



THE 5 LENSES FRAMEWORK

Seeing the system that makes your
work happen



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Introduction

Why this matters



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Leaders work hard. They convene meetings, produce plans, commit resources. Yet progress can still stall. Not because people don't care, but because the system of work (its decisions, authority, habits and flows) contains blind spots. When you cannot see the patterns shaping outcomes, good intentions become fragments of activity rather than coherent progress.

The 5 Lenses

The 5 Lenses grew from more than two decades of working with organisations navigating complex change, across charities, public bodies, regulated financial services and social care. The same patterns kept appearing across very different settings. What was missing was not effort or commitment. It was shared sight of the system shaping outcomes. The framework is a practical working tool that helps leadership teams surface what is really happening so they can act with greater confidence.

The Patterns

Many organisations find themselves caught in familiar patterns: initiatives launch with enthusiasm but lose momentum, decisions made in meetings somehow fail to translate into action, resources stretch thin whilst priorities multiply, and talented people work harder without seeing proportional results. These symptoms often point not to lack of effort or capability, but to systemic misalignment that remains invisible until examined deliberately.

The Framework

The framework operates on a simple principle: before you can change what isn't working, you must first see it clearly. By examining organisational reality through five distinct perspectives, Purpose, People, Power, Process and Practice, leadership teams develop a shared understanding of the forces shaping their outcomes. This shared sight becomes the foundation for coherent, sustainable decisions that land in practice rather than remaining aspirational.

How to use this Framework



Not a Checklist

This is a way of looking, not a box-ticking exercise. Use it to build genuine insight.

When to Apply the Lenses

- Plans are not landing as expected
- Decisions are not sticking
- Energy feels scattered across competing priorities
- Results feel harder to achieve than they should

The 5 Lenses works best when leadership teams engage with it together, in space that is deliberately separate from operational decision-making. The goal is not to solve problems in the moment but to develop shared understanding that informs better decisions over time.

It does not replace the frameworks your organisation already uses, it works alongside them, helping teams know with greater confidence which tools to reach for and where to focus attention first.

Some organisations integrate it into regular governance cycles; others reach for it at moments of challenge or transition. The structure is simple: see before you solve.

Purpose:

Why this matters



Test Alignment

Different groups often carry different assumptions about what success looks like right now.



Clarify Direction

Local decisions can make sense in isolation yet still pull in competing or different directions.



Enable Trade-offs

When purpose becomes clearer, difficult choices become easier to make with confidence.

This lens examines why any initiative, decision or allocation of resources matters. It sounds obvious, yet misalignment on purpose is one of the most damaging blind spots in organisational life. Teams can work diligently towards goals they understand differently, creating effort without cumulative impact.

The problem is not that organisations lack stated purposes: it is that different people interpret the same goals through different lenses, shaped by their particular pressures, histories and contexts. What the board means by "improved stakeholder engagement" may differ significantly from what operational teams understand, yet these differences remain unspoken until outcomes diverge from expectations.

What you might notice: activity without shared intent, where people are busy but pulling in different directions; competing definitions of success that create confusion about what good looks like; resource pressure without clear agreement on what matters most. When leadership teams develop genuine clarity about purpose, something shifts. Trade-offs that felt impossible become navigable, resources can be allocated with confidence, and effort starts to accumulate rather than dissipate.

Questions to explore: Why does this matter now? Who benefits if this succeeds? Where might priorities be misaligned across different parts of the organisation?

People:

Who is Affected and Involved



Agreement in meetings rarely translates into confidence in practice.

This lens asks leadership teams to look beyond the organisational chart and consider how decisions actually land with the people who must live with them. Workloads, habits, incentives and history shape how change is understood on the ground.



Questions to explore...

- Who is impacted by this decision or change?
- Who has influence but is not yet involved?
- Where is capacity particularly tight?
- What assumptions are we making about what people can absorb?

Too often, middle managers are expected to deliver change they had no hand in shaping, frontline staff face new requirements without the capacity to meet them, and stakeholder needs are interpreted rather than directly consulted.

When leadership teams see this gap clearly, they can adjust expectations, provide appropriate support, and communicate with greater honesty

Designing for reality rather than aspiration means targeting support where it is actually needed, pacing change to match genuine capacity, and acknowledging legitimate concerns rather than asking people to absorb more than the system can hold.



What you might notice...

- Silent workarounds - unofficial ways to cope
- Overlooked perspectives from those closest to the work
- Unrealistic assumptions about bandwidth
- History/relationships that shape receptiveness to change

Power:

Where is the Authority and Energy?



Formal Structures

Organisation charts and role descriptions define official authority and reporting lines.



Informal Influence

Respect, expertise, relationships and history create power that may not appear on any chart.



Practical Control

The ability to delay, redirect or quietly veto often sits with unexpected individuals or groups.

Formal structures seldom tell the whole story about where power actually resides. This lens asks who can genuinely say yes, and whose quiet resistance can stop progress.

In many organisations, the person with formal authority to approve a decision is not always the person whose agreement determines whether it moves forward. Understanding this gap, where middle managers, operational gatekeepers, and informal influencers shape outcomes, prevents naive assumptions about why decisions don't stick.

Questions to explore: Who can say yes? Who can quietly say no? Are responsibilities aligned with expectations and authority?

What you might notice: decisions revisited repeatedly without clear reason; unclear accountability where multiple people believe they are responsible but none can actually act; invisible centres of influence whose buy-in is essential but unrecognised.

When power is understood in practice rather than theory, governance steadies. Accountability reflects actual authority. Decisions are socialised with the right people before they are formally made, and progress comes with fewer surprises.

Process:

What's in Place and Where Does It Stick



Designed procedures and lived pathways are often remarkably different. This lens examines the route that work actually takes rather than the route policies describe, surfacing where friction slows progress or forces people into workarounds.

Approval chains may have grown so lengthy that ownership diffuses. Information systems built for different purposes may require duplicate data entry. Handovers between teams may lack clarity about who owns what at each stage.

Questions to explore...



- What route does work actually take from initiation to completion?
- Where does the process slow down or stop?
- Where does information get lost or require rework?
- What unofficial shortcuts have people created?

What you might notice...



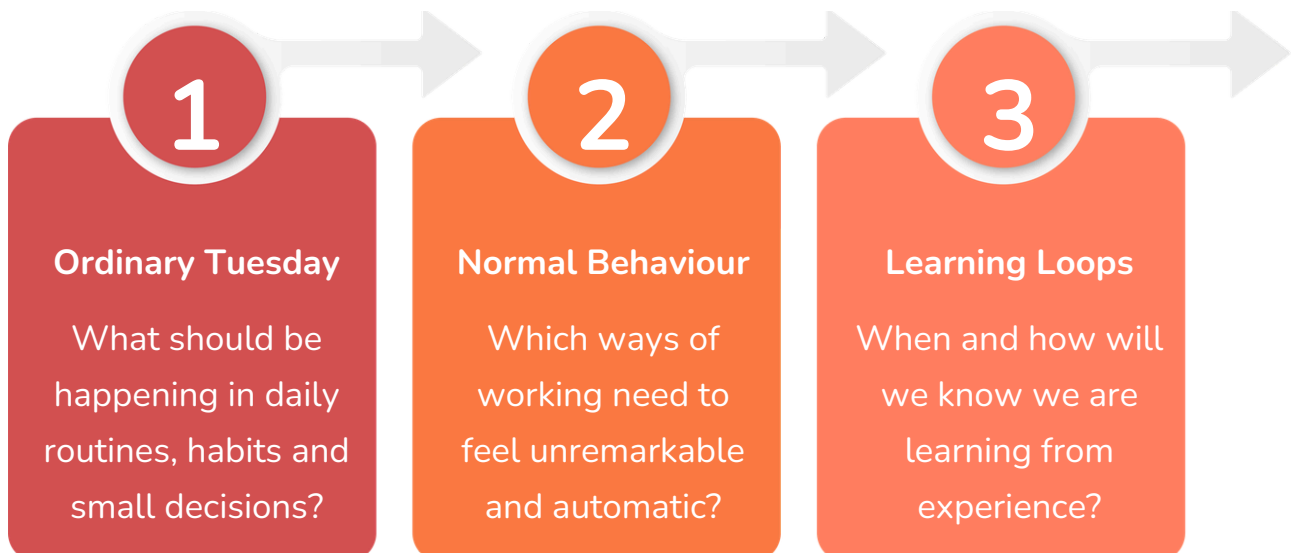
- Rework and duplication that waste capacity
- Informal shortcuts that bypass intended controls
- Frustration that feels personal but is actually structural
- Competing systems that require translation between them

Process problems often manifest as people problems. When talented professionals seem resistant or inefficient, the root cause may be a process that makes the right thing harder than the wrong thing.

When teams seem territorial, competing systems may be forcing them to protect their own workflows. Clarity here turns irritation into focused improvement, removing obstacles rather than urging people to work harder within systems that were never designed for the work they now support.

Practice:

What Happens and When Do We Learn



Change lasts only when it becomes routine, visible in habits, conversations and small decisions repeated over time. This lens asks what actually happens on an ordinary Tuesday morning when nobody is watching and initial enthusiasm has faded.

Many transformation efforts focus heavily on launch, but without attention to how new ways of working integrate into daily practice, even well-designed changes revert to familiar patterns under pressure. People fall back on what their systems and environment still reward.

What you might notice: aspirations in strategy documents not reflected in how people actually spend their time; feedback loops too slow or filtered to support genuine learning; reliance on announcements rather than sustained reinforcement through everyday routines. When practice shifts, change stops being a project.

Leadership attention moves from launching initiatives to noticing patterns, from making announcements to shaping environments. The work becomes less dramatic but far more durable.

The question is not what we say matters, but what our daily habits reveal about what actually matters in practice.

Using the Lenses Together

A brief scenario...

The Presenting Problem

A public service organisation launched a programme to improve staff engagement. Despite initial enthusiasm and significant investment, participation dropped steadily after the first few months.

Looking through the Lenses

Rather than blame communication or staff resistance, the leadership team examined the system through all five perspectives and discovered something different.

Purpose

Staff expected clarity about workload pressure, not a wellbeing initiative. The disconnect between leadership intent and staff experience created cynicism.

People

Middle managers, who would need to release time for staff to participate, had not been involved in shaping the plan. They saw it as another demand.

Power

Authority to release time sat with line managers, not the senior sponsors. Without their buy-in, participation remained optional in practice.

Process

Approval requirements for even small participation activities added delay and diluted ownership, making engagement feel bureaucratic.

Practice

Weekly team routines left no protected space for reflection or different conversations. The initiative competed with established patterns.

The problem was not enthusiasm; it was system design. Leadership had tried to add engagement activities to an unchanged, already stretched system.

Once that became visible, the approach changed: involving middle managers, simplifying processes, and protecting time in team routines. The initiative became a genuine shift in how work happened.



Start a Conversation



The most useful thing you can do with this framework is take it back into your organisation and use it. Share it with your leadership team. Pick one lens and ask what it surfaces. Notice where the conversation goes.

Clarity about the system does not remove complexity; it changes where leaders focus attention. The framework works because it creates space for honest conversation about patterns that are easier to see collectively than individually. It gives language to dynamics that teams know intuitively but struggle to articulate, and shifts focus from blame and firefighting to systematic improvement.

Many organisations return to the lenses periodically as conditions change, using them to test assumptions and maintain shared sight.



About Rachel Jannaway

Rachel works with boards and leadership teams in purpose-led organisations, bringing clear thinking to moments of complexity. She serves as a Chair of Governors and advises on governance, transformation and AI adoption.



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Find out more

The thinking behind the 5 Lenses is explored in a monthly article series offering practical insights on governance, change and AI adoption in purpose-led organisations.



www.jannaways.co.uk/blog