

CLIENT ADVICE SHEET



Decision-Making in Volatile Times

Uncertainty isn't new. Every leader has faced difficult decisions and incomplete information at some point. But the volume, speed and interconnectedness of the challenges facing schools, academy trusts and charities in 2025 makes decision-making harder than ever.

These pressures rarely arrive one at a time, they overlap, compound, and emerge faster than governance and planning cycles can respond. From funding pressures to political changeability, cultural divides to reputational risk, boards and exec teams must make choices in the context of growing complexity.

And yet, it is precisely in these moments that leadership becomes most visible. Not because leaders have all the answers, but because they shape how others respond; through calm, clarity, and courage.



1. Start with values, not spreadsheets

When the pressure is on, it's tempting to leap into financial forecasts or risk registers. But sustainable decisions start with a sense of purpose. Ask:

- What are we here to do?
- What does our community need from us right now?
- Which values must guide this decision?

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Values give you a steady compass in shifting terrain. You can find out more about this in our resource pack which accompanies this advice sheet:



In the pack, **Exercise 1: Purpose Driven Alignment Using the Golden Circle Framework** will help your team ensure they are navigating uncertain times via their values rather than being dictated to by circumstances.



2. Decide at the right level

In crisis, there's a tendency to centralise decisions - but this isn't always wise. Good governance involves structured delegation. Boards should:

- Focus on the big picture and emerging risks
- Ask for assurance, not operational updates
- Trust leaders to lead within agreed frameworks

Clarity about roles and boundaries saves time and reduces anxiety. For more information on this, visit our [blog](#) on that subject.



3. Scenario plan, don't predict

Predicting what will happen is a tempting trap for leaders. Your board has probably asked, many times, what you think will happen. After all, you're paid to make decisions, to use your judgement and to lead. But, by accepting that you can't predict accurately in volatile times, you legitimise

scenario planning. This takes away risk. Your eggs are not all in one basket anymore. Exploring scenarios builds resilience, sharpens thinking and fosters calm.

You can't know what's coming. But you *can* rehearse what you'd do in different plausible futures. For example:

- What if funding drops by 10% next year?
- What if staff absences increase by 25% this winter?
- What if a key partner publicly challenges us?

In the accompanying resource pack, **Exercise 2: Leading Through Multiple Futures** will get you started on this journey. Get in touch with us today to request access to this additional free resource.



4. Create thinking space

In urgent times, teams often mistake movement for progress. But strategic leadership needs space to reflect. Trusts and charities should:

- Protect time for blue-sky (generative) discussion
- Invite external facilitation when tensions rise
- Use coaching or peer supervision to reduce reactivity





Our Three Rooms Analogy, which you can find in ***Exercise 3: From Reflex to Reflection: Creating Space for Wise Decision-Making*** in the resource pack helps leadership teams slow down and distinguish between simple, complicated, and complex challenges; allocating the right mindset, resources, and level of oversight to each.

Determining what sought of decision needs making is an essential step to responding wisely rather than react instinctively because, whilst necessity may be the mother of inventions, wisdom rarely arrives when you're rushing!



5. Surface hidden tensions

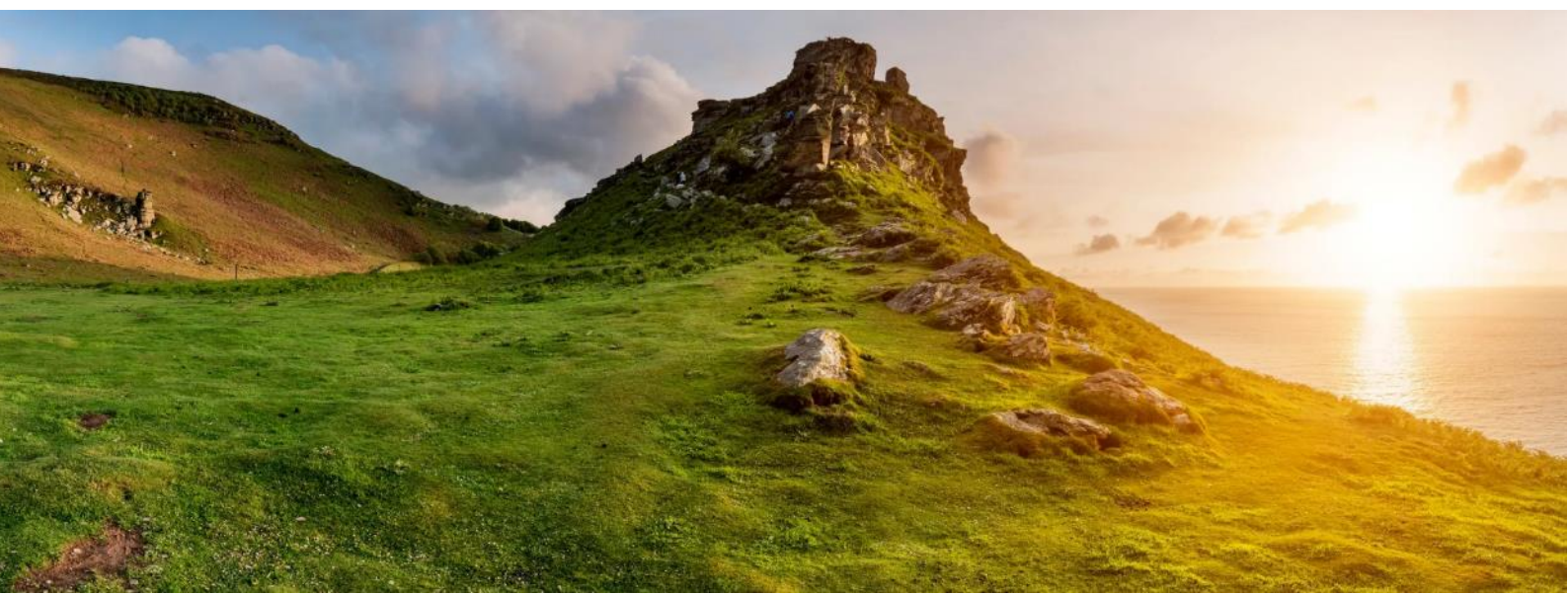
Volatility often exposes unspoken tensions: culture clashes, unclear priorities, unspoken fears. Leadership means noticing and naming these early. Try:

- Asking, "What are we not saying here?"
- Checking if strategy documents still reflect lived priorities
- Encouraging diverse voices, not just confident ones

Truth-telling builds trust and trust makes better decisions possible. Because in uncertain times, better decisions matter more than ever.

Uncertainty doesn't need to paralyse your organisation. In fact, it can be a moment of sharpening; where boards and executives return to their core mission, listen deeply, and act with courage.

Mastery | Clarity | Wisdom





Further Support

We all need support and encouragement. If you'd like an external perspective on your issues or simply want additional capacity to address them, my team at Mastery | Clarity | Wisdom can help.

We offer interim leadership support, along with problem solving sessions, and long-term coaching for board chairs, CEOs and governance professionals. We also offer wider board development sessions, independent governance reviews and internal scrutiny.

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