From Distraction to Strategic Action: Using the Hedgehog and LPS Decision Matrix to Focus Your Organization ©bridgegroupllc
By Mike Letcher

In today's public sector environment, distractions are everywhere. The pull to get involved in countless problems, programs, and partnerships—many of which are tangential to an agency's core mission—creates a constant drain on time, resources, and energy. Boards managers, department heads, and nonprofit leaders alike are often swamped not by the complexity of their mission, but by the sheer volume of non-mission work consuming their calendars.

So how do you regain focus and align your organization around what truly matters?

The Problem: Noise Over Strategy

Organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors are uniquely vulnerable to "mission drift." Boards, community groups, partner agencies, and even well-meaning staff often push leaders toward projects that do not clearly add value or deliver strategic outcomes.

While responsiveness and flexibility are important, organizations that lack focus risk failing to deliver on the promises that matter most to their communities.

The Strategic Lens: The Hedgehog Concept

Jim Collins, in his groundbreaking book *Good to Great*, introduced a simple but powerful concept to help organizations clarify what they should focus on. The **Hedgehog Concept** invites organizations to reflect on three key questions:

1. **What are we deeply passionate about?**

2. **What can we be the best in the world at?**

3. **What drives our resource engine?**

When these three circles intersect, the result is a clear area of strategic focus. Collins called this the "hedgehog"—a metaphor for simple, consistent focus rather than scattered complexity.

However, while the Hedgehog Concept provides a valuable strategic anchor, many public organizations have struggled to translate this framework into action. That is where the **Lead, Partner, or Support Decision Matrix (LPSDM)** comes into play.

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The Solution: The LPSDM Framework

Once an organization identifies an initiative that fits within its Hedgehog, the next question becomes: **How do we act on it?**

The **LPSDM** is a practical tool that guides decision-makers in choosing their organization's most effective role:

- **Lead**: The initiative is squarely within your mission, you have the capacity, and it is central to your Hedgehog. You take primary responsibility.

- **Partner**: The initiative aligns with your strategic focus but requires collaboration. You join forces with others to achieve it.

- **Support**: The initiative is important, but others are better positioned to lead. You offer assistance without overcommitting your own resources.

Application in Practice

Imagine exploring how to address rising youth violence. This challenge aligns with public safety, community development, and education—but how should your organization be involved?

- **If your agency is the police department**, and youth violence is tied to crime trends, you may choose to **Lead** a cross-sector initiative to reduce violence.

- **If you run a Parks & Recreation Department**, and your programming provides safe after-school activities, you might **Partner** with local schools and nonprofits.

- **If you manage a finance or IT department**, you may choose to **Support** the effort by providing budget insights or data analysis tools.

The key is not just identifying whether a challenge matters—but knowing **how** your organization should engage. The LPSDM gives you the structure to make that decision strategically, rather than emotionally or reactively.

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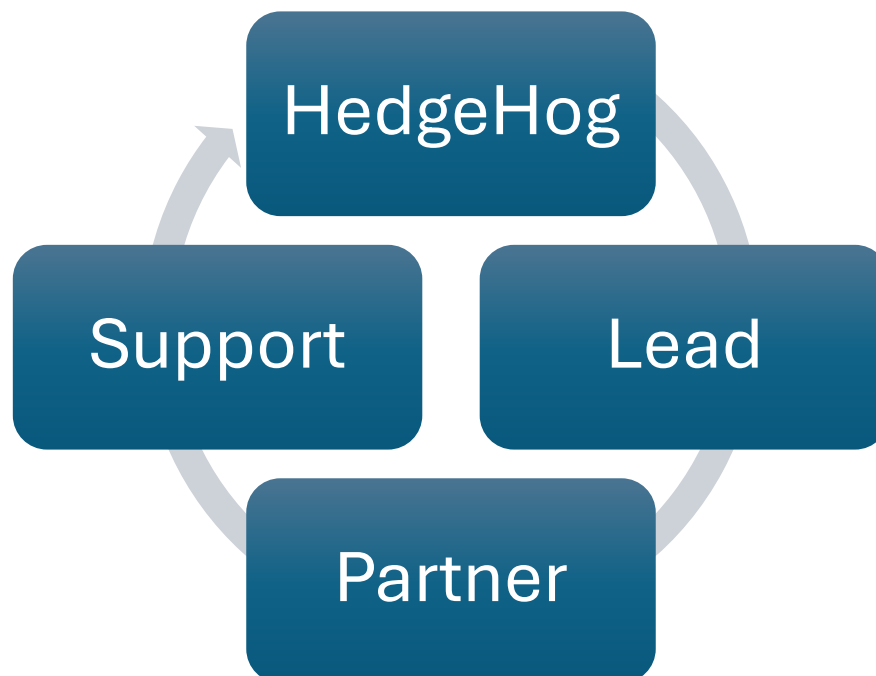## By Mike Letcher

Discussion Questions for Leaders

1. What percentage of your organization's current activities clearly fall within your Hedgehog?

2. Can you identify one recent initiative that may have distracted your team from core priorities?

3. What is your default mode—do you tend to Lead, Partner, or Support too often without re-evaluating?

4. How can you begin applying the LPSDM to upcoming management meeting or board agenda items?

Strategic clarity is not the product of one retreat or one strategic plan. It is the ongoing discipline of aligning your organization around what matters most—and resisting the temptation to chase every issue that surfaces.

By combining **Jim Collins' Hedgehog Concept** with the **Lead, Partner, or Support Decision Matrix**, public sector leaders now have a clear framework to both **think strategically** and **act operationally**. In doing so, they free up energy, focus on what delivers the greatest impact, and serve their communities with greater precision and purpose.

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Lead, Partner, or Support Decision Matrix (LPSDM)

CRITERIA	LEAD	PARTNER	SUPPORT
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH HEDGEHOG	Fully aligned with all 3 Hedgehog circles (Passion, Excellence, Engine)	Aligned with one or two Hedgehog elements	Indirectly related or complementary to Hedgehog
ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERTISE/CAPACITY	We have the internal skills, people, and infrastructure to own this	We bring key strengths but need others to succeed	Others are better equipped; we offer supplemental skills or tools
COMMUNITY EXPECTATION OR MANDATE	The public or governing body expects us to lead this	Shared ownership is expected; the public sees this as collaborative	Others are expected to lead; the public sees us as a contributor
RESOURCE INVESTMENT	Worth significant resource/time investment	Moderate investment with shared responsibility	Minimal investment; mostly indirect or in-kind
RISK IF WE DON'T ACT	High risk to mission, credibility, or outcomes if we do not lead	Moderate risk: others are stepping in too	Low risk: initiative will proceed without us
POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT	High and measurable impact if we lead	Good impact when paired with capable partners	Marginal or background support to overall impact
EXAMPLE INITIATIVE	Launching a citywide homelessness strategy from the Housing Department	Collaborating on a youth violence prevention coalition	Providing IT or data support to a regional climate action effort

How to Use This Matrix

1. **List the initiative** you are considering.

2. **Evaluate each row** based on how your organization fits the criteria.

3. Choose the column (Lead, Partner, or Support) that receives the majority of matches or makes the most strategic sense.