

## Leadership in Action Impact and Reflective Report

**Leo Schwartz**

*Trinity College Dublin, School of Psychology  
Dublin, Ireland  
schwartzl@tcd.ie*

### I. Leadership in Action Impact Report

#### I.I Project Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

I undertook an eight-week Leadership-in-Action placement at Vidaråsen Landsby (Andebu, southern Norway) from 16 June to 10 August. Vidaråsen is a Camphill community of approximately 120–140 people comprising villagers (people with intellectual disabilities) and co-workers (non-villagers). My objectives were threefold:

- **Community integration:** live in a shared house, participate in daily life and workshops, and build relationships with villagers.
- **Operational leadership:** plan and deliver one full week of **fellismiddag** (the village-wide communal dinner) and support throughout July, covering procurement, menu planning, team coordination, and service.
- **Learning under constraint:** lead inclusively while navigating variable attendance, fragmented supply logistics, and the absence of formal budget oversight.

Across July I led Week 2 and assisted on other weeks, typically working 07:45–17:00. Responsibilities included ordering through multiple supplier sites (meat, vegetables, dry goods, dairy) while being mindful of price constraints and incorporating garden/farm produce grown within the village.

Attendance fluctuated markedly across weeks (100 diners in some weeks and 30–40 in others), and headcounts were not consistently confirmed, which occasionally led to over-ordering or over-production. During my lead week, deliveries—which only arrived on Tuesdays—were delayed to late afternoon; because fellismiddag serves at 16:30, this necessitated a same-day menu change (lasagne) to ensure service. Daily provision for vegetarian and vegan diners was maintained; allergen control posed no problems and there were no incidents. Kitchen equipment was adequate for scale. There was no stated weekly or per-capita budget and no order oversight; my best estimate of cost per cover was  $\approx$  €2.

#### I.II Relevant Stakeholders, Events, and Activities

The core stakeholders were the villagers and co-workers directly engaged in kitchen work, the house community, and the Vidaråsen leadership team. Wider stakeholders included external suppliers (whose Tuesday-only delivery cadence shaped production) and the internal garden/farm that provided seasonal produce.

Daily activities in July centred on fellismiddag. We held morning in-person meetings to plan the day, confirm roles, and coordinate tasks. At the outset of my lead week, the kitchen team was severely understaffed (myself, one co-worker, and two villagers, one of whom usually left early), which required careful delegation and collaboration. I typically led the main meal and dessert during my week, and on most non-lead weeks I was responsible for dessert, coordinating with others for remaining tasks. Communication for operations was in person, and post-service debriefs were not routine.

#### I.III Intended Impact, Achievements, and How it will be Sustained

The intended impact was twofold. **First**, to deliver inclusive communal meals that enable villagers to participate meaningfully in preparation and service, thereby supporting dignity, routine, and community cohesion. **Second**, to develop my leadership through situational decision-making under real constraints (volatile headcounts, delivery timing, and lack of budget guidance).

*What was achieved:* I led one full week of fellismiddag and assisted throughout July, maintained vegetarian/vegan provision, and handled a late delivery by adapting the menu to ensure continuity of service. Despite the absence of a formal budget or oversight, I worked within an estimated €2 per cover. No allergen incidents occurred, and equipment supported safe delivery at scale.

To support sustainability beyond my placement, I requested to produce three end-of-project outputs:

- (i) a personal reflection
- (ii) a feedback letter to Vidaråsen leadership (focusing on communication, ordering oversight, and head-

count confirmation)

- (iii) a practical guide to fellismiddag for future volunteers/teams (to consolidate ordering pathways, delivery timing expectations, and baseline dietary provision)

These materials are intended to capture learning from July and provide a consistent starting point for subsequent teams operating under similar constraints.

#### I.IV Interaction With the Community in Need

Camphill is informed by the philosophical framework of **anthroposophy**: a spiritual philosophy founded by Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th century that seeks to provide a holistic path of knowledge and inner development to understand the spiritual in the human being and the universe. While I do not personally subscribe to this philosophy, I consistently experienced the care for community and others that it emphasises. My interaction with the community was daily and direct—living in a shared house, attending workshops, and collaborating with villagers and coworkers in the kitchen. This included assigning roles appropriate to abilities and preferences, coordinating tasks through morning meetings, and maintaining vegetarian/vegan options each day. Variability in weekly diner numbers, staffing, and deliveries was navigated collectively, with the priority of ensuring a communal meal that upheld inclusion and continuity for villagers.

#### I.V Key Challenges

During my LiA, limited communication between certain leaders at Vidaråsen—particularly between my supervisor and workshop leaders—generated persistent ambiguity around remit and authority. Before arrival I had been told I would lead two to four weeks of fellismiddag; on arrival, this was reduced to one. I subsequently learned that workshop leaders were not aware of who I was, why I was in Vidaråsen, or whether I was undertaking the work I intended. In the absence of a shared understanding of my role, some workshop leaders went over my supervisor's head to influence later stages of the project, even as they critiqued one another's communication. The result was scope drift, role ambiguity, and decision friction, with parallel lines of instruction producing conflicting expectations for my day-to-day activities.

Operationally, this misalignment increased the coordination burden required simply to clarify remit and decision rights, and it reduced the continuity of leadership practice envisaged for the placement by compressing the primary leadership element to a single week. The inconsistent signals also created a sense of dissonance in routine interactions, as different leaders endorsed different priorities. At points I felt without a clear purpose; one-to-one meetings with my supervisor, in which we re-anchored tasks to the community's vision, helped restore a sense of belonging and direction. The experience underscores a basic lesson for inclusive service delivery in multi-leader environments:

explicit, early alignment on scope, role, and authority is not cosmetic but constitutive of dignifying, effective practice.

## II. Reflective Report: Lessons Learnt and Future Goals

I entered the Laidlaw Programme with two entwined motives: to test myself in real-world leadership under constraint and to deepen my capacity for independent, publishable research. I wanted evidence—not platitudes—that I could move a project from conception to delivery when resources, timelines, and expectations were fluid. Over the year, those motivations matured. I still value achievement, but I have come to prize process clarity, role alignment, and psychologically safe collaboration as the preconditions for sustainable impact.

### II.I Lessons from Personal Challenges

Two experiences, one in the lab and one in the kitchen, crystallised how I now approach difficult problems. In research, an external dependency (a face database) failed unexpectedly. I could have waited; instead, I reframed the bottleneck as an opportunity for agency. I built my own face repository from the FACES database, programmatically extracting graded emotion frames, applying landmark-based deep-learning crops, and then validating the stimuli at scale through a ratings site. Reliability was high ( $a \approx .92$ ), perceived intensity tracked the “actual” gradient (Spearman  $p \approx .65$ ,  $p \approx 0$ ), and 43% of variance was explained—good enough to proceed while remaining honest about residual noise. When off-the-shelf MATLAB code also proved unavailable, I wrote the experimental task end-to-end ( $\approx 15,000$  lines), an exercise in disciplined problem decomposition rather than brute force. This sequence taught me a bias to action, the value of transparent validation, and the importance of architecting my own tooling when dependencies wobble.

In my Leadership-in-Action (LiA) placement at Vidaråsen, the challenge was not technical but organisational: scope drift, unclear authority, and conflicting instructions across parallel leadership lines. Before arrival I expected to lead two to four weeks of the village-wide communal dinner (fellismiddag); in practice this compressed to one, amid uneven communication between workshop leads and my supervisor. The resulting role ambiguity increased coordination costs and intermittently eroded purpose. What changed my trajectory was establishing cadence: short morning planning huddles, crisp role allocation suited to abilities (villagers and co-workers), and re-anchoring in one-to-one supervision when misalignment accumulated. I learned that early, explicit agreements about remit and decision rights are not “nice to have”; they are constitutive of inclusive, dignifying service.

## II.II What I Found Constructive and What I Enjoyed

In both the lab and Vidaråsen, I found the constructive elements were those that established a rhythm of structured improvisation. In Norway, this meant designing lightweight systems—pre-mortems for deliveries, rota sheets for cooking teams—that could absorb volatility. In the lab, constructive practice came from iterating experimental design under constraint: converting a breakdown in external resources into the opportunity to generate and validate my own face repository. That process—sourcing, cropping, rating, and statistically validating 400 stimuli—not only made the experiment viable but also gave me confidence that independent innovation can substitute for dependency when handled with methodological transparency.

Enjoyment came less from the smooth moments than from seeing difficult tasks come together. At Vidaråsen, this was the satisfaction of watching villagers take ownership of tasks and seeing confidence expand alongside competence. In the lab, the most rewarding moment was running my first pilot: watching the MATLAB code I had written present stimuli, log responses, and integrate with EEG hardware exactly as intended. Both experiences reinforced that the greatest satisfaction comes not from the absence of friction but from designing systems that work despite it.

## II.III Communicating in Diverse Groups

The lab environment demanded communication across disciplinary lines: psychologists, computer scientists, and research assistants brought divergent expertise and vocabularies. Here, I learned to translate: explaining deep-learning-based facial landmark extraction to psychology students in plain terms, while summarising behavioural reliability indices (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) for technically minded peers. At Vidaråsen, communication leaned towards clarity and accessibility, requiring concise, demonstrative instructions that preserved dignity and inclusivity. Across both contexts, I learned that communication is not only about audience adaptation but also about honesty in surfacing uncertainty—whether explaining statistical limits of a validation study or forecasting unpredictable delivery times.

## II.IV My Personal Leadership Style

What both contexts revealed is that my leadership style tends to be anchored in composure, evidence-seeking, and system-building. In the lab, this meant I could maintain progress when software bugs, hardware incompatibility, or missing datasets might have paralysed momentum. In Vidaråsen, composure steadied the group during meal pivots, while evidence-seeking (tracking estimated cost per head, running small test batches in the kitchen) ensured

adaptations were justified. The benefit is resilience under constraint; the limit is a tendency to over-rely on personal initiative, sometimes defaulting to “I will just fix it” rather than distributing problem-solving. My developmental challenge is therefore to balance initiative with delegation—making systems legible and repeatable by others rather than purely reliant on me.

## II.V Future Development

Across both summers, I have gained an appreciation for how leadership is forged less in moments of ease than in the crucible of challenge. The Laidlaw Programme has therefore not only broadened my skills but also clarified the trajectory I wish to pursue: a career in neuroscience research. I now see leadership in research not simply as technical competence, but as the ability to design systems, manage uncertainty, and sustain momentum across diverse teams and stakeholders.

The obstacles I faced—unclear authority in Vidaråsen, missing datasets and software failures in the lab—mirror the unpredictability of academic science. When a vital database collapsed, I created and validated my own, which taught me that resilience requires both innovation and methodological rigour. These lessons will be vital when experiments fail, grants delay, or collaborators hold competing priorities.

Communication was another transferable skill. In Vidaråsen, translating logistics into accessible steps echoed the task of explaining complex neuroscience to diverse audiences—whether undergraduates, reviewers, or policy-makers.

The main area I still need to grow is systematised delegation. In the lab, I relied too heavily on my own coding, whereas long-term leadership requires protocols others can adopt—much like the fellismiddag guide I left for future volunteers.

Looking ahead, I see my future research leadership built on these lessons: reframing obstacles, clarifying responsibility, communicating across groups, and externalising knowledge. If I can consolidate these skills, I will be equipped not just to react to volatility but to design conditions where discovery and collaboration can thrive.

## II.VI Closing Thoughts

The Laidlaw Programme has taught me that leadership is not about heroic execution but about enabling resilience: designing conditions where both people and systems can absorb volatility and still deliver. In the lab, this meant transforming dependency failures into validated tools and functioning code; in Norway, it meant orchestrating inclusive, dignifying service under shifting constraints. My future leadership will rest on coupling initiative with systematisation, so that what I build is both effective and enduring.