

# **PROJECT COMPASS ADVISORY**

## **Pillar 3: People & Leadership Guide for SMEs and Charities in Ireland**

**Date:** 16 April 2026

**Author:** Senior Project Management Consultant

**Subject:** Leading Change, Mapping Influence, and Navigating Dual Workforce Dynamics

---

### **Executive Summary**

In the project management landscape of Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Charities, the "People" element is the most significant determinant of success. Unlike large corporations with rigid hierarchies, small organizations rely on influence, shared vision, and the delicate management of a dual workforce—comprising both paid staff and volunteers. This guide explores the strategic integration of leadership and stakeholder management, grounding practical advice in the seminal work of **John Kotter (2012)** on change leadership and **Lynda Bourne (2016)** on stakeholder relationship management. By adopting a human-centric approach, as highlighted in recent **McKinsey (2023)** research, Irish project leads can foster resilient teams that are aligned with the organization's mission and capable of navigating the complexities of modern project delivery.

---

### **Leadership Models for Change: The Kotter Framework**

Project management is, at its core, the management of change. For Irish SMEs and Charities, change often meets resistance due to limited resources or "change fatigue." **John Kotter's (2012) 8-Step Process for Leading Change** provides a robust framework for overcoming these barriers.

## The 8-Step Process in a Small-Scale Context

Step	Strategic Focus for SMEs/Charities
1. Create Urgency	Link the project to the organization's survival or mission impact.
2. Form a Coalition	Assemble a "Guiding Coalition" of influential staff and volunteers.
3. Create a Vision	Define a clear, inspiring "North Star" for the project.
4. Communicate Vision	Use every channel to keep the vision front-of-mind.
5. Remove Obstacles	Identify and neutralize "blockers" (e.g., outdated processes).
6. Short-Term Wins	Celebrate small milestones to maintain momentum and morale.
7. Build on Change	Use early successes to tackle larger, more complex issues.
8. Anchor Culture	Ensure new ways of working become "the way we do things here."

For small teams, **Step 2 (Forming a Powerful Coalition)** is particularly critical. In the absence of deep hierarchical structures, the project lead must identify "informal leaders"—those whose opinions carry weight regardless of their job title [1].

---

## Stakeholder Mapping: The Stakeholder Circle Methodology

Stakeholder management is often reduced to a simple list of names. However, **Lynda Bourne (2016)** argues for a more sophisticated approach through the **Stakeholder Circle Methodology**. This technique focuses on three dimensions: **Power, Proximity, and Urgency** [2].

### Visualizing Influence

The Stakeholder Circle allows project leads to visualize the "weight" of each stakeholder. In an Irish charity, a major donor may have high **Power** but low **Proximity**, whereas a local volunteer group may have high **Proximity** and **Urgency** but lower formal **Power**.

Understanding these nuances prevents the "squeaky wheel" from dominating project resources at the expense of more critical, but quieter, stakeholders [2].

---

## Managing 'Volunteer/Staff' Dynamics in Irish Charities

The "Dual Workforce" is a unique feature of the Irish charitable sector. Managing the intersection of professional staff (accountable via contracts) and volunteers (motivated by mission) requires a specialized leadership style.

### Navigating the Dual Workforce

- 1 **Shared Vision (The Mission Link):** Volunteers are intrinsically motivated. Leadership must constantly link project tasks back to the charitable purpose to maintain engagement.
  - 2 **Role Clarity:** Tension often arises when boundaries between staff and volunteer roles are blurred. Clear "Terms of Reference" for volunteers and "Job Descriptions" for staff are essential.
  - 3 **Inclusive Decision-Making:** While staff may hold operational authority, volunteers often hold the "institutional memory." Including key volunteers in Kotter's "Guiding Coalition" ensures buy-in and reduces resistance to change [4].
- 

## Future-Proofing Leadership: The Human-Centric Shift

Recent research by McKinsey (2023) highlights a global shift toward **Human-Centric Leadership**. For Irish organizations, this means prioritizing empathy, adaptability, and psychological safety. In a post-pandemic world, where hybrid work is common even in small SMEs, the ability to lead "beyond the office" is a core competency. Project leads must move from "command and control" to "facilitate and empower," ensuring that every team member feels valued and aligned with the project's value proposition [3] [5].

---

## Academic References

- [1] Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press.  
[2] Bourne, L. (2016). *Stakeholder Relationship Management: A Maturity Model for Organisational Implementation*. Routledge.

- [3] McKinsey & Company (2023). *The State of Organizations 2023: Ten shifts transforming organizations*. McKinsey Global Institute.
- [4] Monych, M. (2015). *Volunteer team management*. Theseus Research Repository.
- [5] Project Management Institute (2021). *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition*. PMI Global Standards.
-