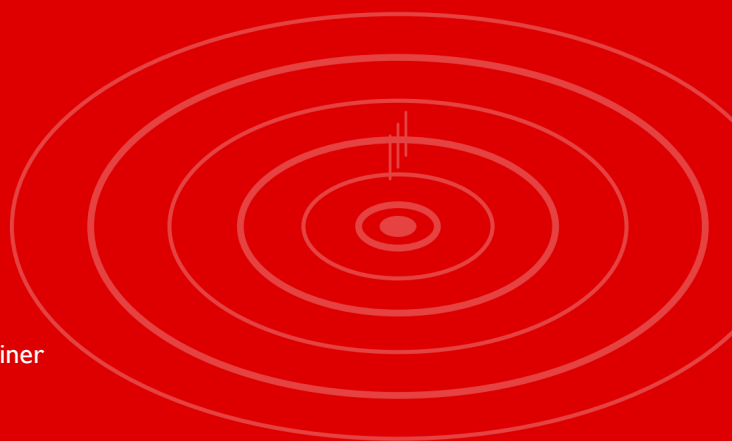




ABOUT THE INSTRUMENT

Avanti Development Framework Profile

Leadership that ripples outward, and ripples back.



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Avanti Change Ltd
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INTRODUCTION

What this instrument is for

Public service organisations are being asked to do more with less, to work across boundaries and to share power with the communities they serve. Most leaders know that structures and plans alone do not achieve that. What makes the difference is how leadership travels: whether a direction formed at the centre carries through every part of the organisation and into the lives of the people it exists to serve.

The Avanti Development Framework Profile uses the image of ripples in still water. Leadership starts at the centre, in the senior team, and ripples outward through the governance partnership, the leadership community and the whole system of partners and communities. Each ring carries six elements: whether vision and values are Shared, Understood and Owned; whether Rich Diversity is used; whether Positive Challenge is possible; and whether people are Acting as One. Leaders respond to 48 short statements about their own organisation, and the results show where each ripple holds its strength and where it softens as it travels. Just as importantly, they show whether communities and people with lived experience are sending ripples back in, and whether those are felt at the centre.

The profile is for boards and executive teams, political and executive leadership, senior management groups and system partnerships across councils, health and care, housing and homelessness, mental health, harm reduction, police and fire, and the voluntary and community sector. It is values-led, strengths-based and developmental: a structured development tool, not a clinical or selection test. Its value lies in the conversation it opens, facilitated by Avanti, about how your leadership could reach further for the people and places you serve.

Like ripples from a stone in still water, this profile shows how your leadership travels outward from the senior team through the governance partnership, the leadership community and the wider system, and where it holds strong or softens.

Built around values and outcomes

The framework starts from a simple conviction: leadership in public service exists to make a difference to people's lives and to the places they live, not simply to run organisations well. That is why the outer level matters so much, and why every element asks not only how your leaders work together but whether that work reaches the people you serve. Values and integrity sit underneath every statement, in the consistency between what leaders say and what they do when it is costly.

Communities are treated throughout as partners. Lived experience is valued as expertise in its own right, alongside professional knowledge. Co-ownership, co-production and co-design are named explicitly at the system level, and Arnstein's ladder of participation is used to help leaders see honestly where their practice sits. The result is a profile that supports people-centred change: change shaped with people, around people, rather than done to them.

Values	Integrity, honesty and the public interest come first. Each instrument asks how people behave when values are tested, not only when they are easy to live.
Social outcomes	We look past activity and outputs to what actually changes for people and places, and ask leaders to hold themselves to that test.
Community	Communities are partners in public service, not audiences for it. Every instrument has a view beyond the organisation's own boundary.
Lived experience	People who use services, and those who have been failed by them, hold expertise that no professional can replace. We treat it as evidence.
Co-production	Designing and delivering with people, not for them. We use Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to be honest about where practice really sits.
People-centred change	Change is something people live through. How it is led shapes trust, wellbeing and whether the change lasts.

OUR APPROACH

How every Avanti instrument works

The profile is values-led and non-judgemental: it describes how leadership travels and never diagnoses, treats every difference in view as a contribution, and offers a developmental starting point that helps leaders and communities realise what they could achieve together.

Values-led	Integrity, the public interest and outcomes for people and places sit at the heart of every instrument. Community, lived experience and co-production are part of what we measure, not an afterthought.
Non-judgemental	We describe, we never diagnose. There are no good or bad profiles, only different starting points, and every result is offered as a perception to explore.
Difference as a positive	Different scores, views and styles are contributions. The richest conversations start where people see things differently.
Maximising potential	We look for what people and teams could become: the strengths to build on, the range not yet used and the contribution others are waiting for.
Individual to system	Each instrument connects the individual to the team, the organisation and the wider system of partners and communities.
Developmental	Every result is a starting point for growth and conversation, never a verdict. The instruments are not for selection, pay or performance management.

From individual to team, organisation and system

Every ripple begins with individual leaders, gathers strength in the senior team and travels through the organisation into the wider system; the profile follows the six elements across all four rings, so you can see how individual, team, organisation and system connect.

THE METAPHOR

Ripples

Like a stone dropped in still water, leadership starts at the centre and ripples outward, and communities send ripples back.

Drop a stone into still water and rings spread outward from the centre. Leadership works in a similar way. What happens in the senior team ripples out through the governance partnership, the leadership community and the whole system of partners and communities. Each ring carries the same six elements: Shared, Understood, Owned, Rich Diversity, Positive Challenge and Acting as One. As you read your results, follow each element outward. Notice where the ripple holds its strength and where it softens as it travels. Neither is a verdict. A softening ripple simply shows where a little more energy, or a new connection, could carry your leadership further.

The four rings are the senior team at the centre, the governance partnership around it, the leadership community beyond that, and the whole system on the outer edge. The rings are concentric, not a ladder: each matters, and each depends on the others. Ripples do not only travel one way. Communities and people with lived experience are not simply reached by the outer ring; they send ripples of their own back towards the centre, through their insight, challenge and expertise. An organisation that welcomes those returning ripples learns faster, decides better and builds something with people rather than for them. The profile looks in both directions.

FOUNDATIONS

Where the thinking comes from

The instrument is Avanti's own design. It is informed by established research and practice, credited below, and by more than two decades of the founders' work with leaders and teams in public service. All questionnaire items are original to Avanti.

Kakabadse: top team development

Professor Andrew Kakabadse's extensive research into top teams showed that the quality of relationships and dialogue at the top shapes organisational performance, and that unspoken tensions are among the most costly. The framework's emphasis on shared direction, candour and acting as one is informed by this work.

Huish: top team leadership in local government

Dr. Jonathan Huish's DBA at Cranfield University examined top team leadership in local government, including the relationship between elected members and senior officers. It informs the framework's view of the governance partnership as one of mutual dependence, in which each side needs the other to succeed.

Milliner: community engagement in public services

Dr Amanda Milliner's PhD at the University of South Wales explored community engagement in public services. It informs the system level of the framework, particularly understanding built through dialogue, reaching people who find formal processes inaccessible, and co-ownership with communities.

Edmondson: psychological safety

Professor Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety showed that teams learn and perform better when people feel able to speak up without fear. This informs the Positive Challenge element, which treats safety as the condition that makes candour and skilled challenge possible.

Arnstein: the ladder of participation

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation distinguishes consultation and placation from genuine partnership and shared power. It informs how the framework describes co-ownership, co-production and co-design at the system level.

Snowden: leading in complexity

Dave Snowden's Cynefin framework highlights that complex problems call for diverse perspectives, experimentation and sense-making rather than single expert answers. This informs the framework's treatment of Rich Diversity and of the system as something in formation.

Design principles

Concentric, not hierarchical

The four levels are rings, not rungs. Effective leadership needs attention to all four at once, holding the inner levels steady while engaging honestly with the outer ones.

The same six elements at every level

Each level is assessed against the same six elements, so you can see whether a strength in your senior team carries through to the partnership, the leadership community and the system.

Grounded in what people see

Statements describe observable practice rather than intentions, so responses reflect how leadership is experienced, not how it is described in strategies.

Communities as partners

The outer level treats communities and people with lived experience as co-owners of the direction and as genuine sources of expertise, not as audiences for consultation.

A conversation, not a verdict

Results are designed to open a facilitated, honest conversation about development. They are never a judgement on individuals or a rating of performance.

THE MODEL

The 6 elements at a glance

The framework works at four concentric levels. Each level is assessed against the same six elements, so leaders can see where the organisation is strong and where coherence breaks down as you move outward from the senior team to the whole system.

L1 The Senior Team

Whether your most senior team leads as a genuine team, rather than a gathering of individual portfolio or service leads.

L2 The Governance Partnership

Whether those who govern and those who lead the organisation work as mutually dependent partners.

L3 The Leadership Community

Whether direction travels coherently through every tier of leadership, and honest insight travels back up.

L4 The System

Whether you lead with partners and communities as one system around people, rather than as a single organisation acting on others.

L1 The Senior Team

The executive or political leadership team in its own right

The first level is about what it takes for a senior team to be effective in its own right. That might be an executive team, a political leadership group, or a board's inner leadership. In every case the question is the same: is this a unified leadership body, or a collection of capable individuals who meet to report on their own areas and then return to them?

The development task here is largely internal. It is about building a direction that every member holds, relationships honest enough to carry disagreement, and the collective discipline to put the whole ahead of the part. Everything else in the framework rests on this level being stable enough to hold under pressure.

L2 The Governance Partnership

Elected members, trustees or non-executives working with senior officers or executives

The second level is about the defining relationship in most public service organisations: the partnership between those who hold governance roles (elected members, trustees, non-executive directors, board members) and the senior officers or executives who lead the organisation day to day. Each is essential and each is incomplete without the other. When this partnership works, an organisation can take on almost anything. When it fractures, everything else becomes harder.

Development at this level is not about blurring roles or dissolving proper accountability. It is about each side understanding the other's world well enough to act as genuine partners, being honest about differences in role and perspective, and holding together when decisions are difficult. This draws directly on Dr. Jonathan Huish's doctoral research into top team leadership in public service.

L3 The Leadership Community

All tiers of leadership together, from the most senior to those leading front-line teams

The third level extends the framework to the whole leadership community of the organisation: governance and executive leaders, senior managers, and the managers and team leaders who lead most of the day-to-day work. This is the level at which vision and values must travel, from the top of the organisation into the experience of staff and the people who use services.

The development task here is coherence in both directions. Direction needs to be genuinely understood, owned and acted on at every tier, rather than turning into a management task by the time it reaches the front line. Equally, the knowledge, concern and insight held by middle and front-line leaders needs to travel upward honestly, without being filtered into reassurance along the way.

L4 The System

Partners, communities and people with lived experience: one system in formation

The fourth and outermost level reaches beyond the organisation to the whole system it is part of: partner organisations across public, voluntary and community sectors, the communities it serves, and the people whose lived experience of services and circumstances gives them knowledge no professional can fully replicate. This is where public service has its ultimate purpose: not the performance of one organisation, but what changes in people's lives and places.

Leading at this level means building understanding through dialogue, sharing power through genuine co-production and co-design, and treating difference across communities and partners as intelligence rather than complication. It draws directly on Dr Amanda Milliner's doctoral research into community engagement in public services. The word 'formation' is deliberate: a system that works as one is not found, it is built through decisions, relationships and behaviour over time.

	Element	In a sentence
E1	Shared	A direction held in common, not owned by one person at the top.
E2	Understood	Each person can translate the direction into their own world.
E3	Owned	Genuine ownership, not compliance; co-owned with communities at system level.
E4	Rich Diversity	Different thinking, backgrounds and lived experience, linked to maximise potential.
E5	Positive Challenge	Psychological safety, candour and skilled challenge, working together.
E6	Acting as One	One Team, One Partnership, One Leadership, One System.

	Element	In a sentence
E1 SHARED		
A direction held in common, not owned by one person at the top.		

Shared means that the people at a given level of your organisation can each describe where you are heading and why, in their own words, and that those descriptions recognisably match. It is tested not in the strategy document but in the corridor, the partnership meeting and the community hall.

In many organisations the direction lives with one or two people: the chief executive, the leader, the chair. Others can repeat the headline but would describe the purpose quite differently if asked. Under pressure, those differences pull people towards separate priorities.

A genuinely shared direction takes conscious, repeated investment. At the outer levels it also means a vision for people and places, not only for the organisation, that partners and communities can see themselves in.

Why it matters

When direction is not genuinely shared, energy goes into negotiating priorities rather than delivering them, and people experience public services as disjointed. A shared direction lets decisions be made closer to the people affected, with confidence that they fit the whole.

Through a values lens: A vision is only truly shared when the communities and people with lived experience it is meant to serve recognise their own hopes in it. Shared direction is built with people, not announced to them.

When it tips too far: A shared direction can become a polished script that everyone repeats, leaving less room for fresh questions.

E2 UNDERSTOOD

Each person can translate the direction into their own world.

Understood is about translation. It is one thing to agree with a direction, and another to know what it means for the decisions you make on Monday morning. People who understand the direction can explain how it shapes their own area, and what it asks of colleagues elsewhere.

Understanding is not uniform, and should not be. A leader in housing will understand the direction differently from a leader in finance, and an elected member differently from a chief officer. What matters is that each understanding is genuine and grounded in real work, rather than a recitation of language passed down.

In the governance partnership, understanding also means each side knowing enough about the other's world to act as partners. In the system, it is built through dialogue with communities, not communication at them.

Why it matters

A direction that is agreed but not understood leads to inconsistent decisions and frustrated staff. When people can translate it into their own context, services become more coherent for the people using them and leaders spend less time correcting course.

Through a values lens: Understanding at system level is built in conversation, including with people who find formal engagement inaccessible. Different communities will understand the same vision in different terms, and that diversity is a strength.

When it tips too far: The wish for everyone to understand can turn into over-explaining, leaving less space to hear how others have interpreted things.

E3 OWNED

Genuine ownership, not compliance; co-owned with communities at system level.

Owned is the difference between leaders who carry the direction and leaders who carry it out. Compliance is easy to mistake for ownership in calm conditions. The difference shows when the direction is costly: when a personal view has to give way to a collective decision, when no one senior is watching, or when a colleague needs public backing after a hard call.

In the governance partnership, ownership means both sides owning the whole agenda, delivery and context, while respecting each other's roles. Across the leadership community it means people treating the direction as theirs to shape.

At the system level, ownership becomes co-ownership. Communities and people with lived experience have genuine agency in shaping priorities, not simply the chance to agree with them.

Why it matters

Owned direction persists through difficulty; complied-with direction quietly erodes. Public service change asks people to keep going when progress is slow and resources are tight, and only real ownership sustains that effort long enough to change outcomes for people.

Through a values lens: Co-ownership is co-production in practice: building the knowledge and confidence of community members so they take part as informed, equal partners rather than as recipients of consultation.

When it tips too far: Strong ownership can become protectiveness, where the direction is defended rather than opened up for others to reshape.

E4 RICH DIVERSITY

Different thinking, backgrounds and lived experience, linked to maximise potential.

Rich Diversity is about difference in all its forms: thinking styles (analytical and creative, strategic and practical), professional cultures, personal backgrounds, identities, and the lived experience of people who have used services or faced the circumstances services exist to address.

Having difference in the room is not the same as using it. Many teams quietly settle into the preferred style of their most dominant members and reach consensus too soon. Rich Diversity means being curious about how others think, rather than frustrated when they think differently, and deliberately linking different perspectives so that the whole is wiser than any part.

At the outer levels it means valuing the operational knowledge of front-line leaders, and treating community perspectives and lived experience as intelligence about what the system needs.

Why it matters

Complex public service challenges rarely yield to a single professional view. Organisations that draw on the full range of thinking and experience available make better judgements, spot risks earlier and design services that work for the people who actually use them.

Through a values lens: Valuing lived experience as genuine expertise, alongside professional knowledge, is at the heart of this element. It is a matter of dignity as well as effectiveness.

When it tips too far: The wish to hear every perspective can slow decisions, or inclusion can quietly become an expectation to agree.

E5 POSITIVE CHALLENGE

Psychological safety, candour and skilled challenge, working together.

Positive Challenge integrates three things that cannot be separated. Psychological safety is the condition in which people feel able to speak without fear. Candour is the discipline of actually saying what is not being said: the doubts and disagreements that circulate informally but never reach the table. Skilled challenge is raising those things in a way that is honest, specific and well-intentioned.

Safety is built through consistency. People watch how the most senior leaders respond to difficult messages over time, and adjust what they say accordingly.

At the outer levels, Positive Challenge means honest signal travelling upward through the organisation, and communities and partners feeling safe enough to tell you what they think and fear, including about you.

Why it matters

When challenge is unsafe, problems are reported late and edited on the way up, and decisions are made on a partial picture. In public service that can mean harm to people. Organisations that hear the truth early can act while there is still time.

Through a values lens: Candour is a form of respect, and listening to uncomfortable truths from communities and people with lived experience is a test of integrity rather than a threat to reputation.

When it tips too far: Challenge can become relentless or point-scoring, and colleagues may feel tested rather than helped.

E6 ACTING AS ONE

One Team, One Partnership, One Leadership, One System.

Acting as One is what the other five elements make possible. It does not mean everyone is the same, or that roles and accountabilities are blurred. It means people understand themselves as part of a single enterprise in which the success of the whole matters more than the success of any one part.

At each level it takes a different form. One Team: a senior team that leads as a body, not a meeting of department heads. One Partnership: governance and executive leaders as mutually dependent partners. One Leadership: a community of leaders across tiers, not a chain of command.

One System: partners and communities working together around people, rather than separate organisations around their own boundaries. That system is always in formation, built through daily decisions and relationships.

Why it matters

People do not experience public services as separate organisations; they experience them as one set of encounters that either joins up or does not. Acting as One is how organisations make that experience coherent and improve outcomes that no single body can achieve alone.

Through a values lens: Acting as One at system level is people-centred change in practice: organising around the lives of individuals and communities, and sharing resources, risk and credit to do so.

When it tips too far: The pull towards unity can quieten dissent, so that acting as one becomes thinking as one.

USING THE INSTRUMENT

How it is completed

The profile is completed by the leaders of an organisation or partnership about their own organisation. Typically that includes the senior team, those in governance roles such as elected members, trustees or non-executives, and, where the focus includes the leadership community and system, a wider group of senior and middle leaders. Partners and community representatives can also be invited where the aim is to look at the system together. Avanti agrees the respondent group with you in advance.

There are 48 statements, eight for each element and two for each element at each of the four levels. Each is rated on a scale of 1 to 10. Most people complete it in about 15 to 20 minutes. It can be completed online or on paper, and there is space for optional comments. Individual responses are confidential to Avanti and are reported only in aggregate.

Rating	What it means
1	Rarely true of us
4	Sometimes true of us
7	Often true of us
10	Consistently true of us

Instructions given to participants

Each statement describes your organisation, or the partnerships it is part of. Rate how true it is today, based on what you have actually seen and experienced rather than what is written in plans or strategies. If a statement is outside your direct experience, give your best honest judgement and use the comment space to say so.

How it is scored

Each statement is rated from 1 (rarely true of us) to 10 (consistently true of us). Scores are averaged in two directions. Following one element across all four rings gives the element score, showing, for example, how strong Positive Challenge is wherever it travels. Taking all six elements within one ring gives the level score, showing, for example, how strongly the ripple is carried in your governance partnership.

Together these form a matrix of 24 cells, so you can trace each ripple from the centre outward and see where it holds and where it softens. Each score is placed in one of three bands: Growing edge (below 5), Established (5 to below 7.5) and Signature strength (7.5 and above). Where several groups take part, their results can be set side by side, because people standing at different points on the water often see the ripple differently, and each view adds something. Comparison norms will build up over time as the profile is used; it is not benchmarked against a published norm group.

Band	Range	What it signals
Growing edge	1 to under 5	Your leaders see this as a growing edge: a place where real progress is possible and where focused attention is likely to bring the greatest return.
Established	5 to under 7.5	This is a recognised strength in many situations, with scope to make it more consistent and to carry it further across the organisation and system.
Signature strength	7.5 to 10	This is a signature strength that others notice, and one you can share, protect and build on deliberately.



Using the results

Results are shared in a facilitated session with the leaders who took part. The most useful conversations rarely start with the lowest score. They start with the patterns: where a strength in the senior team fades at the partnership or system level, where different groups see the same thing differently, and where comments point to something not yet said aloud. The aim is shared understanding of what is really happening, before any decisions about what to do.

From there, Avanti helps the team agree a small number of development priorities, linked to the outcomes the organisation is trying to achieve for people and places. These might involve senior team development, work on the governance partnership, leadership community programmes, or co-production with communities. Repeating the profile after 12 to 18 months shows what has shifted.

When to use it

A new senior team or leadership arrangement

When a team has formed or changed significantly, the profile establishes a shared baseline and gives the team a structured way to talk about how it wants to lead.

Strengthening governance

When the relationship between those who govern and those who lead day to day needs attention, the partnership level offers a respectful, evidence-based starting point.

A major change or improvement programme

Before or during significant change, it shows whether leadership is ready to carry the change through every tier and into partnerships.

Building partnership and co-production

When organisations are trying to work as one system with partners and communities, the system level helps leaders see honestly how far shared ownership really reaches.

Reviewing progress

Repeated after a period of development, it shows what has changed and where to focus next.

Ethics and good practice

Taking part is voluntary and based on informed consent. Individual responses are confidential to Avanti and results are reported only for groups large enough to protect anonymity; Avanti agrees the minimum group size with you in advance. Data is held securely, used only for the agreed purpose and handled in line with UK data protection law. The profile describes how leadership is experienced across an organisation. It is not a clinical or selection test, and it must not be used for recruitment, performance management or any judgement about individuals.

Please note

This is a development instrument. It is not a clinical assessment and it is not designed or validated for selection, recruitment, promotion or performance management decisions. Scores describe perceptions at a point in time and are a starting point for conversation, not a verdict.

Part of the Avanti suite

Avanti Leadership Behaviours 360

Where the Development Framework Profile looks at leadership across the organisation, the 360 looks at individual leaders, helping each person see how their own behaviour supports shared direction, challenge and acting as one.

Avanti Strategic Team Behaviours

When the profile highlights the senior team or governance partnership as a focus, Strategic Team Behaviours explores in more depth how that team works together day to day.

Avanti Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimensions explores the underlying culture of an organisation, current and aspired, helping explain why particular elements of the framework are especially strong or still growing.

Avanti Leadership Preferences

Leadership Preferences helps leaders understand their own preferred ways of contributing, which supports Rich Diversity by making different thinking styles visible, valued and usable.

About the authors

Dr. Jonathan Huish

Jonathan is a founding director of Avanti. His doctorate from Cranfield University studied top team leadership in local government: the conditions under which senior teams become genuinely effective and the things that quietly stop them. He is CIPFA qualified, has coached and mentored for more than twenty years, from first-line supervisors to chief executives, and brings a Tavistock grounding in group relations and reflective practice to how Avanti designs and facilitates its work.

Dr Amanda Milliner

Amanda is a founding director of Avanti. Her PhD from the University of South Wales studied community engagement in public services: what it takes for engagement to move beyond consultation into genuine co-production and partnership with communities. Her practice spans engagement strategy, leadership development and organisational design, with a particular focus on the relationship between organisational culture and the communities it serves.

About Avanti

Avanti Change Ltd works with leaders, boards and teams across public services: councils, health and care, housing and homelessness, mental health, harm reduction, emergency services and the voluntary and community sector. Our work is rooted in Welsh values of humility, service and dignity, and in the belief that how change is led matters as much as what changes.

Let us help your organisation move forwards

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