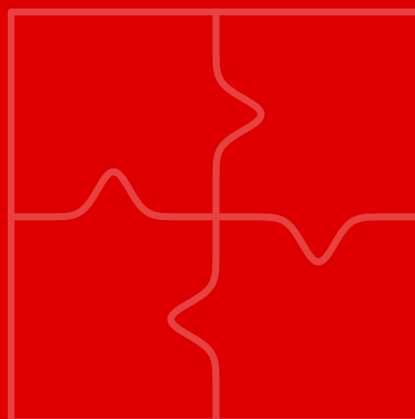




ABOUT THE INSTRUMENT

Avanti Leadership Preferences

Your piece in the leadership picture



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Avanti Change Ltd
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INTRODUCTION

What this instrument is for

Every leader brings something distinctive to public service. Some draw energy from people and conversation, others from time to think. Some see the long view, others the practical detail. Some weigh values most heavily, others the evidence. Some keep options open, others like a clear plan. None of these is better than another, and every leadership team needs all of them. The richest teams are those that know which they hold, and use them deliberately to reach their full potential.

Avanti Leadership Preferences is a short questionnaire that describes how you prefer to work. It looks at four pairs of preferences: Engagement, Thinking, Judgement and Adaptability. Each pair is a continuum, drawn as a moon, and everyone sits somewhere along it. Three of the pairs combine to show your piece in the picture: one of eight distinct contributions, from Civic Connector to Governance Guardian, that together make up a complete leadership team. The fourth pair describes how you go about the work.

The instrument is designed for people leading change across public service: councils, health and care, housing and homelessness, mental health, harm reduction, police and fire, the voluntary and community sector, regional bodies and the partnerships that connect them. It works for boards and executive teams, for elected members, trustees or non-executives working with senior officers, and for leadership and project teams at every level. Its purpose is simple: to give people a shared, generous language for the different contributions they bring, so that individuals, teams, organisations and the wider system can use their full range in the service of people and places. It describes and never diagnoses, and it is always a starting point for growth.

A short preference profile that shows how you naturally lead, the piece you bring to a leadership team, and how you and your colleagues fit together.

Built around values and outcomes

Avanti Leadership Preferences is built around the belief that public service leadership exists to make a positive difference for people and places. Every pole and every piece is described in terms of what it contributes to that purpose: the Civic Connector bringing communities in as partners, the Values Champion keeping dignity and fairness at the centre, the Intelligence Broker treating lived experience as evidence, the Delivery Driver keeping promises to the public, and so on around the picture.

This matters because a team's preferences shape who it listens to, how it involves communities and how it shares power. A team that understands its picture can see where co-production and co-design come naturally and where they need deliberate effort, and it can invite people with lived experience to bring the perspectives the team itself holds more lightly.

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

Leadership Preferences describes and never diagnoses: every moon and every piece is a strength, and difference between colleagues is what completes the picture. It is values-led and developmental, a starting point for helping people and teams realise their full potential in service of communities.

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

The profile starts with the individual and their piece, builds into a team jigsaw, shows an organisation whether its leadership holds the whole picture, and reaches into the system by asking which pieces partners, communities and people with lived experience bring.

THE METAPHOR

Moons and Jigsaw

Your preferences wax and wane like moons; together they shape your piece of a jigsaw that only makes sense alongside others.

Two images run through this profile. The first is the moon. Each preference pair is a continuum, so we draw it as a moon: a half moon means you draw on both sides about equally, and the fuller the moon, the more strongly you lean one way. No phase is better than another. The second is the jigsaw. Three of your moons combine to shape your piece in the leadership picture, one of eight contributions with edges that fit against the others. A single piece is never the whole picture. Read your moons to understand how you prefer to work, and your jigsaw to see where you fit, and who completes the picture with you.

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.

A long tradition of work on psychological preference

The idea that people differ in where they direct their energy, how they take in information and how they reach decisions goes back to Carl Jung, and has informed a long tradition of work on psychological preference. We draw on that general idea, expressed entirely in our own terms and applied to leading change in public service.

Kakabadse: top team effectiveness

Andrew Kakabadse's research on senior leadership teams shows how unspoken differences and unaddressed tensions at the top can quietly shape an organisation's performance. A shared language for preference gives senior teams a safe way to talk about how they really work together.

Edmondson: psychological safety

Amy Edmondson's work on psychological safety shows that teams learn and perform better when people feel able to speak up, question and admit uncertainty. Understanding why colleagues see things differently makes it easier to welcome their challenge.

Avanti: Rich Diversity and Positive Challenge

Rich Diversity is Avanti's term for the difference in thinking and contribution that strong teams need. Positive Challenge is the practice of turning that difference into constructive tension rather than friction. Leadership Preferences gives both ideas a practical, everyday language.

The founders' practice

The model draws on more than twenty years of coaching and team development by Dr. Jonathan Huish, grounded in Tavistock group relations, and on Dr Amanda Milliner's doctoral research into community engagement in public services. It reflects what we have repeatedly seen make the difference in leadership teams.

Design principles

Preferences, not ability

The profile describes how you prefer to work, not how well you work. Everyone can work in any part of the picture.

Two good options every time

Every question asks you to choose between two things capable leaders do well, so there is never a right or wrong answer.

Continua, not categories

Each pair is a sliding scale drawn as a moon. A balanced moon is as useful as a full one.

Pieces that fit together

The eight pieces only make full sense alongside each other. A team needs all eight, and difference is what makes the picture whole.

A start, not a verdict

The profile is a prompt for conversation and reflection, always best explored with colleagues or a coach.

THE MODEL

Moons: four preference pairs

Each of the four pairs is a continuum rather than a category, which is why they are drawn as moons. The line between the two sides slides, and everyone sits somewhere along it rather than in one camp or the other. A half moon means you draw on both sides about equally; the fuller the moon, the more strongly you lean that way. Neither side of any pair is better than the other.



Balanced



Moderate



Clear



Strong

ENGAGEMENT

Where does your energy come from, and how do you prefer to engage?

Active (A)

Active leaders draw energy from people. They think by talking, engage readily across the organisation and beyond, and are comfortable responding in the moment. In meetings they often speak early and help the conversation move. They enjoy variety and several things at once, and they are usually visible to staff, partners and communities. Their energy can lift a room and help a team build momentum, especially at the start of new work.

- Energy and momentum in the room
- Visible, approachable leadership
- Quick, live responses to new situations

Reflective (R)

Reflective leaders draw energy from time to think. They prefer to work things through before speaking, and their contributions are usually considered, well formed and to the point. They tend to build deep rather than wide relationships and to concentrate on fewer things at greater depth. In meetings they may speak later, but what they say often reframes the discussion. They bring calm, care and quality of thought, especially to complex or sensitive issues.

- Considered, well-formed contributions
- Depth and quality of thought
- Calm attention in complex situations

THINKING

What kind of information and problems engage you most?

Strategic (S)

Strategic leaders are drawn to the big picture. They notice patterns and connections, think naturally about where things are heading and enjoy problems that are open-ended and uncertain. They generate ideas readily and like to explore different futures before choosing one. Their thinking helps an organisation anticipate change and see how its work fits into the wider system of public service, so that it shapes its future rather than only reacting to it.

- A view of the whole system
- Fresh ideas and new possibilities
- Anticipation of what is coming

Grounded (G)

Grounded leaders focus on what is real and deliverable. They pay close attention to facts, detail and how things actually work on the ground, and they trust approaches that have been tested in practice. They tend to concentrate on the present and the near future, and they are patient with the routine work that keeps services running well. They bring realism, reliability and discipline, and they keep ambition connected to what people actually experience.

- Realism about what will work
- Accurate attention to facts and detail
- Reliable focus on the here and now

JUDGEMENT

What do you weigh most heavily when you make a decision?

Values-Driven (V)

Values-Driven leaders decide with purpose and principle in mind. They ask what is right for the people affected, how a decision will feel to them and whether it reflects what the organisation stands for. They bring conviction to the case they make and are willing to hold a position when something important is at stake. In public service, where many decisions carry real human impact, they help keep dignity, fairness and care at the centre.

- Conviction and a clear sense of purpose
- Attention to the human impact of decisions
- A voice for people who are not in the room

Evidence-Led (E)

Evidence-Led leaders decide with analysis and clear criteria. They want to know what the data shows, what options exist and what the trade-offs are. They apply standards consistently, see fairness as treating like cases alike, and are willing to change their minds when the evidence changes. They bring rigour and impartiality to decisions, which helps organisations use public money wisely and explain their choices openly to anyone who asks.

- Rigour and clear reasoning
- Consistency and impartiality
- Openness to changing course when the evidence changes

ADAPTABILITY

How do you prefer to organise yourself and the work?

Adaptive (N)

Adaptive leaders are comfortable with uncertainty. They prefer to keep options open, gather information as they go and adjust plans as the situation changes. They are curious, flexible and at ease with questions that do not yet have answers, which makes them valuable when conditions are complex or fast-moving. They see a change of route as learning rather than as a setback, and they help a team respond creatively to what it finds.

- Flexibility when circumstances change
- Comfort with ambiguity
- Creative responses to the unexpected

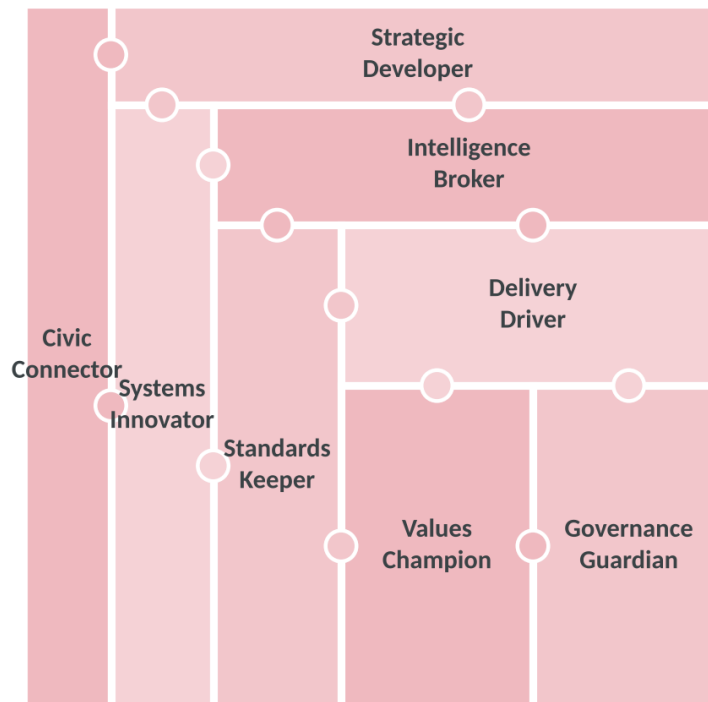
Structured (D)

Structured leaders like clarity. They prefer defined plans, agreed roles and clear timelines, and they are comfortable making decisions and moving on. They hold themselves and others to commitments, and they build the systems and routines that let complex work run reliably. In public service, where people depend on services being there every day, they bring the discipline and consistency that turn good intentions into dependable delivery.

- Clear plans and firm decisions
- Reliability and follow-through
- Structures that let complex work run smoothly

The jigsaw: eight pieces

Your preferences are continuous, but what they add up to is not. Where Engagement, Thinking and Judgement combine, they produce eight distinct contributions, and each contribution has edges, because it only makes full sense alongside the others. That is why they are drawn as pieces rather than moons. A leadership team needs all eight, and everyone can work in any of them. The size of each piece shows where you are likely to go first.



Piece	Mix	In a sentence
Civic Connector	A-S-V	Builds relationships across the system and draws people into a shared purpose
Strategic Developer	A-S-E	Takes promising ideas and works out, with others, how they could really work
Systems Innovator	R-S-V	Imagines genuinely new ways of doing things, anchored in purpose
Intelligence Broker	R-S-E	Gathers and makes sense of intelligence so that others can decide well
Standards Keeper	A-G-V	Makes sure things are done well for people, and seen through to the end
Delivery Driver	A-G-E	Turns decisions into action with pace, structure and clear accountability
Values Champion	R-G-V	Holds a team to its values and keeps people at the heart of decisions
Governance Guardian	R-G-E	Brings careful assurance so that public trust is well placed

CIVIC CONNECTOR

Builds relationships across the system and draws people into a shared purpose

Civic Connectors are at their best out in the wider system, with partners, communities and networks. They pick up what is changing beyond the organisation, see how it connects to the bigger picture, and translate direction into a story people want to be part of. Their decisions are guided by purpose and by what matters to the people affected, so they often become the voice linking the organisation to the communities it serves, bringing energy and momentum to new directions.

What this piece gives a team

A Civic Connector keeps a team facing outwards. They bring in partners, community voices and fresh intelligence, help the team see itself as part of a wider system, and give change a human story. In team leadership they build the coalitions and trust that let ambitious work happen across organisational boundaries.

When this strength is overplayed: Enthusiasm can run ahead of what has been agreed, and conversations can multiply faster than decisions.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPER

Takes promising ideas and works out, with others, how they could really work

Strategic Developers sit between innovation and delivery. They are drawn to new possibilities, but they test them with a realist's eye, asking what the evidence says and whether an idea will stand up in practice. Energised by working with others, they enjoy pilots, prototypes and proofs of concept, and they learn by doing. They are often most valuable in the middle stage of change, when a promising strategy needs critical, practical development before it can be rolled out.

What this piece gives a team

A Strategic Developer helps a team move from strategy to something workable. They bring constructive challenge to new ideas, design ways to test them, and keep the team honest about what the evidence shows. In team leadership they make it safe to experiment while keeping a clear eye on results.

When this strength is overplayed: The appetite for developing new things can draw attention from established work, and constant testing can feel unsettling to others.

SYSTEMS INNOVATOR

Imagines genuinely new ways of doing things, anchored in purpose

Systems Innovators bring original thinking to complex, ambiguous problems. They reflect deeply, look for patterns across the whole system and ask what could be fundamentally different, not just slightly better. Their ideas are anchored in purpose and values, so their innovation is usually about doing right by people in new ways. They often work best with time and space to think, and they bring the creative leap that lets an organisation reimagine a service rather than simply repair it.

What this piece gives a team

A Systems Innovator gives a team the capacity to rethink, not just improve. They notice connections others miss and bring considered, original ideas to stubborn problems. In team leadership they help the team hold a long view and remember why change matters, especially when pressures pull towards quick fixes.

When this strength is overplayed: Ideas can keep evolving in private for longer than the team can wait, and the next new idea can arrive before the last one has been tried.

INTELLIGENCE BROKER

Gathers and makes sense of intelligence so that others can decide well

Intelligence Brokers collect, connect and interpret information from many sources. Reflective and thorough, they listen carefully to what is said and what is not, look for patterns across the wider system, and test what they find against the evidence. They are comfortable holding a question open while the picture builds, and their advice is valued because it is rounded, balanced and well informed. They help a team decide well rather than simply quickly.

What this piece gives a team

An Intelligence Broker gives a team the quality of insight that good decisions depend on. They bring together data, research and what partners and communities are saying, and they notice patterns early. In team leadership they help the team pause, check what it knows and avoid acting on assumptions.

When this strength is overplayed: The search for a fuller picture can delay a decision the team needs to make, and careful advice can arrive after the moment has passed.

STANDARDS KEEPER

Makes sure things are done well for people, and seen through to the end

Standards Keepers take pride in doing things properly. Practical and grounded, they focus on what is happening now and what needs to be finished. Their energy is visible and engaged: they work alongside colleagues, keep people on track and care that the service people receive is consistently good. Guided by values, they see quality as a matter of respect for the public. They make sure change lands fully, rather than stopping short of the finish.

What this piece gives a team

A Standards Keeper gives a team reliability and a shared sense of what good looks like. They keep attention on quality, finish what is started and care about the experience of the people being served. In team leadership they help sustain services through change so that people do not lose out while new things are built.

When this strength is overplayed: Care for doing things properly can make new approaches feel risky, and finishing perfectly can take longer than the moment needs.

DELIVERY DRIVER

Turns decisions into action with pace, structure and clear accountability

Delivery Drivers make things happen. Active and grounded, they focus on what needs to be done now and drive it forward with energy. They make decisions on evidence and clear criteria, set up the structures and plans that complex work needs, and hold themselves and others to account for results. They are often at their best when a strategy must become visible progress at pace, and they give a team confidence that what is agreed will actually be done.

What this piece gives a team

A Delivery Driver gives a team drive and clarity. They turn discussion into decisions and decisions into action, set clear objectives and track progress. In team leadership they make accountability normal and help the team show partners and communities that it does what it says it will do.

When this strength is overplayed: Pace can move ahead of involvement, and the drive for results can leave quieter voices unheard.

VALUES CHAMPION

Holds a team to its values and keeps people at the heart of decisions

Values Champions bring a strong, steady sense of what is right. Reflective and grounded, they think carefully about how decisions will affect real people, and they are loyal to the principles and relationships that matter. They often have a stabilising effect on a team, holding it together through pressure and uncertainty. They speak up for people without power or voice, and they bring wisdom and conscience to decisions with significant human impact.

What this piece gives a team

A Values Champion gives a team its conscience and its steadiness. They remind colleagues why the work matters, notice when a decision does not sit well with shared values, and help hold relationships together through demanding times. In team leadership they build trust and keep purpose alive.

When this strength is overplayed: Loyalty to familiar ways can make useful change harder, and principled positions can become difficult for others to discuss.

GOVERNANCE GUARDIAN

Brings careful assurance so that public trust is well placed

Governance Guardians attend to the detail others move past too quickly. Reflective, thorough and grounded in facts, they check figures, contracts, compliance and quality with care, and they will name gaps in governance or assurance that others would rather not see. Their decisions rest on clear criteria applied consistently. They concentrate deeply on a few things at a time, and they provide the assurance that public money and public trust deserve.

What this piece gives a team

A Governance Guardian gives a team confidence that its decisions are sound and its risks understood. They check the facts, keep governance clear and make sure commitments are properly recorded. In team leadership they protect the team's integrity and help it earn and keep public trust.

When this strength is overplayed: The wish to be certain can slow work that needs to move, and careful checks can be heard as doubt rather than care.

USING THE INSTRUMENT

How it is completed

The questionnaire has 48 questions, twelve for each of the four pairs. Each question offers two statements, and you choose which is more like you on a four-point scale, from much more like the first statement to much more like the second. Most people complete it in around fifteen minutes. It can be completed online or on paper, individually beforehand or at the start of a session.

Each person completes their own profile; there are no other raters. For team use, everyone in the team completes it and individual results are combined into a team picture, shared only with each person's agreement. We recommend that results are always explored in a facilitated conversation, either one to one with a coach or as part of a team session.

Online, the order in which the two statements appear is varied for each person, and answers are mapped back before scoring. This reduces any habit of favouring one side of the page and does not change the scoring. On the paper form, statement A is always on the left.

At least 10 of the 12 questions in each part must be answered for a profile to be produced. Unanswered questions are left out, and the percentage is worked out from the questions answered. The report says how many were answered.

Response	Meaning
3	Much more like statement A
2	A little more like A
1	A little more like B
0	Much more like statement B

How it is scored

Each answer scores from 3 to 0 towards the first side of its pair. The twelve answers for a pair are added together and turned into a percentage, which shows how far you lean towards each side. A result between 50 and 60 per cent on one side is a **Balanced** preference, 60 to 72 is **Moderate**, 72 to 85 is **Clear** and 85 or more is **Strong**.

Your pieces come from the first three pairs. The size of each of the eight pieces is worked out by multiplying together your percentages on the three sides that make it up, so the eight pieces always add up to 100 per cent. Your largest piece is your lead piece, the three pieces that differ from it on one side only are the pieces beside it, and your smallest is your open edge. Adaptability does not change your piece; it describes how you go about the work. This is a structured development tool, not a clinical or selection test, and comparison data will build up over time as the instrument is used.

Strength of lean	Range	What it means
Balanced	50% to 60%	I sit close to the middle here, so there is little you need to adjust for. I can work comfortably either way.
Moderate	60% to 72%	A noticeable lean. Working this way helps me give my best, though I can flex easily when the work needs it.
Clear	72% to 85%	A clear preference. These make a real difference to how well the work goes.
Strong	85% to 100%	A strong preference, and the one most worth knowing about. Working with it brings out my best; I can work the other way, but it takes much more of my energy.

Your four-letter code uses a capital letter where you have a noticeable lean (60% or more) and a small letter where you sit in the **Balanced** band (50% to 59.9%). A small letter means you draw on both sides of that pair about equally. It is shown that way so that two people either side of the middle are not read as opposites.

If preferences were perfectly even, each of the eight pieces would hold 12.5%. A leading piece of 25% is already twice that, and 40% or more means one piece clearly leads the picture. Below 25% the picture is **Spread**, from 25% to 40% it is **Leading**, and from 40% it is **Concentrated**.

Three pieces differ from a person's leading piece on one side only. They share two of its three preferences, so all three sit beside it. The two largest are described in full.

The team's open edge is the single piece with the smallest average share across the team. Separately, any piece that nobody in the team leads with is worth naming: it is not a gap in ability, but nobody's first instinct, so the team will need to cover it deliberately.

Each person's lead piece is shown by name only when everyone in the team has agreed. Without that agreement, the team picture shows only how many people lead with each piece, because in a small team a list of codes and lead pieces can identify people even without names.

Using the results

For individuals, results are explored in a coaching conversation. We look at your moons, your piece in the picture, how others are likely to experience you, what tends to get the best from you, and how you can bridge with colleagues who lead from a different piece.

For teams, the individual pictures are brought together into a team jigsaw. A facilitated session helps the team see its collective strengths, recognise its open edges, understand where friction between colleagues comes from difference rather than difficulty, and agree practical ways to use the full picture, including how to draw in partners and communities.

When to use it

Forming a new leadership team or partnership

Helps people understand each other quickly and agree how they will work together before habits set.

Starting significant change

Shows whether the team has the full range of contributions the change will need, from vision and relationships to delivery and assurance.

When a team feels stuck

Offers a neutral, generous language for tensions, helping colleagues see difference as a resource rather than a conflict.

Moving towards co-production

Helps a team see which contributions it brings to work with communities and where it might invite others in.

Individual coaching

Helps a leader understand their natural contribution, its costs when pronounced, and how to work well with people unlike themselves.

Ethics and good practice

Taking part is voluntary and based on informed consent. Individual profiles belong to the person who completes them and are only shared with a team or line manager with their agreement. Data is held securely and in line with UK data protection law, and used only for the development purpose agreed at the outset. Avanti Leadership Preferences describes preferences, not ability. It must not be used for recruitment, selection, performance management or any decision about a person's employment, and results should never be used to label or limit anyone.

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

The 360 shows how others experience your leadership behaviours. Leadership Preferences shows where you naturally start. Together they help you see how your preferences shape the behaviours others notice, and when a different approach might serve the situation better.

Avanti Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimensions describes an organisation's culture as it is and as people want it to be. Leadership Preferences helps explain why some cultural shifts come easily to a leadership team and others need more deliberate effort, depending on the pieces the team holds.

Avanti Strategic Team Behaviours

Strategic Team Behaviours looks at how well a team works together as a whole. Leadership Preferences adds the individual layer, showing which pieces each member brings to those shared behaviours and where the team relies on just a few people.

Avanti Development Framework Profile

The Development Framework Profile looks at how leadership, teams and partnerships are developing across an organisation and its wider system. Leadership Preferences helps leaders at each level see the contribution they bring to that development and what they can draw from colleagues, partners and communities.

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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