



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 3

February 2023

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](mailto:dixonfreelance@icloud.com)

## Welcome to 2023!

Hello and welcome to 2023! On behalf of the operating committee (OC) I want to thank you for your continued participation in the Association. As we continue to emerge from the restrictions of the previous couple of years, we are looking to reengage with all of you across a broader range of activity.

We recently met as an OC and identified who will be looking after each area of activity, this matrix is included on the following page in this newsletter. For those unfamiliar, the OC looks to organise a range of activities to support the purpose of the association - effective application of systems leadership across a range of industries and settings. Input into this discussion comes from sessions such as annual conference and also directly from you, the members. We look as much as possible to respond to the needs which people bring to us and are keen for all members to participate as is feasible for them. We see a large part of our role as being a conduit for input and participation; e.g. last year's conference subcommittee of six people only contained two OC members. Can I ask therefore, that you look at the matrix of activities and make contact with us to indicate areas in which you would be happy to provide support and input. Our intention is then to form effective

sub-teams to work on these areas.

This year we are also going to look for the opportunity to hold a function/conference in North America as well as in Australia. While exact planning for this is not commenced yet the indications are that this will be in quarter three of the year.

We are also keen to explore the continued establishments of hubs which can operate across geography and time zones to allow for more accessible conversations to support members in a broader range of locations. We had success with the development activity based on this design last year and will look to run several more across 2023. We are also keen to talk with any members who would be interested in supporting the creation of an SLDA hub in their region.

Beyond this we are always interested in the views of the members about how we can provide value around and purpose and would welcome any comments or correspondence around that.

**Phillip Bartlett** *Chair of the Operating Committee.*



## Membership fee & website password

As previously communicated to members, the decision was made by the operating committee to re-instate the annual membership fee of \$50 for 2023. Members who attended the conference had the annual membership fee included as part of the conference cost. Those people who were unable to make it to the conference will have received an invoice due for payment by 31 January 2023.

For the first time, we have provided the ability for members to pay via credit/debit card or direct credit to the association bank account. We have had a great response and thank all those who have paid to date.

Now that the due date for payment has passed, the password for access to the members only resources area of the SLDA website will be changed shortly and all financial members will be advised via email. Anyone who subsequently becomes a member or pays their 2023 membership fee will of course be likewise informed.



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

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## Matrix of Operating Committee roles for 2023

As mentioned in Phillip's welcome message, the Operating Committee met recently to identify which operating committee members will look after specific areas of activity for 2023. Please see below the matrix of roles. We would like to

invite members to get in touch with us if you are happy to support a particular area(s). Please contact us via email to [enquiries@sldassociation.com](mailto:enquiries@sldassociation.com) to indicate where you would be happy to provide support and a member of the Operating Committee will be in touch to organise sub-teams for the work.

Role	Name										x = Lead  x = support
	Phillip Bartlett	Mark Potter	Clive Dixon	Katie O'Keeffe	Noel Rawlins	David Brewer	Sam Symes	Emma Trumper	Andrew Moore	Sarah Cox	
Chair	X						x				
Association Secretary (Including Treasurer, IT Admin / Website maintenance)		X						x			
Conference Committee (sub roles for North America and Au)	X North America						X Australia		x	x	
Member Development including engagement / Networking				x		x NZ		x		X	
Newsletter			X					x			
Librarian (Development of framework/systems and content)					X		x				
External relationship development				X							

## Membership update

We would like to extend a very warm welcome to our newest members who have joined us in the previous 9 months:

Ellen Cardias	Belinda Hampton	Zoe Disselkoen
Jennifer Lawrence	Cathy Campbell	Natalie Fisher
Robert Blanckensee	Emma Hayes	Mia Hardcastle
Justin Kuskie	Aditya Chaudry	Katie Davies
Yolanda Mclean	Kerry Rule	Nafeesa Zulfqar
Suberia Bowie	Bree Killeen	Kirsty Smith
Emma Merritt	Carly Jones	Dani Harris
Vanessa Dempsey	Kylie Gurney	Matt Kaged
Paul Hood	John Grisby	Samantha Walshman
Ellen Downs	Janet Austen	Lucy Wall
Max Roche	Karen O'Brien	Jess Fraser
Melanie Hyde	Cate Whiting	Tom Norton
	Linda Scott	

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## 2023 Systems Leadership Conference Australia save the date

After a 3-year hiatus, over 50 delegate members gathered at the Gold Coast to reflect, connect and progress the work of Systems Leadership globally. We were treated to presentations of extraordinary systems leadership-led work outcomes and learnings through unprecedented work disruptions in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.



The SLDA conference committee has confirmed the dates for the 2023 conference, to be held in Australia.

**When:** Friday 8 September—Sunday 10 September

**Where:** To be confirmed

The committee will meet frequently throughout the course of the year so many updates will be available. In the interim, we ask members to 'save the date' and share with colleagues.

Furthermore, we will be reaching out to members and business partners to present at the conference in 2023. If this may be something you have or your business partners have considered please contact the committee at [enquiries@sldassociation.com](mailto:enquiries@sldassociation.com).

A member of the committee will be in touch with you to discuss this further.

We look forward to seeing you in September 2023!



**Sam Symes Conference Committee Australia Operating**

## Learning and Development Events

We have a very exciting year ahead for our members, the following provides you with some information on the currently scheduled events.

Please email us at [enquiries@sldassociation.com](mailto:enquiries@sldassociation.com) if you are interested in attending any of our events or would like further information.

Details	Event	Facilitator	Cost
Location: Online Date: Tuesday 28th February 2023	Introduction to Systems Leadership	Phillip Bartlett	\$89
Location: Brisbane Date: Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> April Duration: 1 Day	Master Class	Ian McDonald	\$200
Location: Tablelands Date: Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> April Duration: 1 Day	Master Class	Ian McDonald	\$200
Location: Online Date: Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> May 2023 Duration: 8am – 11am (AEST)	Introduction to Systems Leadership	TBA	\$89

### Please note:

- the online sessions are open to members and non-members, we invite you to share the opportunities with your colleagues/friends.
- Master Class sessions are subject to the number of participants, we suggest you act quickly to ensure your seat is secured.

Our intention is to provide you with relevant and useful learning sessions, please do not hesitate to contact us at [enquiries@sldassociation.com](mailto:enquiries@sldassociation.com) with any suggestions or requests.

**Sarah Cox Membership Development Operating Committee**



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## Interruption and distraction

The consequences for our work and some practical solutions.

*Or How I can get my work done, and done well?*

*Richard Huelin, June 2022*

It's hard to think of a job more affected by interruption than that of a school leader. We accept that regular interruptions to our work are expected and inevitable.

*"I have little to no control over that aspect of my role; it's just a part of the job."*

*"A lot of the stuff I do is meeting the needs of others."*

It can seem that those who rely on your assistance, advice, counsel etc. think you should stop what you're doing so that you can help them.

Interruptions and distractions have 2 primary effects on our work. The first is on the quality of our work. The second is on the quantity of work we get done *at work*.

The two parts of this article are designed to influence your thinking and practice regarding interruptions to your work:

1. By sharing with you some of the most recent brain function research about the impact of interruption on your ability to perform successfully in your role, and
2. By explaining how you can mitigate endless interruptions to your work.

*Why?*

1. There are profound cognitive effects which result from interruption and distraction. As a leader, you are thinking and making critical decisions constantly. Can you afford to be doing this sub-optimally?
2. Both your work and non-work lives will be more fulfilling if you can successfully complete all (or at least most) of the work you plan to while you are at work.

*There are two distinct objectives in reducing interruption and distraction:*

1. Reducing cognitive underperformance.
2. Getting a lot more work done during the work day.

**Part 1.** What recent research tells us about interruption and distraction, in terms of our cognitive capability:

*Acknowledgement:* The majority of the material for this article has been drawn from "Stolen Focus", by author Johann Hari, 2020. It is compelling reading and heavily researched. I have only extracted themes which relate directly to the work of a leader in an organisation.

### **Multi-tasking:**

Multi-tasking is a fallacy. Computers can do it. We can't. And we can't learn to do it. It is not possible to think about 3, 5 or 10 things at a time. Our brains produce only 1 or 2 thoughts in our conscious mind at once. We have very limited cognitive capacity. It's not changeable; it's a function of brain structure.

### **Task Switching:**

When people think they're doing several things at once, they are actually 'juggling'. They task switch, back and forth. With each switch, they must reconfigure their brain.

Task switching comes with profound and costly effects that reduce your ability to do your job.

#### **1. The cost of switching:**

You're reviewing a document and an email pops up on your screen. You glance at the email, then you go back to your reviewing.

In that moment ...

Your brain has to reconfigure. You have to remember what you were doing before and what you were thinking. That takes a little bit of time.

When you do this, your performance drops. You are slower. You lose the time it takes to scan the email subject and the time it takes to refocus.

One study by Hewlett Packard demonstrated that 'technological distraction', emails, texts, and phone calls, caused an average drop in IQ of 10 points. (That's about twice the effect of smoking cannabis).

#### **2. The screw up effect:**

When you task switch, errors that otherwise wouldn't happen start to creep in, because our brains are error prone. When you switch tasks, your brain must backtrack, pick up and figure out where it left off, and it can't do that perfectly. Instead of spending critical time thinking deeply, your thinking is more superficial, because you need to correct errors and backtrack.

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**3. The creativity drain:**

New thoughts and innovations come from your brain shaping new connections from what you've seen, heard and learned. Your mind, given free, undistracted time, automatically thinks back over everything it has absorbed and forms links between those things in new ways. This happens subconsciously.

If you spend a lot of brain processing time task switching and error correcting, you have less time to follow your associative links to new places and original and creative thoughts.

**4. Diminished memory:**

A UCLA comparative study demonstrated that people who were asked to perform two tasks at once could later remember less of what they did than the group who performed one task. It takes mental space and energy to convert experiences into memories. If you spend energy on task switching, you'll remember and learn less.

Another study of 136 students involved their sitting a test. Some had their phones off and some had them on, receiving intermittent texts. The latter group performed 20% worse on the test. Other studies have shown this distracting effect to be up to 30%.

*Having your phone on and your email notifications on while you're at your desk or computer reduces your cognitive capability significantly, because you'll be continuously task switching.*

*And if you think you are good at task switching or getting better at it over time ...*

*I'm sorry, but you're wrong.*

**How often are people typically task switching?**

The average office worker spends 40% of their time wrongly believing they're multi-tasking.

The average American worker is distracted every three minutes.

Uninterrupted time is becoming rare. One study showed that most office workers *never* get one uninterrupted hour in a day.

*Does this sound familiar?*

*And ... interruptions double your error rate.*

*So what's the answer?*

To do your job well, you need to be able to focus on one thing at a time; not all day, every day, but at least for a significant proportion of your work time.

You might say that you have little or no control over your time, but the truth is you *can* create space in your week where you have uninterrupted time to do *your* work (The work for which you are directly accountable). You will need to alter some of your behaviours *and* to influence some colleagues to change some of their behaviours. This will benefit them as well. You'll create some dissonance, but you'll be able to explain to your colleagues how they will also be better off.

**Interruptions** are often unavoidable in school leadership roles, but *you can* reduce the frequency dramatically through the expectations you set, the behaviours you model and how you plan and carry out your work.

**Distractions** can be substantially minimised by changing your behaviour. You have control over the things you *allow* yourself to be distracted by, though there may be informal systems which cause you to feel a degree of obligation to do certain things. This might require a system change. For example, *"The people I work with expect that I'll respond immediately to a phone call, text or email."*

*If you create uninterrupted time to focus your thinking, you will improve the quality of your work, accomplish more and have greater work satisfaction. Changing behaviour comes through practice. You may experience dissonance and change requires consistent and persistent application. And you may initially find it difficult to stay focused, but that will pass.*

*See you in Part 2.*

*Regards, Richard.*

**Richard Huelin , Consultant**

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## VALPEO: A new, “SLT-friendly” way of assessing capability?

By Andrei Stepanov<sup>1</sup>

### The Task

For any organisation that embarks on the Systems Leadership journey, becoming better at assessing individual capability is a mission-critical task. To this end, the Systems Leadership Theory (SLT) provides conceptual underpinnings in three areas:

- the five levels of capability (MPA, knowledge, technical skills, social process skills, application)
- the frame of reference of Work Levels used to assess role complexity and individual MPA,
- the fundamentals of a system for assessing potential internally emphasizing the role of the manager’s manager (M+1).

### The Dual Challenge

My experience shows that such a work-levels-based internal “M+1” system for assessing potential can be very powerful – but also that invariably there are two challenges.

The first challenge is the time and effort it takes to develop the “M+1” system to a level where both senior leadership and HR have full confidence in it as the main way of assessing talent. This level of confidence can only be reached once the organisation has achieved a critical mass in three areas:

- The organisational structure must be aligned with Work Levels,
- The “M+1”s must get to know their organisational “grandchildren” well enough to make informed judgements of their potential,
- The current capability of “M+1”s must be aligned with the complexity of their roles.

Meeting these three pre-conditions takes time and effort. Meanwhile, the organisation will continue to make appointment mistakes costing 5-15 times<sup>2</sup> annual salary each. These mistakes can fuel opposition to the “M+1” system and cast doubts on its validity even in the minds of its proponents.

The second challenge is that this system is not applicable to external hires. For organisations that look for strategic leadership talent both internally and externally, this can be a major limitation.

That’s why most organisations, in addition to the “M+1” assessment system want to have the option of using an independent assessment of potential they can trust:

- as a safety net during the build-up of the “M+1” system,
- as a second opinion for critical promotions / high-potential employees, and
- as a permanent feature for recruitment.

### A Possible Solution?

To overcome the dual challenge, I have been on the lookout for SLT-compatible external assessment solutions that can complement the “M+1” system. In my view, such a solution must meet four criteria:

- Assess MPA and do so in the frame of reference of Work Levels.
- Cover other capability elements, especially social process skills and application.
- Give insights to the degree of compatibility of a person’s value system with an organisational culture using the SLT’s six universal values and a mythological lens.
- Be scalable.

The search for the best approach is still ongoing. Based on the four criteria above, the solution I have so far found to be most helpful, relevant, and conceptually compatible is called VALPEO.

VALPEO (VALuing PEople and Organisations) has been developed by Fabiaan Van Vrekhem of Accord Group (Belgium). Its “people” component is focussed on studying three “orientations” of an individual:

[Complexity Orientation](#) that integrates concepts of vertical development formulated by Elliott Jaques and Robert Kegan.

[Values Orientation](#), based on the framework of fundamental human values developed by Shalom Schwartz.

[Behavioural Orientation](#): based on the widely accepted five-factor model of personality<sup>3</sup> that VALPEO has translated into business-friendly language.



My analysis shows that against the four criteria outlined above VALPEO stacks up as follows:

Criterion	VALPEO Compatibility
Assessment of MPA using Work Levels as frame of reference	Complexity Orientation uses seven complexity levels with enough similarity to SLT to ensure interoperability
Assessment of social process skills and application	Among forty-nine dimensions used in Values and Behavioural Orientations, 17 can be used to calibrate a mythological lens and assess individual fit to culture against SLT's six universal values, 15 can be used to assess social process skills, 5 can be used to assess application.
Insights to individual compatibility with organisational culture	
Applicability at scale	Online surveys for Complexity, Values and Behavioural orientations are available in six languages. Validation interviews are carried out by a growing <a href="#">community</a> of over 30 accredited partners based in 10 locations across Europe, Middle East, Africa, and North America.

**Next Step**

For those SLDA members who would like to learn more about VALPEO and evaluate its utility for the organisations they work with, we will be happy to organise a more detailed presentation and discussion. To give us an idea of attendance and help us focus on what's most useful to you, please complete a 1-minute survey [by clicking on this link](#).



**Andrei Stepanov** *Accredited International Partner, Leadership Assessment & Development, Valpeo*  
*For more information please contact [andrei.stepanov@gmail.com](mailto:andrei.stepanov@gmail.com)*

<sup>1</sup>[Andrei](#) joined Macdonald Associates Consultancy team in 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Mallory T (2018). What does a Bad Executive Hire Cost You. Acadia Associates, Atlanta, GA [http://www.acadiaassociates.com/Cost\\_of\\_a\\_Bad\\_Exec\\_Hire.pdf](http://www.acadiaassociates.com/Cost_of_a_Bad_Exec_Hire.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> as developed by multiple researchers, most notably, Fiske (1949), Norman (1967), Smith (1967), Goldberg (1981), and McCrae & Costa

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