Leadership Without Borders

Companion Reflection & Field Guide

Applying the Relic Contextual Leadership Framework

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How to Use This Field Guide

This companion guide turns the reflection questions in Leadership Without Borders into a repeatable practice for individual leaders, leadership teams, instructional coaches, and aspiring administrators. Use it with one real leadership situation at a time. The goal is not to produce a score. The goal is to make your thinking, evidence, perspectives, actions, and follow-through more visible.

- Work through the chapter that matches your current leadership challenge rather than completing the book mechanically from beginning to end.
- Write observations before interpretations. Separate what you saw or heard from what you think it means.
- Invite perspectives from people affected by the decision. A leader's self-report cannot establish how others experienced the action.
- Choose one manageable next step and a specific review date. Improvement comes from examining effects and adjusting, not from completing a worksheet.
- Use the tools for professional reflection and conversation, not as validated evaluation instruments or staff-ranking scales.

The five core dimensions

Dimension	Practice question
Vision-Centered Leadership	Connect decisions to a clear, shared learning purpose.
Teacher Empowerment	Give educators meaningful influence, authority, and support.
Relational Trust	Build credibility through respect, clarity, responsiveness, and follow-through.
Contextual Awareness	Investigate local conditions, expectations, histories, and perspectives before acting.
Continuous Improvement	Test, learn, review effects, and adapt practice over time.

The Relic Leadership Reflection Cycle

1. Observe the Context

Describe the situation, evidence, constraints, patterns, and what remains unknown.

2. Reflect on Leadership Practices

Examine your actions and assumptions through the five framework dimensions.

3. Engage with Teacher Perspectives

Ask how the issue and the leadership response are experienced by those closest to the work.

4. Adapt Leadership Practices

Choose a feasible adjustment that fits the purpose, responsibilities, and context.

5. Strengthen School Culture

Review what the change taught you about trust, collaboration, expectations, and future routines.

Start with one current situation

Leadership situation or decision I want to examine:

Why this matters now:

People most affected:

Chapter 1: Leadership, Culture, and School Improvement

Leadership becomes visible through decisions, routines, and relationships. This section helps you compare your intent with how a decision was experienced and what it communicated about the school's priorities and trust.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Decision signals, trust, school improvement

Reflect

What did a recent leadership decision communicate beyond its stated purpose?

Where is there evidence that teachers experienced the decision as supportive, unclear, or restrictive?

Which of the five framework dimensions is most visible in this situation, and which is least visible?

What evidence would help?

- A decision, message, meeting, or follow-up that shows what people actually experienced.
- A teacher perspective that confirms or challenges your interpretation.
- A repeated routine that shows whether this was an isolated event or part of a pattern.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 1: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"How did that decision affect your work, and what do you think I may not have considered?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 1: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Choose one recent decision that affected teachers.
2. Ask at least one teacher how the decision was experienced, without defending the original intent.
3. Identify one adjustment you can make within the next two weeks and set a review date.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 2: Transformational Leadership in Practice

Transformational leadership matters when shared purpose is paired with intellectual challenge, individualized support, and reliable follow-through. This section tests whether inspiration is connected to practical support for teaching and learning.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Shared purpose, support, expectations

Reflect

How clearly do your current priorities connect to a shared purpose for teaching and learning?

Where are you providing individualized support rather than the same support to everyone?

When have high expectations been paired with the resources, feedback, and trust needed to meet them?

What evidence would help?

- Examples of how priorities are communicated and revisited.
- Evidence that support differs according to teacher or team need.
- Follow-up showing whether coaching, resources, or feedback were useful.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 2: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What kind of support would make this expectation more workable or more useful?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 2: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Select one teacher or team that needs a different kind of support.
2. Clarify the goal, ask what support would be useful, and agree on one next step.
3. Review whether the support changed practice, confidence, or access to resources.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 3: Teacher Voice and Leadership Influence

Teacher voice becomes meaningful when participation has consequences. This section helps you clarify decision boundaries, hear missing perspectives, and close the feedback loop.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Voice, influence, decision boundaries

Reflect

Which decisions can teachers genuinely influence in your school?

Whose perspectives are easiest to hear, and whose are regularly missing?

How often do you explain what changed - or did not change - because of teacher input?

What evidence would help?

- A list of recent decisions and who influenced them.
- Feedback from quieter, newer, dissenting, or otherwise less-heard staff.
- Examples of how leadership communicated what changed because of input.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 3: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What part of this decision should teachers influence, and what perspective have we not heard yet?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 3: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Choose one upcoming decision and state the decision boundary before asking for input.
2. Invite perspectives through more than one channel so public speaking is not the only path to participation.
3. Close the loop by communicating what you heard, what changed, and why.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 4: Cultural Context and Leadership

Context should prompt inquiry rather than assumptions. This section helps you examine how culture, role expectations, language, history, and organizational structures shape how leadership is interpreted.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Assumptions, culture, adaptation

Reflect

What assumptions are you making about how people in this setting prefer to communicate, decide, or disagree?

Which expectations are truly required by policy or role, and which are habits that could be adapted?

Who can help you understand the local history or meaning behind a response you may be misreading?

What evidence would help?

- Local perspectives on communication, authority, family/community expectations, or decision-making.
- Policies or role requirements that distinguish fixed responsibilities from adaptable processes.
- Examples where your first cultural interpretation proved incomplete or wrong.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 4: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What am I likely to misunderstand about how this issue is experienced here?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 4: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Identify one leadership routine that may not fit the current context.
2. Ask two people with different perspectives how they experience that routine.
3. Adapt one part of the process while keeping the essential responsibility clear.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 5: Contextual Intelligence in School Leadership

Contextual intelligence begins by separating observation, interpretation, and action. This section helps you use evidence without pretending that data alone explains why a pattern exists.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Evidence, interpretation, contextual judgment

Reflect

What do you actually know about the problem, and what are you interpreting?

What does the available data reveal, and what can it not explain?

Which perspective could most challenge your first explanation of the situation?

What evidence would help?

- A clearly dated observation or baseline.
- Student work, staff input, family/community perspective, or other evidence that adds context to aggregate data.
- A record of what happened after a small change was tested.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 5: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What does this evidence miss about what is actually happening?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 5: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Write the issue in three columns: observation, interpretation, and question.
2. Gather one additional perspective or piece of evidence that tests your interpretation.
3. Try one small, reversible action and decide what evidence will guide the next adjustment.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 6: Leadership During Change and Crisis

Change and crisis expose the quality of communication, trust, and decision-making. This section supports clear responsibility, transparent uncertainty, predictable updates, and learning after disruption.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Uncertainty, communication, resilience

Reflect

What was known, unknown, and changing when the decision had to be made?

How did you communicate uncertainty without creating unnecessary confusion?

Which relationships or routines built before the crisis helped - or failed to help - during the crisis?

What evidence would help?

- A timeline of decisions, updates, and changing information.
- Questions or concerns raised by staff, families, or students.
- Evidence from an after-action review about what should be retained or changed.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 6: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What information or support would have reduced uncertainty for you?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 6: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Name the immediate responsibility that must guide the response.
2. Set a predictable update rhythm and identify who needs information, support, or a way to raise concerns.
3. After the immediate pressure passes, conduct a short after-action review and record one change for next time.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 7: Building Strong School Culture

Culture is visible in repeated interactions: who speaks, how disagreement is handled, whether concerns receive a response, and whether commitments are kept. This section turns those patterns into something you can examine and improve.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Relationships, routines, follow-through

Reflect

What everyday interaction best reveals the current culture of your school?

What happens when someone disagrees with a leader, colleague, or established routine?

Which commitments are consistently followed through, and where does follow-through break down?

What evidence would help?

- Examples of how leaders respond to concerns and disagreement.
- Evidence of commitments made and whether they were completed.
- Patterns in collaboration, help-seeking, recognition, and problem-solving.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 7: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What happens here when someone raises a concern or disagrees?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 7: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Select one routine where trust is visible in action.
2. Make one change that improves predictability, response, or shared responsibility.
3. Ask staff what they notice after the change and decide whether to keep, adjust, or stop it.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 8: Developing Future Leaders

Leadership capacity grows through meaningful responsibility, explicit boundaries, support, and reflection. This section helps you develop emerging leaders without simply transferring extra work.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Mentoring, responsibility, leadership capacity

Reflect

Who is already demonstrating leadership without holding a formal title?

Are leadership opportunities meaningful developmental experiences or simply additional work?

What support, boundaries, and feedback help emerging leaders build judgment?

What evidence would help?

- Examples of who currently leads work and how opportunities are distributed.
- A clear scope of authority and support for an emerging leader.
- A debrief showing what the person learned and what support is needed next.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 8: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What responsibility would help you grow as a leader, and what support would you need?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 8: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Identify one emerging leader and one bounded responsibility aligned with that person's strengths or growth goals.
2. Clarify purpose, authority, support, and what remains your responsibility.
3. Debrief after the experience and identify the next stretch opportunity.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Chapter 9: Leadership for Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is disciplined learning. This section helps you define a problem, test a manageable change, examine variation in results, and decide what to adjust before scaling.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Problem definition, testing, learning

Reflect

Is the improvement problem defined specifically enough to learn from it?

What baseline or evidence will allow the team to judge whether a change helped?

Where might the same change produce different results for different students, teachers, or settings?

What evidence would help?

- A baseline tied to a specific problem.
- Evidence collected during a small test of change.
- Results by relevant groups or contexts, including unintended effects.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Chapter 9: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What would count as evidence that this change helped - and who might experience it differently?"

My adapted question:

Chapter 9: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Choose one manageable change rather than launching a full solution.
2. Specify what evidence you will collect and how long you will test the change.
3. Review the results with the people affected, including unexpected or negative effects, before expanding.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Final Chapter: The Future of Leadership in Education

The final section helps you consolidate what you have learned, identify the framework dimension that needs sustained attention, and create a leadership commitment that can be reviewed in practice.

FIELD GUIDE FOCUS Integration, commitment, next leadership chapter

Reflect

Which experience has most changed how you understand leadership?

Which leadership belief do you now hold with more humility or curiosity than before?

Which dimension of the framework needs the most sustained attention in your next leadership chapter?

What evidence would help?

- Notes from earlier chapter reflections.
- Feedback from teachers or colleagues about how your leadership has changed.
- A concrete commitment with a review date and evidence of progress.

Evidence I already have:

Evidence or perspective I still need:

Final Chapter: Perspective Check

Who experiences this differently?

Who is most directly affected by this decision or routine?

Whose perspective is represented in my current understanding?

Whose perspective is missing, quieter, or easier for me to dismiss?

What is one question I can ask without leading the person toward my preferred answer?

How will I show what I did with the perspective after I asked for it?

A neutral question I will use

"What is one way my leadership has changed, and one area where I still need to grow?"

My adapted question:

Final Chapter: Apply

Turn reflection into one manageable action

1. Write one leadership commitment for the next 30 days.
2. Name the people whose perspectives you need in order to live out that commitment.
3. Set a date to review what changed, what did not, and what you need to learn next.

Action-planning element	Your response
Concern or opportunity	
Framework dimension to strengthen	
One action I will take	
People to involve	
Time/resources needed	
Evidence of progress	
Possible unintended effects	
Review date	

30-day review

What changed?

What did not change?

What did I learn from people affected?

Keep, adjust, or stop - and why?

Reusable Tool 1: Five-Dimension Leadership Scan

Use this as a discussion anchor, not as a score. For each dimension, record one concrete example, one missing perspective, and one next question.

Dimension	Evidence/example	Missing perspective	Next question
Vision-Centered Leadership			
Teacher Empowerment			
Relational Trust			
Contextual Awareness			
Continuous Improvement			

Reusable Tool 2: 30-Minute Leadership Review

1. First 5 minutes - Describe one situation. Write observable facts separately from interpretations.
2. Next 10 minutes - Examine the situation through the five dimensions. Identify the dimension most relevant to the issue and one missing perspective.
3. Next 10 minutes - Choose one feasible response. State what evidence would help you judge whether it helped.
4. Final 5 minutes - Record the next action, who is responsible, and the date you will review the effects.

Situation / observable facts:

Interpretations I need to test:

Missing perspective:

Next action and review date:

Reusable Tool 3: Teacher Voice Decision Protocol

- Decision: What is being decided?
- Boundary: Is this a fixed requirement, an advisory decision, a joint decision, or a delegated decision?
- Perspectives: Who needs to be heard before the decision is made?
- Access: How can people participate if they do not want to speak publicly?
- Response: What changed because of input? What did not change, and why?
- Follow-through: When will the group revisit the effects of the decision?

Action-planning element	Your response
Decision	
Decision boundary	
People/perspectives to include	
How input will be gathered	
What changed because of input	
What remains fixed and why	
Follow-up date	

Reusable Tool 4: Crisis and Change Review Record

During the event

What is known right now?

What remains uncertain or is changing?

Which immediate responsibilities must guide the response?

Who needs the next update, and when?

What support do educators, students, and families need?

After the event

What worked as intended?

Where did communication or support break down?

Which pre-existing relationships or routines helped?

What should change before the next disruption?

Reusable Tool 5: Emerging Leader Development Plan

Action-planning element	Your response
Emerging leader / role	
Strength or growth goal	
Bounded leadership responsibility	
Decision authority	
Mentor/support available	
Resources/time provided	
Debrief date	
Next stretch opportunity	

Mentor reflection

What did I do that supported the person's judgment rather than taking over?

What responsibility should increase, remain the same, or decrease next time?

Reusable Tool 6: 90-Day Contextual Leadership Plan

Choose one dimension as the primary growth focus. Other dimensions remain connected, but a narrow focus makes follow-through more realistic.

Action-planning element	Your response
Primary dimension	
Why this matters in my current context	
Baseline / current evidence	
People whose perspectives I will seek	
30-day action	
60-day review / adjustment	
90-day evidence of progress	
What I will continue learning	

End-of-Book Leadership Reflection

What has changed in how I interpret leadership?

Which of the five dimensions now feels most natural in my practice?

Which dimension needs sustained attention?

What have teachers, colleagues, families, or community members helped me understand that I did not understand before?

What leadership assumption am I more willing to question?

What will I do in the next month?

How will I know whether that action helped the people it was intended to serve?

My next leadership commitment

Notes