LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

By Caroline Webb

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GROUPS

A COMPANION TO THE BOOK

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I wrote *Leadership Intelligence* to be used, not just read. And to turn the book's advice into an actual change in how you lead, it really helps to talk it through with other people. Getting advice and encouragement from others makes a big difference when you're trying something new.

So I'm delighted you're considering bringing a group together around the book. You might be putting together a book group of colleagues who meet every few weeks. You might be an intact team interested in working through the chapters together. Or you might be organizing a cohort of a leadership development program, where the book is the spine of a longer learning journey. I've tried to make this guide speak to all those settings, with a few tips to each of those three situations along the way.

You might notice that a lot of what follows is actually a reflection of the advice in the book itself. I'm often using the *Leadership Intelligence* frameworks to structure sessions, as well as to discuss the book's contents—very "meta." I hope the guidance below is helpful.

Thanks for considering using Leadership Intelligence in your group. Do let me know how you get on.

PART 1: SETTING UP YOUR GROUP

Which kind of group are you?

Everything in this guide should work for all three settings, but there are a few considerations specific to each type of group.

A book group or peer group: people from different organizations, meeting because you're interested in the ideas. The great advantage here is candor: nobody is anybody's boss, so people can describe their real problems in real detail. The thing to watch is follow-through, since no one will notice back at the office if you don't act on what you decided. If you do a proper close (see below), it's more likely to give people momentum toward applying the ideas.

An intact team: you and your colleagues, reading it together. The advantage is that you can change how you actually work, on the spot: agree a new meeting norm, a new feedback habit, a new way of delegating, and it takes effect on Monday. The thing to watch is candor, especially when the team's leader is in the room. Choose your ground rules carefully (see below), and if you're the leader, go first when it comes to admitting what you find hard.

A leadership development program or cohort: participants from across an organization, working through the book alongside other content over weeks or months. This setting can give you a lot of benefits: people can often be frank because they're not in the same reporting line, while their peer-to-peer advice is hopefully well-tuned to your shared organizational context. Just make sure to look out for ways to connect the *Leadership Intelligence* frameworks to language that's already in use across the organization.

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Choosing what to read

It's a big book, and it may not be easy to discuss the whole thing in a single conversation! It might serve you well to pick a few chapters to major on as a group.

You could ask everyone to vote on the chapters they most want to discuss — I describe a quick way to run that vote below* — and work through the winners in as many sessions as you have available.

If you do have the option of structuring a series of discussions rather than just one, here are a few ways you could structure a series:

The trifecta (3 sessions) – Wisdom, Inspiration, Resilience. For each session, read the core science section plus one chapter from that part of the book.

The team development approach (3-6 sessions). As above but you make sure to pick the three team chapters (Ch 7 for wisdom, Ch 14 for inspiration, and Ch 21 for resilience). This suits an intact team that wants to change how it works together rather than focus on individual skills. For even more impact you could double up, and have two sessions for each of the three themes of wisdom, inspiration, and resilience: one session to talk about what to do differently as a team, and then one session to review progress and tweak the approach.

The full journey (21 sessions, every other week). One chapter at a time, in order. It's a real commitment, but for a leadership program running across a year, it gives you a complete curriculum with almost no design work required.

The red dot technique, for choosing chapters

One way to help your group agree on what to read is the transparent voting technique I mention in Chapter 7. Write up the candidate chapters where everyone can see them. Give everybody three votes, and ask them to put a red dot next to their favorites — a sticker if you have one, a marker pen if you don't. People can spend all three votes on one chapter if they feel strongly. Why is this helpful? Because it plays to the human brain's need for fairness, and it gives everyone a say in the focus of the session, which meets everyone's need for autonomy. Both of those make people more invested in the discussion that follows.

Before the session

- **Ask people to read the relevant section beforehand.** If people are short of time, you could suggest they focus on The Advice section and just skim The Challenge and The Role Model.
- **Ask people to think about a situation or a relationship where they could apply what they've read.** A group discussing "how to give feedback" in the abstract might have a good conversation but a group where each person is thinking about one specific colleague and one specific conversation will be more likely to put it into practice.

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Setting up the session

Especially for teams or leadership development cohorts, these techniques can help make the most of your time together if you do them at the start.

- **Ask a check-in question** to gather people's attention, as I describe in Chapter 7. Something as simple as "what's the most important thing for us to achieve in this session?" or "what's on everybody's mind as we begin?" will do it. It quickly pulls people's focus into the room.
- **Agree some ground rules if you're meeting for the first time**.
  - *Digital discipline.* Agree how you'll reduce the temptation of phones and laptops. It lightens the load on people's brains and improves the quality of the discussion. A "smartphone daycare" box in the corner works nicely.
  - *Timing.* For longer sessions, decide when you'll take breaks and when you'll wrap up. Don't go longer than 90 minutes without stretching your legs.
  - *Confidentiality.* This matters most when you're meeting with colleagues rather than friends. There's the Chatham House Rule, where you can tell people what was discussed in your group but not attribute any specific comment to an individual. Or you might prefer the slightly tighter Las Vegas Rule: what happens in your discussion group stays in your discussion group.
- **Adopt a What I Like norm**, so people can challenge each other well. This is the technique from the Frank section of Chapter 7, and it's worth borrowing for your own sessions from the very first meeting. Agree on a shared phrase with a two-part structure, such as:
  - "What I like about what you're saying is... What would make me like it even more is..."
  - "Where I agree is... Where I differ is..."
  - "What works well for me is... What works less well for me is..."

  Consider writing your chosen phrase up on a flipchart or whiteboard. It tends to get a laugh the first few times, which is part of its power.

PART 2: RUNNING THE SESSION

Understanding where everyone is at

Ask each person to share their thoughts on the topic of what you've read. This could end up being the whole session for shorter conversations. Ask one or more of these questions:

- "Where is the biggest opportunity for improvement for you on this topic?"
- "What interested you most in what you read?"

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- "What have you been experimenting with, and what's worked well?" (If they've already applied some of the advice.)
- "What questions did it raise for you?"

In a sizeable group, consider splitting into pairs or trios (as described in Chapter 7) if you're not going to have time to give everyone three to five minutes.

Then: To go deeper, here are three formats that I've seen work well...

Option 1: Deepening discussion

In the appendix you'll find more exploratory and stretching questions for every piece of the book. These work especially well for book groups where you might not have the time to get into practicing and applying the frameworks as in Option 2 and 3.

Option 2: Practicing a framework

Every chapter is built around a framework, and most of them can be worked through in a group. It reliably sends people away with something concrete to do.

- Make sure people are clear on the framework's steps. It helps to have the framework written up where everyone can see it.
- Ask everyone to pick a real example that's going on in their life right now, as a focus for the exercise.
- Give them a couple of minutes of silence to think about how each step applies to their situation, and to take a few notes. People produce better and more independent thinking when they've had a moment to think alone first.
- Then get into pairs to discuss in more depth — perhaps five minutes each way for the simpler frameworks, or ten minutes each way for the more complex ones. Encourage people to split the time evenly. The nice thing about pair discussions is that it's often easier to share a personal situation in a one-to-one conversation than in the whole group.
- Bring everyone back into plenary, and ask one simple question: "what struck you most about your discussion?"

Option 3: Peer coaching, using the GUIDE model

Another approach is to coach each other on real situations where you'd like to apply the book's techniques. Chapter 13 gives you a coaching model — GUIDE — and this format lets you practice the model and get help with a real problem at the same time.

- Get into groups of three or four.

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- Allocate each person 20 to 30 minutes to be coached on an issue they're facing, ideally related to the chapter you're all focusing on.
- Split the time like this:
  - **Goal.** The person being coached describes the issue and where they'd like help. (Keep this short but don't skip it.) For example: "There's a longstanding disagreement between people in my team on an important issue. I feel like using the Common Ground model could help me resolve it, but I'm not sure how to do it and I'd like advice."
  - **Understanding.** The others ask truly open questions that help the person think through the situation. Make sure these questions aren't just suggestions with a question mark slapped on the end. Instead of "have you tried X or Y?", ask "what have you tried so far?" Instead of "is that because of A or B?", try "what do you think is causing that?"
  - **Ideas.** Then ask what ideas the coachee already has, before anyone builds on it by offering their own suggestion.
  - **Deepen.** Now test what's emerging as the strongest idea: "What would have to be true for this to work?" or "What else do you need to find out?" or "What are you assuming there? Is there a chance that's not true? Does that change what you might be able to do?"
  - **Enable.** Draw the discussion to a close. Ask the person what they're going to do as a result of the discussion, and encourage them to make it as concrete as possible.

Wrapping up

The value of your session will be far greater if you take a few minutes at the end to reflect on what people have found useful (for all the reasons you read in the Flexible section in Chapter 7).

The simplest approach is to do this:

- One thing they've learned
- One thing they're going to do differently as a result of the discussion.

If you have more time, lean on the closing words of the book and ask everyone to:

- **Pick a specific situation** where they want to show up differently, and what they'll do.
- **Decide exactly when** they'll try it out. (It's more likely to happen if they're specific about this.)
- **Be clear how they'll remind themselves—** a calendar note, a task, a Post-it.
- **Agree who they'll tell** how it went. In an ongoing group, the simplest version is that everyone reports back at the start of the next session.

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It's so easy to skip these few minutes as everyone is dashing for the door. But all the evidence suggests that people will learn more and do more as a result of just a few moments of reflection at the end of a session. And that has to be a very good thing for everyone's leadership intelligence.

APPENDIX: CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER PROMPTS TO DEEPEN DISCUSSION

Here are some questions you can use to deepen discussion of each part and each chapter: an opening question to get people talking, two questions to go deeper, and one thing to try together. Use as much or as little as you find helpful.

PART I: DELIBERATE WISDOM

The Core Science of Deliberate Wisdom: How the brain processes information

*The double unlock: **widen** your perspective where it matters, **lighten** the cognitive load everywhere else.*

Opening question: Think of a decision you got wrong. Looking back, was it a failure to widen — you didn't see something you could have seen — or a failure to lighten, because your brain was too full at the time?

Going deeper:

- Where in your working week is your thinking most likely to be distorted because your cognitive load is too high? What's actually causing that load?
- Whose perspective might be systematically missing from the information that reaches you?

Try it together: Each person names one recurring meeting or decision where they'd benefit from widening, and one where they'd benefit from lightening. Compare notes on where the group's answers overlap.

Chapter 1: How to Better Understand a Complex Situation — 360-Degree Vision

Opening question: Describe a situation at work right now that you don't fully understand. What's the part that puzzles you most?

Going deeper:

- Which of the four directions do you naturally neglect — seeing deeper, seeing differently, seeing across, or seeing the system? What does that cost you?
- Who tells you what's really going on? And how do you know they're telling you everything?

Try it together: Pick one person's complex situation and build a causal map of it as a group, connecting the dots between the factors at play. Then ask the person whose situation it is what surprised them about the picture.

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Chapter 2: How to Make Time for Your Top Priorities — The Yes-Grow-No Rule

Opening question: What's the work that only you can do? And roughly what proportion of last week did you spend on it?

Going deeper:

- What's on your plate that someone else could step up and do — and what's the real reason you haven't let go of it?
- What makes saying no hard for you specifically? Is it the fear of disappointing someone, the fear of missing out, or something else?

Try it together: Run a commitment audit in pairs. Each person lists their current commitments, then their partner asks, for each one: "what would happen if you stopped?" Then everyone drafts one positive no and tries it out loud on their partner.

Chapter 3: How to Come Up with Fresh Ideas and Solutions — The FUSE Model

Opening question: Where and when do you have your best ideas? What does that tell you about the conditions your brain needs?

Going deeper:

- What are you assuming about the problem you're currently stuck on? What if the opposite were true?
- When did you last give a hard problem a second bite — stepping away and returning with fresh eyes? What gets in the way of building that into your routine?

Try it together: Take one person's stuck problem and run Dump and Chunk on it as a group: everyone writes down every thought about it on separate sticky notes, then you cluster them together and see what structure emerges. Fifteen minutes is usually enough to change the shape of a problem.

Chapter 4: How to Make an Important Decision — The ACORN Approach

Opening question: What's a decision you're circling around at the moment without quite landing on?

Going deeper:

- How often do you think about your Aim and Criteria before evaluating an Option?
- How often do you generate more than one option before deciding?
- Where in your work would Stage, Track, and Pivot serve you better than making one big irreversible call?

Try it together: Take one person's live decision and do a Future Back exercise: imagine it's a year from now and the decision has gone badly. Everyone spends two minutes writing what went wrong, then shares. The specificity of what emerges is usually the useful part.

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Chapter 5: How to Mentally Prepare for a Key Meeting — The Triple-A Checklist

Opening question: How much time did you spend preparing for your most important meeting last week? What did that preparation consist of?

Going deeper:

- What assumptions do you tend to walk into difficult meetings carrying? Where did they come from?
- Which attitude would change the most in your meetings if you could reliably project it?

Try it together: Each person picks a real meeting coming up in the next week and writes a When-Then plan for the moment they're most worried about: "when [the difficult thing] happens, then I will [specific response]." Read them out. The group can help sharpen the "then."

Chapter 6: How to Handle a Disagreement Well — The Common Ground Technique

Opening question: Think of a disagreement you're in right now. Can you describe the other person's position as positively as they would?

Going deeper:

- How much of your disagreement is actually about the substance, and how much is about how the disagreement has been conducted?
- What would have to be true for both of you to be right?

Try it together: In pairs, each person describes a disagreement, and their partner's only job is to argue the other side as convincingly as possible. Then the pair lists every point of agreement they can find. Most people are surprised by how long that list is.

Chapter 7: How to Lead Intelligent Team Discussion — The 3 Fs of Team Wisdom

Opening question: Think of the best group discussion you've ever been part of. What made it good?

Going deeper:

- Which of the three Fs is weakest in your team — focused, frank, or flexible? What's the evidence?
- Who speaks least in your team meetings, and what would it take to change that?

Try it together: Run a piece of your own session using turn-taking and a hypothetical question, then reflect on what changed. If you're an intact team, agree one technique to adopt in your regular meetings, starting with the next one.

PART II: INTRINSIC INSPIRATION

The Core Science of Intrinsic Inspiration: How the brain processes rewards

The double unlock: reinforce and develop people's sense of ***competence and connection****.*

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Opening question: Think of a time you felt most motivated at work. How much of that was about competence, and how much about connection?

Going deeper:

- Where in your team's week are competence and connection being accidentally undermined? Think about processes and rituals, not just individual behavior.
- What signals are you sending about competence and connection, through the way you work and communicate?

Try it together: Each person names one person on their team—it could be someone they're worried about, or a high performer they want to keep engaged—and describes where they might do more to amplify their competence or connection.

Chapter 8: How to Get People Aligned on a Goal — The Pillars of Possibility

Opening question: Can everyone on your team explain, in their own words, what you're collectively trying to achieve and why it matters? How do you know?

Going deeper:

- Which of the four pillars is shakiest for your current goals — purpose, path, people, or progress?
- When did your team last celebrate a piece of progress? What did that look like?

Try it together: Each person writes their team's purpose in one sentence, as they believe their team members would express it. Read them out and compare. If you're an intact team, the differences between your versions are the most useful thing in the room.

Chapter 9: How to Change the Way People Work — The CASE for Change

Opening question: What behavior are you currently trying to change in your team, and how's it going?

Going deeper:

- Can you state the change as a clear From-To shift? Try it out loud, and see whether the group finds it clear.
- Which is your weakest link — clear, appealing, social, or easy? Most leaders over-invest in clear and under-invest in easy.

Try it together: Take one person's change effort and brainstorm as a group: what would make the new behavior easier, and what roadblocks could actually be removed? Push for practical answers rather than communication plans. And apply Chesterton's Fence to something your organization does out of habit: before you propose scrapping it, work out why it's there.

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Chapter 10: How to Communicate and Be Heard — The Four Frequencies

Opening question: Think of a leader whose communication you've found memorable. Which of the four frequencies were they broadcasting on?

Going deeper:

- Which frequency do you default to, and which do you neglect? The message frequency tends to crowd out the other three.
- What are your pet phrases? Ask the group — they'll know.

Try it together: Each person takes a message they need to deliver soon and drafts one line on each of the four frequencies. Deliver them to a partner, who says which landed and why.

Chapter 11: How to Delegate for High Performance — The Fix-Flex Approach

Opening question: What's the last thing you delegated that didn't go the way you hoped? What was unclear in hindsight?

Going deeper:

- Where are you fixing things that could flex, and flexing things that should be fixed?
- How do you decide the review cadence for delegated work? Is it based on the person and the task, or just on your own anxiety levels?

Try it together: In pairs, pregame a real delegation conversation. One person plays themselves and one plays the colleague, and you talk through the what, the how, and the when. Then swap. Notice how much of the "how" you'd been planning to leave unsaid.

Chapter 12: How to Give Feedback that Drives Action—The Factual Feedback Model

Opening question: What's the most useful piece of feedback you've ever received? What made it land?

Going deeper:

- How much of your praise is factual — an observation and its implication — rather than a general "great job"?
- What feedback are you sitting on right now, and what's stopping you from giving it?

Try it together: Everyone drafts a piece of development feedback using all five steps: intention, observation, implication, invitation, collaboration. Practice it on a partner, who plays the recipient and then reports how it felt. Pay particular attention to the observation step — most drafts turn out to contain interpretation dressed up as fact.

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Chapter 13: How to Develop a Colleague's Capabilities—The GUIDE Model of Coaching

Opening question: When someone brings you a problem, what do you usually do in the first thirty seconds?

Going deeper:

- What's the cost to you and to them of solving things yourself? Be specific about both.
- Which step of GUIDE will you find hardest to stick to?

Try it together: Run a full GUIDE coaching conversation in threes — one coach, one coachee, one observer who counts how many times the coach gives advice before the E. Rotate so everyone plays each role.

Chapter 14: How to Strengthen Team Collaboration — The 4 Hs of Team Inspiration

Opening question: How well does your team actually know each other, beyond the work?

Going deeper:

- Which of the four Hs is your team's strength, and which is its gap — handshakes, heroes, humans, or habits?
- What would a Pressure Pact for your team say? What behavior do you want from each other when things get tough?

Try it together: Run Past-Present-Future: each person takes three minutes to share something from their past that shaped how they work, something about their present, and something they're hoping for. It works in a book group as well as in a team, and it tends to be the session people remember.

PART III: REASONED RESILIENCE

The Core Science of Reasoned Resilience: How the brain processes threats

*The double unlock: look for ways to frame challenging situations as **manageable and meaningful**.*

Opening question: Think of a hard period at work that you came through well. What made it feel manageable? What made it feel meaningful?

Going deeper:

- What in your team's current situation feels demanding, unpleasant, and uncontrollable? Which of those three could you shift?
- Where might you be accidentally making things feel less manageable — through ambiguity, or shifting priorities, or your own visible stress?

Try it together: List the pressures currently facing the group. For each one, ask: is this truly uncontrollable, or is it just unclear who controls it? The distinction is usually where the leverage is.

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Chapter 15: How to Stay Steady and Energized Under Pressure — The Five Resets

Opening question: What are your cues and tells — how do you know, before anyone tells you, that you're running low?

Going deeper:

- Which of the five resets do you already do well, and which one would make the biggest difference if you actually did it?
- What's the reset you know works and still don't do? What's in the way?

Try it together: Everyone commits to one reset to run daily for the next two weeks, and names the exact moment in the day it will happen. Report back next session. This is a rare case where public commitment does most of the work.

Chapter 16: How to Lead Through Uncertainty and Upheaval—The Know-Be-Do Framework

Opening question: What's the biggest source of uncertainty for your team right now? What have you told them about it?

Going deeper:

- What do you actually know that you haven't yet shared, and why haven't you shared it?
- What are the things about your team that will stay true whatever happens — the strengths, values, and rituals people can hold onto?

Try it together: Draft a Know-Be-Do message for a real situation someone in the group is facing. Read it out and get the group's reaction, especially on whether the "know" section is honest enough to be believed.

Chapter 17: How to Improve a Difficult Stakeholder Relationship — The Bridge Model

Opening question: Think of a relationship at work you'd like to be better. What's your working theory of why they behave the way they do?

Going deeper:

- What could be going on for them that would make their behavior make sense, without assuming bad intent? Push yourself past the first answer.
- What's your own contribution to the dynamic? What do you do that they might find demanding, unpleasant, or uncontrollable?

Try it together: In pairs, each person describes their difficult stakeholder, and their partner's job is to argue that person's case sympathetically. Then plan the opening two minutes of a bridge-building conversation, and say them out loud.

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Chapter 18: How to Help a Colleague Who's Struggling — The CALM Approach

Opening question: How do you usually notice that someone on your team is struggling? What are you watching for?

Going deeper:

- How quickly do you move to problem-solving? What might you be missing in the check, ask, and listen steps?
- What's a question you could ask a struggling colleague that would be caring without being intrusive?

Try it together: Practice the ask and listen steps in pairs, with a real situation, and a strict rule that the listener may not offer a single solution. Three minutes feels like a very long time, which is the lesson.

Chapter 19: How to Respond to Failures and Mistakes — The Voyage of Discovery

Opening question: What's your first instinct when something goes badly wrong — and what does your team see on your face?

Going deeper:

- What does your team believe will happen to them if they bring you bad news early? How do you know?
- When did your team last extract a real lesson from a failure, as opposed to holding a post-mortem that produced a document nobody read?

Try it together: Take a real failure — one that's far enough in the past to be discussable — and run the map the terrain and land the learning steps on it. Then ask what would have had to be different for that learning to have happened at the time.

Chapter 20: How to Handle Exits and Layoffs Fairly — Compassionate Clarity

Opening question: Think of a time you've seen an exit handled well, and a time you've seen one handled badly. What was the difference?

Going deeper:

- Where are you being kind in a way that's actually unclear — softening a message so much that the person can't act on it?
- What would you want if you were on the receiving end? What does that tell you about the process you'd design?

Try it together: Draft the clear framing step for a real underperformance situation, then test it on a partner: can they say back exactly what's expected and by when? If not, it isn't clear enough yet. This one is best handled with particular care about confidentiality, so agree your rules before you start, and use no names.

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Chapter 21: How to Build Healthy Resilience in Your Team—The 5 Cs of Team Resilience

Opening question: Look at your team's calendar for last week. What does it say about what you value?

Going deeper:

- Which of the five Cs is weakest in your team — conversation, calendar, calm, cause, or capacity?
- What habits do you have that might be sending the wrong signal about rest, focus, and sustainable work?

Try it together: Each person names one small change they could make that would improve their own energy and resilience — and, importantly, how they could make it visible to their team. Then the group stress-tests each one for whether it would survive a really bad week.

A FINAL THOUGHT

I hope you have a wonderful group discussion about the book. I'd love to hear how you get on—drop me a line at info@carolinewebb.co.

And you'll find more materials that can support your reading (including guidance on applying the book in specific situations, and on using AI alongside it) at **carolinewebb.co/leadershipintelligence**

Thank you for reading!

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