

Enable Traction with the Right Touch

The Blunt, the Brave, and the Rule

Sensory Leadership · Elixar · sensoryleadership.org · Mar 2026

Initiating motion requires an impulse. A touch. Through repeated contacts, the momentum builds up. The heart of business dynamics is about getting things moving. But to be frank, we often get stuck even when we thought we had it all calibrated with analysis and reinforced with strategy. When the heat is on, the team may stall. In those moments, surely something is still missing.

The touch analogy maps directly onto how leaders and teams initiate (or fail to initiate) motion. Where are, then, the levers governing the right impulse and the desired impact?

Some universal rules exist. For example, continuing with our analogy, light slow hand-strokes on skin at 3 cm/s maximise the response of our C-Tactile system — our skin receptors wired directly to the brain, which in turn trigger the oxytocin and endorphin pathways linked to comfort and trust (as documented in a landmark study published in Nature Neuroscience). Yet the rule does not operate in a vacuum. Cultural context and relational history shape how any given touch, physical or figurative, lands.

Empathy, timing, attunement, presence — the soft skills — in fact determine whether anything moves at all.

Throughout this article we will explore how the contact (*touch understood as relational attunement*) and the code (*context and culture that determine how that contact lands*) get our team in motion with adequate impulse and sustained momentum.

THE MANAGER WE LOVE TO HATE

We have all experienced it. The colleague who issues instructions as if the team were a military unit executing a battle order. Fast decisions, tight parameters, little room for discussion. We reach for our standard diagnoses: authoritarian and controlling — a management relic from the 1980s — someone whose emotional intelligence course clearly didn't take.

We may be wrong for two reasons: we confuse style with pathology, and we confuse mood with deliberate situational response.

Have we collectively and genuinely assessed the situation?

First, the style.

Friederike Fabritius, neuroscientist and author of *The Brain-Friendly Workplace*, has neatly documented individual neuro-signatures: the neurochemical profile that shapes how each of us processes information, tolerates ambiguity, responds to pace, and experiences motivation. (Individual styles are covered in our [Article 2](#) about the *Sensory Tribe*.)

A leader's neurochemical profile may dominantly be oriented toward speed and decisiveness under pressure. Under certain conditions, that default profile is precisely what the situation requires. But we cannot stop explanations here. Neuroscience alone does not close the argument.

Second, the response.

Situations change. People are not profiles. We have plasticity, perception and judgment that, with some honest fatigue and genuine introspection, can get us to a balance beyond our default neuro-signature.

This is how a diverse team can best understand and adapt as one coherent body. We accept that a person's default mode is shaped by biology and experience, but the team still needs to understand something more operational: that the manager, in front of us right now, may well neither be in default mode, nor in a mood-driven attitude.

The corrosive damage is happening in the daily perception of how decisions are being made. Don't wait for the irreversible.

Teams erode under **perceptual gaps**. Perceptual gaps regroup a few 'little nasties': limited interpretations, Groupthink, polarisation, and raw perception without critical thinking. They don't manifest as a torrential problem suddenly flooding mailboxes and agendas, so we rarely classify them as "urgent-important" (*so to speak as the Eisenhower matrix*).

However, like corrosive drips on the skin, certain misunderstandings will leave lasting scars on a team and may ultimately fracture the team beyond repair. Pushing these 'little nasties' back into the 'for-later', or 'delegate' box is not recommendable. The time to address perceptual gaps is now. We must decrypt the **contact code** and understand what the situation is actually asking of us.

Beyond moods or styles, we must shed light on when it is time to move and what is a deliberate response to activate team motion...

A deceptively simple model, in practice, transforms the relational climate of teams more durably than most soft-skills interventions. We call it the **lead-2-motion** rule — the recognition that in any given situation (note that situations may be many in a single day), the leader and the team must compose with Speed, Compliance, and Buy-in (this concept is built on the shoulders of Vroom-Yetton, Kotter, Bungay, *MCI-Realize* framework and is covered in depth within the *Sensagy*[™] programme).

These three (*Speed, Compliance, Buy-in*) form a triangle. Every situation sits somewhere on one of the sides of the triangle. And here is the uncomfortable truth:

Among speed, compliance and buy-in, the leader can pursue only two. Aiming to all three is not an ambition — it is a paralysis.

Optimising for all three produces the performance of none. So, the daily discipline of leadership is the attention and the courage to identify and set the mode in which the team must move:

In situations where priorities are speed and compliance (the *Blitz* mode), time cannot be invested in deep consultation of the team nor in building buy-in on the spot. When speed and buy-in shall prevail (the *Fly Solo* mode), the team is left with great autonomy, but compliance may be compromised. When compliance and buy-in are essential (*Long March* mode), then all must accept that pace will slow.

This resolves what may appear as an attitude from the manager: “the authoritarian freak” (in *Blitz*), “the sluggish procrastinator” (in *Long March*) or “the undisciplined permissive” (in *Fly Solo*). The point we must metabolise is that the *lead-2-motion* trade-offs (*that is, compromising either buy-in or speed or compliance*) are situation-driven. Not a manager's whim. In most cases, the situation is not the leader's choice, nor the team's, nor the company's. It is context hitting us in the face. And a call to move in one way or another.

The trade-offs that we directly and fully choose are of a different nature: they are strategy-related. But no strategy, however well designed, eliminates exposure to multiple and contrasting situations. So, facing situations that call for uncomfortable moves is part of the game.

Handled well, the *Fly Solo* mode produces some of the most memorable collective achievements. This is why equivalents of a *Fly Solo* mode are too often depicted in modern leadership press as “ideal” which erroneously suggests that the best managers should default to it because top talent enjoys autonomy. This is misleading. Delegation and empowerment are not triggered only within the *Fly Solo* mode. The situation doesn't always permit it. For example, situations related to safety compliance need generally a *Long March* and occasionally a *Blitz*.

Best managers and their teams learn to adapt their mode of motion with the context. So, a team that has built a shared vocabulary and navigational grammar (see our [Article 3](#) on *Forward-Culture*) will greatly improve both the self-check of the manager and the fair judgment of the team.

On this basis, before getting in motion, an enabling step — rarely seen in business leadership — should occur...

BACKBRIEF TO MOVE AHEAD

The *why* (the situation we face) and the *what* (the motion mode and its two-out-of-three priorities) might not sound like much freedom. In fact, the team is certainly not expected to act robotically. The *how* remains. And this well-framed *how* is a crucial door to effective motion and creativity (see also our [Article 3](#) about boundaries as a catalyser).

That remaining space for the *how* — well-framed but deliberately open — finds its most operational expression in a practice from military command doctrine. This practice is called the **backbrief** (credit to *Arkaro Insights* for reminding its validity in business). Before any mission, the officer backbriefs the commander. It is not to repeat the orders, but to articulate the understanding of the intent, the situation, and the constraints. The commander's purpose is not to check compliance; it is to verify understanding and to prompt the *how* (the immediate choice of entry point in action for the team).

A backbrief is a perception test. It surfaces misalignment before it becomes a costly operational error. It avoids over-instructing.

A simple and powerful cascading process to confirm understanding on the spot, to maintain coherency all through the mission, and to allow action to flow from one level of command to the next in contexts where — literally — rigid plans concerning the *how* never survive the contact with the enemy.

In a *Blitz* mode situation (*where speed and compliance are the chosen two*), the temptation is to over-instruct: to leave no room for interpretation, to remove all autonomy from the team in the name of clarity. Even in the fastest, most directive operating mode, a brief pause to let the direct report declare “*This is my understanding of what we face. Based on what you have asked me, my plan is to proceed as follows...*” costs seconds. It prevents corrosive relational damage, and it launches the right motion.

Sensory Leadership is built on structured sequencing. It is not about adding more to the already vast constellation of leadership wisdom and research. It is an integrative discipline — one that assembles and implements.

ADAPT THE TOUCH, HOLD THE CORE

Regardless of the motion mode adopted (*Blitz, Long March, Fly Solo*) the overall success in the field always depends on perceptual acuity geared toward adaptability. What Dave Snowden (complexity theorist and author of the Cynefin framework) articulates as ‘probe–sense–respond’ (*in opposition to ‘plan–control–deliver’*). This is the *how* that doesn’t stall.

The discipline is not to be permanently in one mode, but to sense which mode a situation demands and to move into it deliberately while preserving the team's room to manoeuvre. Adapting, however, does not mean losing our core — what Tres Roeder calls a 'chameleon with a core'. For this reason, two diagnostic questions should continuously accompany us:

First Diagnostic

Are we holding on to the rules we have agreed together (*the strategy and the lead-2-motion approach*) or are we defaulting to comfort and robotic execution?

That is about respecting a rule that benefits the team even when it constrains individual preferences.

Second Diagnostic

Are we recognising and rewarding the colleagues who make the effort to override their neuro-signature when the team needs it most?

That is about the extrovert who goes quiet in a *Long March*, suppressing the instinct to energise the room so that a slower, more careful consensus can emerge. The analytical mind who accelerates past its preference for completeness in a *Fly Solo* moment, trusting the process because the situation demands it.

These are the unacknowledged acts of leadership that compound, invisibly, into organisational culture. The Sensory Leadership programmes specifically target such dynamics. A Forward-Culture depends on a shared lexicon but also on shared agreements being honoured and practised.

NO PRETENCE ON THE HORIZON

Clarity about a trade-off is not weakness. For a generation that has grown up detecting the gap between stated values and observed behaviour, it is the minimum condition of credibility.

A generational dimension makes this non-negotiable for senior leaders. By 2030, Gen Z and early Gen Alpha will constitute more than 60% of the workforce. These cohorts have grown up with unprecedented access to information, an unusually high tolerance for ambiguity, and a correspondingly sharp intolerance for inauthenticity (a pattern documented annually by the Deloitte Global Gen Z Survey and the Edelman Trust Barometer).

They do not expect their managers to be infallible. What they expect, and what they will leave organisations to find elsewhere when they do not receive it, is honesty about the situation and the trade-off being made.

The lead-2-motion approach is reality-anchored decision-making and cross-generational fluency. The decisions that might otherwise read as arbitrary resolve into coherent logic.

Let's ensure together that we allow the rule — rather than the blunt or the brave — to set the impulse and the rhythm.

If you recognise your organisation in any of these elements, the next step is a conversation.

Discover the full framework at sensoryleadership.org · Contact Elixar at projects@elixar.eu

#SensoryLeadership · #FutureOfWork · #BackBrief · #Lead2Motion

About the Elixar services

Elixar is the sole provider of comprehensive Sensory Leadership programmes — delivered in-presence, anywhere in the world, in English, French, and Italian. Programmes range from the full Sensagy™ journey (24 hours, six modules, from sensory awareness to strategic direction) to the focused OlfaTeam™ format (10 hours, five modules, anchored in olfactory practice and project management application) to keynotes and half-day interventions in retreats and seminars.

elixar.eu

About the Founder of Elixar

Jeremy Leroux is a Managing Director and Strategy Advisor (Cert. MCI, California) with more than twenty years of international leadership experience in B2B industries spanning beverages, food ingredients, and pharmaceutical applications before delving into the world of perfumes (Cert. Olfactive Design, Politecnico di Milano). Having lived and worked across France, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Italy, he graduated in France as an Engineer and MSc in Food Processes and obtained an MBA in California. He founded Elixar on the conviction that sensory experience is and will be a foundation for the performance of humans and businesses.

[linkedin.com/in/lerouxjeremy](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lerouxjeremy)