

Contemporary issues in the public management of social services in Europe

- 01 | Responding to the economic crisis and austerity
- 02 | Innovation, research and evidence-based practice
- 03 | Working with education, health and employment:
recognising a shared agenda
- 04 | Leadership and management in social services



ESN's working group on Leadership, Performance and Innovation was set up in the wake of the economic crisis in Europe. It brought together senior managers of public social services at local and regional level to evaluate both the impact of and the responses to the crisis, and to explore what this experience might mean for the future of the welfare state and for the leadership and management of social services.

The participating managers came from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Over the life time of the group, the members chose to engage with a number of issues which they believed to be critical to the future public management of social services:

1. Responding to the economic crisis and austerity
2. Innovation, research and evidence-based practice
3. Working with education, health and employment: recognising a shared agenda
4. Leadership and management in social services

In their debates, the managers had occasionally invited external experts from national and international agencies including the OECD, Eurohealthnet, the European Commission, and from the UK the Social Care Institute for Excellence

and the National Skills Academy.

Following these meetings, ESN is publishing a series of four public management papers in which we argue why directors of social services, senior professionals, politicians and other stakeholders should address these challenges and suggest how they might tackle them.

The papers conclude with a set of key questions for public managers to help them evaluate their response to the crisis and austerity and think strategically about the future direction and design of services.

The self-evaluation questions are addressed to senior managers working at the local level, but we hope they will be of use to policy makers and public officials at all levels, as well as those working closely with public social services in other sectors.

The European Social Network (ESN) brings together people who plan, manage and deliver public social services, together with those in regulatory and research organisations. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and experience.



The European Social Network is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS 2007-2013). This programme was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

To that effect, PROGRESS 2007-2013 aims to:

- provide analysis and policy advice on employment, social solidarity and gender equality policy areas;
- monitor and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in employment, social solidarity and gender equality policy areas;
- promote policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities;
- and relay the views of the stakeholders and society at large.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

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Introduction

Good leadership and management are essential to the successful operation and development of public social services and for achieving better outcomes for service users. In difficult economic times, when leaders and managers in the public sector are facing greater demands and shrinking resources, and making difficult decisions regarding budgets and organisational change, it is important to consider the qualities, skills and support needed by leaders and managers to be able to deliver quality, sustainable and efficient social services.

The aim of this paper is to explore the perceptions, challenges and opportunities for leadership and management in the social services sector. To do this, the paper draws on established theories of public leadership and management, as well as the expertise and experiences of leaders and managers within ESN's Leadership, Performance and Innovation working group¹.

Firstly, it explores the meaning of the concepts of leadership and management in general and also, specifically, in the context of social services. Next, it looks at the learning and development culture for leaders and managers in social services, drawing on examples from the United Kingdom and Austria. Finally, the paper touches on the issue of ethical limits and outlines the importance of having the right support as a leader and manager of social services.

What is leadership and what is management?

The terms leadership and management are often used interchangeably, although they may refer to different and sometimes overlapping responsibilities and tasks. **Leadership** is about setting and communicating the direction of where the organisation is going. While some academic theories conceptualise leadership based on the personal qualities of a leader to inspire organisational change (transformational leadership), others focus on the more managerial side of leadership, which emphasises the ability of a leader to ensure compliance of staff through an incentive-based system (transactional leadership). A further distinction is made between leadership approaches that emphasise individuals' skills and competencies as separate from the organisation (agency theory), and those which focus on the role of a leader to bring about change in the context within which the organisation operates (systemic leadership approach). Recent approaches to leadership emphasise the need for a combination of both transactional (to supervise, organise and ensure performance) and transformational (to be visionary, entrepreneurial and charismatic) leadership skills².

Management is the process that allows an organisation to achieve its goal to a consistent level of quality. It is a continuous process that works towards achieving the goals of an organisation. The tasks of a manager are often described by action-oriented words, which include planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and providing feedback to employees. In this way, management is linked to the implementation process of organisational change. While traditional theories of public administration focused on the function of managers holding employees to account, new public management theory promotes a management culture allowing for flexibility to achieve new efficiencies in terms of costs and administration and better outcomes for users of public services. In recent years, post-new public management has emerged as a critique of complexity and 'efficiency over quality' focus of the original theory³.

¹ Read more about ESN's Leadership, Performance and Innovation working group, <http://www.esn-eu.org/lpi-working-group/index.html>

² Northouse, Peter (2013) *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Sixth Edition, Sage Publications

³ De Vries, Jouke (2010) *Is New Public Management Really Dead?*, OECD Journal on Budgeting Volume 2010/1

How are leadership and management understood by leaders and managers of social services?

ESN's Leadership, Performance and Innovation working group discussed⁴ how leaders and managers in public social services interpret the concepts of leadership and management in their day-to-day work.

For the most part, members of the group saw leadership and management as different, but overlapping. They felt that leadership involves setting and communicating the direction of where the organisation is going and relies on the personal qualities of the leader to inspire and empower others to move in that direction. This suggests an emphasis on the transformational capability of leaders in social services to inspire change and motivate the workforce towards a common goal.

Working group members commented on the importance of 'authenticity' in leadership: that staff, partners and service users see a leader as having a consistent and transparent approach. In addition, they talked about the need for strategic leadership to be shared with heads of department, senior managers in partner organisations and, in some cases, local elected politicians.

In contrast, the group saw management as being more about ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to move towards the goals of the organisation, including the allocation of resources to make and check progress, as well as delivering changes as required. They also emphasised the important role that managers play in supporting staff. As a result, members of the group associated management with the implementation process, and talked about it in terms of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of day-to-day tasks.

On the whole, the group expressed doubt that anyone would have all of the qualities required to be the perfect leader or manager; rather, they stressed, even the best director of social services needs a strong management team with a variety of backgrounds to shape a vision for the future, manage service transformation and perform day-to-day tasks. For professional decisions, the director may be reliant on advice from middle and junior managers. Even if the director has come up through the service as a social worker or similar, once in a senior role, they should allow the professionals to do their work in most cases, while they focus on managerial responsibilities. As a social director, one needs to have strong budget management skills and systemic thinking.

Political insight and understanding are especially important given that leaders and managers of social services are working in a political environment. Working group members from Italy and France stressed that the reason for the politicisation of the civil service is that legitimacy for public policy comes from elections. Therefore, a politician may appoint someone to a managerial role whom they trust in order to implement their agenda. This may be all the more important where there is need to tackle endemic corruption and clientelism within the administration.

Steinar Eggen Kristensen, Social Director at the Municipality of Randers in Denmark, made an interesting observation regarding the role of politics: *"I drew three lessons from managing a political decision to reduce expenditure in my city. The first is that it is a good idea to have a professional vision that goes hand in hand with funding, e.g. focus on rehabilitation and care in the community – it makes it easier to explain the changes. The second was to prioritise resources – you have to be very precise about why you cut down here or there, using evidence where you can. The third is about political legitimacy: you have to build a broad political coalition in the local council – in my situation, even though the central government and the city mayor called for reductions, not every councillor agreed."*

⁴ More information about this meeting can be found here, <http://www.esn-eu.org/news/263/index.html>

How do leadership and management in the public sector differ from the private sector?

The similarities and differences between the public and private sectors have been frequently debated in the literature on public administration, politics and economics⁵. There is general agreement that public sector represents a unique set of values and obligations. In his work, Professor Walter Kickert has identified three key factors that mark out public sector management as different⁶:

- The *primacy of politics*, which ensures democratic control and accountability, but may also have an impact on strategic priorities.
- The *'rule of law'*, which means that the public sector focuses on the implementation of laws and policies next to having respect for due process and bureaucracy.
- The *values of social justice and human rights* in terms of respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people, which exist alongside business-like approaches.

Members of ESN's working group, some of whom also have experience in the commercial and NGO world, have highlighted a number of additional factors:

- *Accountability*: to elected politicians for the use of public money.
- *Budget requirements*: no requirement to make a profit or a surplus year on year, only to balance the budget (though in good times, not even necessarily to do this).
- *Balancing responsibilities*: the success criteria may be in tension with one another in social services: is it about balancing the budget or providing a high quality service for people in need?
- *Public expectations* are higher in the public sector.
- *Controlling demand*: it is not possible to control demand through prices.

The idea that management skills or techniques from the private sector are transferable to public services is a contentious issue amongst some academics and practitioners. Following calls to improve the responsiveness and efficiency of the public sector, *new public management theory* (or NPM) emerged during the economic crisis of the late 1970s to 1980s with the aim of bringing private sector management techniques into the public sector. Although new public management is more about systems than individual management functions, it provides some context for the discussion about leadership and management.

The key characteristics of new public management include⁷:

- Hands-on professional management
- Explicit standards and measures of performance
- Greater emphasis on output controls
- Create more manageable units (e.g. separate planning and provision interests)
- Shift to greater competition (e.g. through public tendering)
- Stress private sector-style management (greater flexibility; incentive-base)
- Stress greater discipline and parsimony in resource use

When assessing the adoption of new public management into practice, differences in public management tradition and culture across Europe can be identified⁸:

⁵ Boyne, George (2002) Public and private management: what's the difference? *Journal of Management Studies* 39:1 January 2002, p. 98

⁶ Kickert, Walter (2010), presentation at European Social Services Conference, http://www.esn-eu.org/userfiles/Documents/News_2014/Kickert_agreed_final.pdf

⁷ Hood, Christopher (1991) Public management for all seasons, *Public Administration* 69 Spring, pp.3-19

⁸ This table is adapted from the work of Walter Kickert (2010), presentation at European Social Services Conference,

Countries	Factors in the take-up of NPM	Impact of NPM
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil service culture • Legalism • Strong regionalism and localism 	Mixed
Smaller European states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neo-corporatism • Consensus democracy model 	Relative success
Southern Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalism and legalism • Politicisation of civil service • Patronage and clientelism 	Little success
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political reforms enforced change • Openness to business methods 	Relative success

The debate on the virtues of new public management continues today with critics highlighting reasons for not applying certain techniques from the private sector to public sector services, which may depend on universality, interaction with service users and consistency of care rather than constant innovation⁹. Members of ESN's working group have highlighted that the working context of the two sectors is generally different, which affects the leadership and management styles that emerge in the public sector in general and social services in particular. The trade-off between equity in access and outcomes, consistency and universality of services and (cost) efficiency in social services has been identified as a particularly contentious issue by scholars and practitioners alike.

"I was actually appointed director in Sweden on the basis that I would balance the budget. My experience was that you have to make changes quickly. If it takes a long time to reorganise, that's terrible for people."

Lars-Göran Jansson, Secretary of Association of Sweden's Social Directors and Chair of ESN

Learning to lead

The presence of a strong learning culture in an organisation goes a long way in ensuring that those in leadership and management positions are able to deliver the highest levels of performance when it comes to leading organisation change, as well as managing the day-to-day work of an organisation. Therefore, investing in the continuous training and development of senior staff and their teams is essential, especially in difficult times when leaders of public services are being asked to make reform and efficiency happen. Ensuring that senior managers and their teams are equipped with the right skills is also important. Paradoxically, in many countries the area often first hit by public sector cuts are staff training budgets.

In ESN's working group, senior managers had a mixture of strategic and operational responsibilities covering a range of social services, from child protection to long-term care, from welfare benefits to community health. Coming from various professional backgrounds (social work, economics, psychology, medicine, law), most now manage large budgets (often more than several 100 million Euro in Western Europe) and a workforce of thousands. Most group members revealed that they had a diploma in management, but this may or may not be specific to social services or the public sector. Some members had begun their career in a social or health profession. Typically, those who had started out as social workers or psychologists had subsequently added a year's part-time diploma in

http://www.esn-eu.org/userfiles/Documents/News_2014/Kickert_agreed_final.pdf

⁹ Spicker, Paul (2009) The nature of a public service, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 32:11, pp. 970-91

management. Several others reflected on the absence of training or coaching leadership: they had learnt to lead by instinct and experience.

There were various reflections from the group on progression throughout their career. John Powell, Director of Adult Social Services and Housing in the London Borough of Redbridge, UK, talked about feeling intimidated when going to a meeting with other social directors: *“I was feeling very nervous until a close colleague pointed out that I was one of very few directors present to have been a social worker.”* He then felt empowered because he had a set of skills and experiences that the others did not have. Another group member, Steinar Eggen Kristensen from the Municipality of Randers in Denmark, became a social director with a background in public management and reflected: *“As a director, I have found it important that the senior management team has the right range of competences. Of course, not coming from a social work or care background, I have been very dependent on my managers for their professional expertise, but in some situations, I found they benefitted from having an outsider to make changes.”*

“As a leader, you have skills and competences, but you use different ones according to the situation and the circumstances. You need certain skills to manage change and you need to work collaboratively with colleagues and others to deliver change.”

Karine Lycops, Director of Social Welfare, City of Genk, Belgium

Leadership Qualities Framework, United Kingdom¹⁰

The UK care sector had been rocked by a small number of high-profile cases of abuse of vulnerable adults – and by the failures to detect them. The UK government and leading organisations in the sector came to see a vital role for leadership, not only in avoiding abuse but in ensuring quality of life for people using services. The government’s most recent policy document, ‘Caring for our Future’, saw several *policy aims* for the adult social care sector: choice and control; working in partnership with service users, carers and providers; personalised care; and “keeping people healthy and involved”.

The National Skills Academy for Social Care was therefore asked to produce a ‘leadership qualities framework’ for leaders working in adult social services across the public and the private sector. It did this by consulting with service users, (family/informal) carers and staff to identify (1) *values*, (2) *principles* and (3) *qualities* for good leadership in social care services for adults. The consultation identified personal *values* that would underpin good leadership:

- Integrity – leading with honesty
- Dignity – encouraging mutual respect
- Compassion – being caring towards others
- Support – being supportive of others
- Growth – inspiring others to achieve

A set of six practical *principles* for leaders to follow in their work are intended to give ‘real meaning’ to the values:

- Social purpose – being clear on the aims of adult social care
- Co-production – acting on the views and choice of service users
- Innovation – enabling others to make a contribution and sharing what works
- Improvement – create a culture where everyone wants to do things better
- Integration – build strong links with services, providers and the community
- Risk and responsibility – support staff and users to take responsible decisions

¹⁰ Many thanks to Jo Cleary, Chair of The National Skills Academy for Social Care, for her input in this section. Find out more about the Leadership Qualities Framework here, www.nsasocialcare.co.uk



The Leadership *Qualities* Framework contains seven dimensions of good leadership in social services (see diagram left). Each dimension is then broken down into four behaviours; each is accompanied by a description of what good leaders do and “what leadership looks like” for different types of staff: front-line worker; front-line leaders; operational leaders; and strategic leaders. It is intended for use in developing staff at different levels of leadership, thereby strengthening care organisations and improving services. It encourages care staff to believe that “leadership starts with me” and provides individual and organisational benchmarks against which to measure current leadership capabilities and to create targeted development plans for the future.

Graph 1: The Leadership Qualities Framework

The National Skills Academy for Social Care: www.nsasocialcare.co.uk

“Leadership is not just about authority at the top of organisations. It’s a practical understanding – and awareness – about how you do what you do, and the impact on others. It’s about behaviours, and taking responsibility for them. And it’s everyone’s business – people working at all levels in social care.”

Jo Cleary, Chair, The National Skills Academy for Social Care, UK

A systemic approach to leadership and management in social services, Austria¹¹

A systemic leader is a senior member of staff who spends some of their time consciously in a leadership role. In contrast to other leadership models (for example transactional theories), which emphasise the rational behaviour and power that executives can exert over individuals within their organisation, the systemic leadership approach sees the role of an effective leader in their ability for self-reflection and willingness to continuously consult with their staff in order to adapt to the changing needs of their organisation. This emphasis on reflection and observation of how the organisation and its staff work within the system is useful as a leadership approach within the social services sector as allows an organisation to respond and adapt over time to the needs of the population.

Systemic leadership has strong historical roots in German-speaking countries. In Austria this approach is rooted in the traditions of the Austrian school of thought on organisational development and the work of several Austrian-born scientists¹². Some of the *key values* which underpin a good leader under the systemic approach:

- Fairness, respect and empathy – the leading values for the social work should be practised within the leadership culture within social services and institutions as well; leaders should act as role models for their staff.

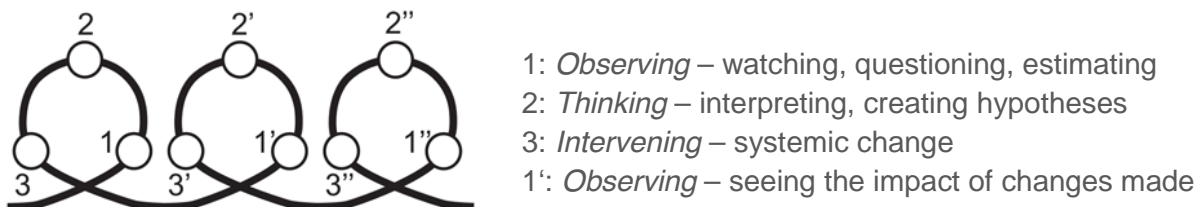
¹¹ Many thanks to Guenther Bauer, managing director of senior centres Linz (Gmbh) and former Head of the Office for Social Affairs of the city of Linz (1990-2004), for his efforts in supplying information about the systemic leadership approach, see The Fifth Discipline and the Social Sector,

http://www.guentherbauer.at/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=64

¹² For example Paul Watzlawick, Heinz von Foerster and Peter Drucker

- Mutual trust – building trust with employees in the same way that a social worker builds trust with the service user.
- Self-reflection and communication – listening to employees and promoting the concept of self-reflection and evaluation.

Systemic leadership is based on the assumption that everyone has to deal with blind spots (half information) and therefore a leader has to take time to observe, reflect and interpret their own behaviour and contributions to the organisation before intervening and making changes to the development of the organisation or services in question. This should be a continuous and perpetual process of observing, interpreting and intervening, which are the key principles of the approach.



Graph 2: The Fifth Discipline and the Social Sector

Guenther Bauer: http://www.guentherbauer.at/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=64

In Austria (and also Germany) the systemic leadership approach is being used more and more frequently in the field of disability and elderly care, in health care institutions and in public social administration in cities, such as Salzburg, Linz and Vienna. There is a wide range of training modules and Master's qualifications available which promote organisational self-reflection and supervision and its implementation in practice. Managers from the social and health care administration of the region of upper Austria (city of Linz) have been participating in a systemic leadership program, as have managers from the Ministry of Social Affairs who took part in a special systemic training programme, which has yielded positive results in terms of the motivation of staff and their satisfaction with the quality of organisational management.

Ethical principles and limits

Ethical awareness is a fundamental part of the professional practice of social workers, leaders and managers of social services alike. The 'Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles',¹³ adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 2001, outlines four key ethical issues in the field of social services:

- The loyalty of social workers is often in the middle of conflicting interests.
- Social workers function as both helpers and controllers.
- The conflicts between the duty of social workers to protect the interests of the people with whom they work and societal demands for efficiency and utility.
- The fact that resources in society are limited.

The last two dilemmas are of particular interest to leaders and managers in social services. Members of ESN's working group pointed out that next to concerns regarding the access to and quality of social services and citizens' rights to care and to being treated with respect and dignity, there are also ethical limits about the efficient and sustainable use of public money. All agreed that if they felt compelled for economic or political reasons to go beyond their ethical limits, they would ultimately have to resign.

¹³ IFSW (International Federation of Social Work), 'Ethics in Social Work', Statement of Principles', approved at the General Meetings of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work in Adelaide, Australia, October 2004, available at: <http://www.ifsw.org/f38000032.html>

Carlos Santos Guerrero, Head of Department for Social Services Coordination in Galicia, Spain, expressed his concerns: *“I am getting close to the limits in my country because of the cuts and the crisis. I need to explain to my (political) superiors what would be the consequences of certain decisions to close services, reduce access or raise charges. I need negotiation and dialogue skills and I need to show flexibility: in this way, we have avoided some very tough measures.”*

Working group members also stressed that leaders in social services have to demonstrate personal credibility and authenticity. This is not only about having certain qualifications and professional experience or having been appointed according to a proper process. It is also about *personal authenticity* – that is, personal commitment to the mission and values of social services. Michaela Sopová, Director of the Department of Social Affairs in the Bratislava self-governing region in Slovakia, said: *“If I did not set clear limits, it would harm my personal integrity and my authenticity.”* Members also stressed that they themselves try to be transparent and consistent so that staff, service users, partner organisations, politicians and others know what to expect from them.

Supporting leaders and managers

Leaders and managers do not operate in silos and need support from different sources to do their jobs well. The members of ESN’s working group highlighted various sources of personal or professional support in their job:

- The regional branch of the association of social directors.
- Their direct line-manager within the administration or the chief executive/city-manager/secretary of the municipality.
- Senior management team (opinions differed as to the extent of this support).
- A retired director who acts as a mentor and does not know the people involved.
- Friends outside the sector who are also in management jobs.
- In some cases, politicians can offer good support, but this has limits.
- In certain matters, a good junior manager in the service can be a useful sounding board.

This suggests that professional associations or informal groups of social directors were frequently mentioned as an important support network beyond their own organisation. Working group members also discussed the sources of praise and appreciation.

Different members of ESN’s Leadership, Performance and Innovation working group mentioned that they particularly appreciated this coming from an external audit or evaluation (because it is independent), from the management team and wider staff and from local politicians.

“If I had some advice for social directors managing during this crisis, it would be that you have to champion the idea that it is still possible to make a difference. You have to go back to your priorities, to the public interest, and act accordingly.”

Marie-Paule Martin-Blachais, Director General of National Observatory of Children at Risk (ONED), France

Conclusions

Leadership and management have an impact on the effectiveness and quality of social services and therefore the outcome for users of services. Building on the experiences of ESN members from the Leadership, Performance and Innovation working group, this paper has aimed to outline the challenges and opportunities for leadership and management in public social services. It shows that public sector leadership carries with it a unique responsibility to balance values of social justice and human rights with contradicting political and economic forces, ensuring clear accountability and efficiency of services.

The economic crisis, as well as other societal demands, have placed additional pressure on leaders and managers to deliver. If social services are to work well, there should be well-trained leaders and managers at all levels in order to ensure that they inspire and empower their staff, address the needs of service users, facilitate cooperation between sectors and use resources effectively and efficiently. Investing in a continuous learning and development culture where leaders and managers feel supported and take time to reflect on the question of what makes a good leader in the social sector are essential to ensure that social services deliver better outcomes, even in a challenging political and economic environment.

A call for reflection

Building on discussions raised in this paper, we would like you to think about what would help you to become a better leader and/or manager in social services:

1. What qualities and skills (personal and professional) do you have which make you a good leader and/or manager?
2. Are there any areas where you think you could improve?
3. Are there any training opportunities available which could enable you to become a better leader and/or manager?
4. How do you deal with the impact of politics in your work?
5. Do you feel that the economic crisis has had a significant impact on your responsibilities as a director and manager? How have you dealt with this?
6. What are your ethical limits?
7. What support system do you have around you to help your work as a leader and/or a manager?

If you wish to get involved in our future discussions about leadership and management in social services and share your experiences on the topic, please get in touch via info@esn-eu.org or join our discussions on ESN's LinkedIn group *Social Services in Europe*.

Supporting public leaders and managers – new ESN peer learning programme

ESN will be launching a programme of peer visits for ESN members who are public leaders and managers of social services. You can apply to be visited by a fellow public leader or manager from another country, or to visit a colleague – or both. Please contact info@esn-eu.org if you are interested in this opportunity.

Notes:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

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