydney and has been using Systems Leadership Theory (SLT) in his work for almost 25 years. His introduction to SLT was during his time working in the Commonwealth Bank as it transitioned from the government to private sector. He established M Consulting management consultancy in 2002 and became an Associate of Macdonald Associates at that time. His consulting work has covered a diverse range of industries including Mining, Oil Refining, Rail Transport, Air Transport, Engineering, Local Government, Universities, the Banking & Finance Sector and the Not-for-Profit Sector, working in Australia and North America.

Operating Committee 2022

Our current operating committee members are:

- Phillip Bartlett (Chair)
- Mark Potter (Secretary)
- Clive Dixon (Member development)
- Noel Rawlins
- Sam Symes (Conference)
- David Brewer
- Katie O’Keefe
- Emma Trumper (Secreteriat)

Contact us

e: enquiries@sldassociation.com.au

w: https://www.sldassociation.com

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Membership Development HUBs

The Operating Committee plans to establish hubs in Melbourne, Newcastle, Brisbane, Cairns, North America and England to give members in these areas the opportunity to meet to engage in the association's development activities. We are contacting members to act as convenors for each of the Hubs.

We hope to be ready for the first developmental activity in July when we will provide members with an update of association activities, including a preview of the conference and Ian will present his thoughts on the role of Systems Leadership in organisations coming out of the pandemic.

The task assignment for the establishment of the Membership Development Hubs is included below, please contact Clive Dixon via dixonfreelance@icloud.com if you have any questions or are interested in starting a hub.

Context

The **purpose** of the SLDA is to encourage the understanding of the sustainable application of Systems Leadership in diverse work environments. The Operating Committee organises activities to develop the capability of members to use Systems Leadership.

These have taken the form of an annual conference, working together courses, master classes, webinars and podcasts. Activities have been limited during the last three years due to the pandemic. This has also resulted in the association trying online formats for development activities.

In 2022, the Operating Committee plans to provide a combination of face to face and online developmental activities. The strength and success of our association depends on our ability to engage productively with each other. To this end, opportunities will be provided for members who live in common geographical areas to meet and engage in development activities.

Purpose

To engage members and other interested people in common geographical areas in the capability development activities of the Systems Leadership Development Association.

Quantity of Output

Hubs in Melbourne, Newcastle, Brisbane, Cairns, North America and England.

Quality of Output

A Convenor will arrange for members and interested people to meet in each HUB to engage in developmental activities delivered through the association.

The Convenor will liaise with the Operating Committee to determine which developmental activities the members of the HUB will join.

The Convenor will contact members in the HUB and arrange a suitable venue and technical requirements for the developmental activity.

The Convenor will provide feedback from participants in the HUB to the Operating Committee on the value of activities and suggestions for further activities.
Developmental activities organised in the HUB will include a follow up discussion and a social/networking element such as dinner, drinks.

A typical HUB may involve members using a meeting room at a venue/hotel to join a webinar on a particular topic of interest in Systems Leadership. Following the presentation members may have a short discussion of the main points, followed by dinner at the venue.

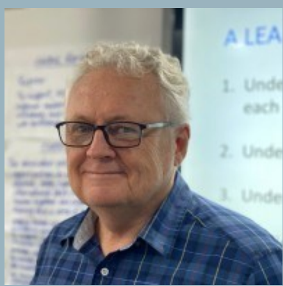
It is expected that the cost of the HUB meeting will be minimal, where the meeting room is provided free of charge in exchange for members dining at the venue. Likewise, the webinar will require basic technology of a laptop or data projector. Keep it simple!

Resources

Member of the Operating Committee
SLDA membership list
SLDA website
SLDA planned Development Activities

Time

The first developmental activity is planned for July in 2022.



Clive Dixon, *Growth and Development , Operating committee*

Clive has extensive experience in school education as a teacher, principal, principal supervisor and regional director. He works with schools and other organisations, delivering training and coaching school leaders and executives to improve their capability to create positive, productive cultures. His special interests include organisational change,
leadership development, pedagogy and the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Task Assignment as Social Process

Context
Very few things drive as much confusion in organisations as misunderstandings about the Tasks people have been asked to undertake. Most often this occurs completely innocently of any malicious motive or intent but can result in very negative views being formed about individuals and/or groups; not to mention potentially great wastage of resources (people, time, money, etc) in undertaking the wrong thing and/or reworking. Effectively formulating and assigning tasks is pivotal to being an effective leader (and team member). The model presented here provides a framework for enhancing this effectiveness.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to provide an explanation of the key aspects of the Task Assignment process so that people can more effectively apply it in their work.

Work and Tasks
In Systems Leadership Theory (SL), **Work** is defined as: "Turning Intention into reality". This is essentially a process of a person utilising their discretion to develop options and make decisions to move towards achieving an output. *(ie taking ideas or concepts and making them real / tangible).*

A Task (contrasted with a Role) is: **"An assignment to achieve a specific output within a given time, with given resources and within specified limits."** In other words a one-off defined piece of work.

So, the core of "work", as we look at it, is developing and selecting a pathway (how) that moves us towards a goal (what). Obviously developing useful alternatives and selecting one that has a high chance of success are part of how well we do this. Indeed, our opinion about another person's performance does not normally just focus on if they got to the end point but also on the way (how) that they got there.

There is a qualitative difference in the way each of us performs the work to produce outputs – This will be the **Process** (pathway) they pursued as well as the **Outcome**. The way a Task is constructed and described will have an influence on the way I choose to do this.
To work most effectively, I need to have the opportunity to hold the accountability for that work. The Organisation through my manager will also be looking for me to accept accountability for that Task so that my work can align and integrate with that of others to achieve plans over time.

Some Pre-conditions need to be in place for me to accept the accountability to perform work (or if I don't, to have a meaningful discussion about why that is not acceptable behaviour).

They can be described as follows:
- Clarity of the work
- Capability of person assigned the work
- Resources to do the work effectively (including authority)
- Belief that I will be reviewed fairly

These refer directly to the 3 questions at work:
- What am I meant to do?
- How am I going?
- What is my future?

SL proposes that to the extent that I can't' answer these questions, I will struggle to fully apply myself fully to my work – what we now call engagement or discretionary effort.

Key Issues
The following are significant contextual issues
- This is a social process between people. You cannot "program" a task to be done by someone as you could with a PC or PLC.
- It is about having people accept accountability.
- They way it is done (our work choices) clearly will effect mythologies and culture
- It is a two way process
- Therefore this process is not necessarily simple

It is clear from the above that having a clear framework for assigning tasks can help this process go well. Also that there is 'work' to be done in the formulation (see below) and choosing how to assign the Task.

Task Assignment
Assuming the Task is clear in the mind of the assigner, it needs to be correctly assigned. This may also involve other people – in fine-tuning parameters or issues or may just be the Assignee and Assigner.

The core components of a successful Task Assignment are as follows:

- **Context** (including any unusual Limits)
- **Purpose**
- Output – in terms of **Quality** and **Quantity**
- **Resources** available

Time for completion

These can be abbreviated to **CPQQRT**.

Components of a Task

- **C** The organisational environment in which it is being done
- **P** The summary What and Why for the task
- **Q** Quality of outcome
- **Q** Quantity of outcome
- **R** Resources
- **T** Time

The Context and Purpose set the scene for the dimensions of the Task – the Quality, Quantity, Resources and Time.
They give information about why the Task is important and what may occur along the pathway while the dimensions describe the Task itself.

The interrelationship between the four dimensions is what tells me what the priorities are and where to aim my capability.

Context

The Context is the broad environment in which the Task will occur. It tells me what's going on around my work that could impact on it and allows me to make an informed decision about any changes in the situation as I go along.
It also tells me where my work fits in the larger picture and who else it impacts. It could include:

- How the Business is performing
- What the current priorities are
- Likely changes that may occur during the course of the Task
- How the Task relates to other things going on
- Where and How the output will be used and its desired impact
- How this Task relates to other work in the Team and Business
- Any Limits which are beyond the normal for this area/person
- Further explanation of the reason for the Task and its importance

Purpose

The Purpose of the Task should be able to be expressed as a one sentence statement without using "and" or "or". In other words it should point clearly to only one Purpose for the Task. It needs to express What it is and Why it needs to be done.

A good understanding of the Context and Purpose (including the broader business context) allows people to make clearer and more confident decisions in the absence of being able to ask for clarification or if the situation changes during the work).

Output (Quality & Quantity)

The output should be specified in terms of "How many" (Quantity) and "what they're like" (Quality). The determination of these will be influenced by what the output is to be used for. It may be that the "customer" of the output should be a part of this definition. There is an obvious trade-off between these two aspects of output and the Assignor needs to be clear what this is.

The quality dimension can also have aspects like safety, environmental and cultural outcomes within it. We may need a project completed to a set technical standard but also to a safety requirement and done in such a way as to preserve relationships with another group or set up a platform for future work

Resources

The resources are the things I have at my (organization) disposal to do the work. The lack or over-abundance of them will strongly influence the options I generate and therefore the Pathway I choose. Typically there are some physical resources but there are also other types. These may include:

- People
- Equipment
- Time – i.e. person hours or availability of people
- Access to information or testing
- Authority

An important aspect here is not to assume people need all the resources they feel they might. This dimension also interrelates with output – especially as regards cost of the output. Equally don't always assume cheapest is best – (see Q & Q)

Time

The time specified here is maximum time to completion – in other words an end point for the Task. This is vital as the pathway that I choose is very much affected by how long I have.
Often people do not adequately set this parameter relying on more vague notions like, "as soon as possible" or "soon as you can". The dilemma in phrases such as these is that they assume that both people have the same set of information and priorities in their heads – which is rarely the case. They lead to misunderstanding and an unclear sense of the priority of the Task.

Further, the lack of a know end point gives me (as assignee) few ways to judge between alternative pathways. To do so I have to make a judgment about your preferred timing.
Understanding the Work/Task

Once the task is clearly formulated and assigned it is **vital** that there is a check for understanding. The "work" of both people in this transaction will be effected by the task not being clear (in both technical and social terms) so, the accountability for being clear on the task exists on both sides of the relationship. The Assignor's work is to have assigned the task clearly.

This implies asking for and taking on board any feedback about the task or its parameters during the assignment process and attempting to make sure that the assignee has the same picture of the task (its parameters, priority and importance) as she/he does. They also need to clearly set the expectations for reporting on progress.

The Assignee's work includes having made good attempts to understand the task being assigned.
This could include; providing feedback about the task – its purpose or parameters, giving input to modify some of the parameters based on their own experience and clarifying any aspects of the task with which they are unsure.

Further, once they are engaged in the work, they are accountable to report back to the assignor if the context changes significantly – i.e. if they feel it makes the task undoable, or the assignor would not want the task completed if they knew of the change in context.

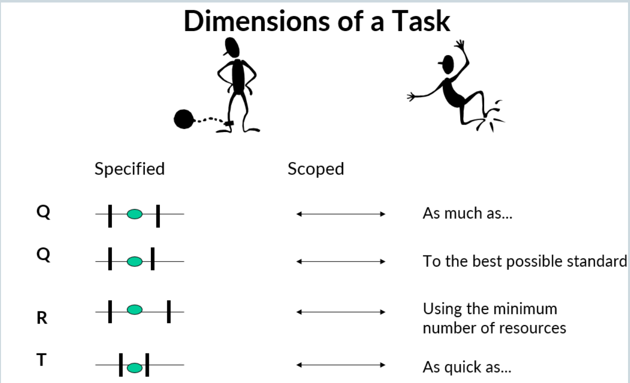
As can be seen from the above, the formulation and assignment of a task is an "Active" process for both people. Both have clear accountabilities in the process (and therefore authorities that can be derived to assist in their accomplishment).

Task Assignment and Priorities
As mentioned, these four parameters of the Task are interrelated. " You can have as many as you want, or as cheap as you can, or the best quality possible, or as fast as possible – but it's impossible to have all four!"

It is vital to give the assignee clarity about the balance between them. Each dimension can be **specified** (no variation wanted) or **scoped** (within a prescribed range).
Specifying obviously closes down discretion while scoping leaves more discretion for the person. However, if all the dimensions are scoped, it is likely that there will not be sufficient direction about the priorities the assignor requires.

As a general rule if three dimensions are **Specified** (i.e. defined tightly within a range) and the other **Scoped** (i.e. left to the assignee to do their best at), this gives a clear indication as to where the assignor would like energy to go in developing a cleverer solution.

E.g. – Output to this Q & Q and within these R's (Specified) but the quicker the better with next Friday as the latest (T scoped). Very clearly the work of the leader here is to determine the tasks to be done, set the context and direction and then monitor and support progress, leaving the person assigned the tasks to do the "work".

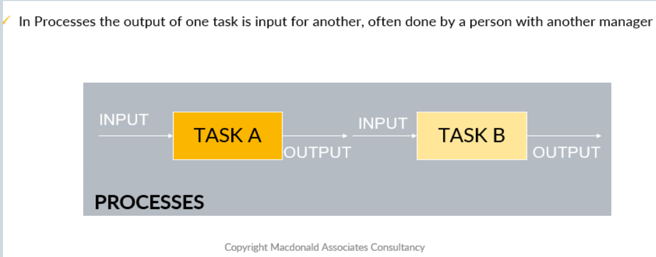


Tasks Across Role Boundaries
Many tasks in organisations occur across the boundary of a Work Group, Team or Department. Moving along the process flow of the business people normally engage in work whose output is the key input for another's work – e.g. selling and product or service with a delivery promise which must be worked to; mining ore to a blend that is necessary for the refining/treatment process.

Importantly from this, most of "my" work impacts on other people's ability to perform their work and vice versa. So the formulation and assignment of my tasks has to take this into account.

Some of the issues that arise from this include:

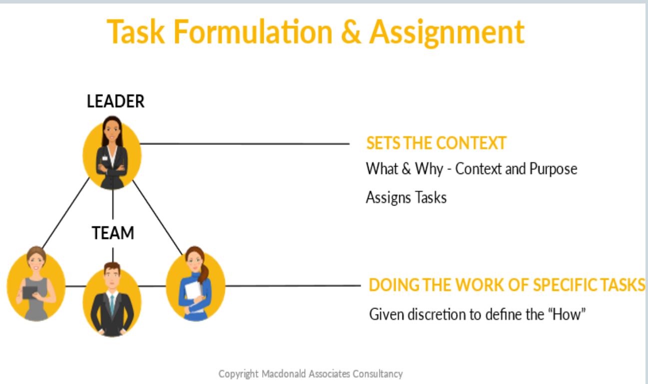
- How do I have input into how/when resources arrive for me?
- How do those I pass my output onto have input into the Q&Q of my Task?
- What are the authorities that we need for this relationship to be clear?
- How do I resolve priorities if the Task does not come directly from my manager?
- What are the monitoring and communication processes?



Task Formulation

We have said above that the "formulation" of Tasks is in fact "work" for the person assigning. This means that they have to consider options (in limits) and make a decision about how best to do it. They have to consider many factors and also be clear on how this Task fits in with their Plan or other Tasks within their own work.

This is clearly the work of the assignor but may involve others including the assignee. Utilizing effective Team Process she/he can involve people in discussing issues, ideas and options or performing sub-Tasks involving research for the main Task.



Whilst there is sufficient material in "formulation" to have a separate paper some of the main issues are highlighted below.

The process of involvement can have many benefits. These include:

- Gathering a wide and more useful set of issues and ideas
- Developing people's ownership / commitment for the work to be performed
- Allowing for discussion of priorities and
- Providing a chance for more effective decisions about the parameters of the Task and their interaction.
- With or without involvement the Assignor needs to be as clear as possible about what they need done and why.

Issues to be considered include:

- What really needs to be done here – Priority?
- What is the capability of the person
- What reasons do I have for assigning this to them – e.g. expediency, development, quality concerns, experience, risk?
- What needs to be done to match the complexity of the Task to the person?
- What limits are there which they won't know about?
- What is the key variable here? (See QQRT)
- Why is this important – for me, the organization?
- What sort of reporting and coaching system is needed here?

Conclusion

The above is not trying to suggest that every time we assign anything to anyone that we have to formally lay out the CPQQRT. It does suggest, though, that there will be times – especially new, complex or one-off, important tasks – when it will pay to do so. In other situations the discipline of checking if we have covered off the dimensions of the model and that the other person shares them in understanding involved will add to clarity and potentially commitment. It should help avoid situations of rework or the expenditure of effort on something that does not resemble what was wanted.

Reference: Systems Leadership (Creating Positive Organisations) – Macdonald, Burke & Stewart; Gower, 2006

Phillip Bartlett Chair of the operating committee.

Phillip is the MD of Response Learning whose purpose is supporting people, organisations and communities to improve their effectiveness.

Membership update

We would like to extend a very warm welcome to our newest members who have joined us in the previous 3 months:

Eleanor Bark

Alison Bradley

David Hubbert