WORKSHOPSKILL · PARTICIPANT KIT

Rotate the Lead — Participant Workbook

The guide in print, a frame to write after every debrief question, and session notes pages.

Folder: `rotate-the-lead` · Category: leadership · 8–16 people · 25 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

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CONTENTS

Objectives
The handover pattern
How to run it
Failure modes
Facilitation notes
Props in this folder
How to run this debrief
The nine debrief questions
When to use this activity
Setup
The card
Variations
Put it on the wall
Agent version
Read the rotations
Failure modes of the debrief

25	8–16	print props
MINUTES	PEOPLE	SETTING

Rotate the Lead — Facilitator Guide

A 25-minute, 8–16 person leadership tool. Give the team a real small task, then rotate who's leading every few minutes — and make each handover restate the goal, what's done, and the next move before anyone directs. Leadership stops being a job title and becomes a set of visible moves anyone can make and pass on.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Carried a real thread through one full round — and handed it over in one breath: goal, done-so-far, next, **before** directing.
2. Made one decision as lead that was **visible and owned**, and felt the difference between a call that is named and one that drifts.
3. Seen which teammates can hold a round cleanly — leading shown as a set of moves anyone can make, not a rank only one person holds.

When to use this activity

- A team where leadership is stuck on one person and nobody else has practiced holding the thread.
- Before handing someone a real stretch assignment — rotate the least-senior person first.
- You have 8–16 people, one small finishable task, and 25 minutes; online, it runs on a shared doc.

The handover pattern

Move	The rule	What it makes visible
Restate	The incoming lead says goal / done-so-far / next in one breath **before** directing	whether the thread was actually shared — or only ever in one head
Call	Each lead makes one visible call and names its owner	the decisions a room was making by drift, silence, or the loudest voice
Pass on	The round closes on a clean summary handed to the next lead	exactly what the team loses every time the thread drops

Two rules only, and the rounds test both: no directing before restating; no leading without one named call.

Setup

- 8–16 people, in one working group (above 12, run two parallel groups on the same task).
- One real, small, finishable task — triage the backlog, plan next week, draft the one-pager. Not a discussion topic; something with an output.
- The card faces from `rotate-the-lead-prop-cards.pdf`: handover, lead-now, listen-first, make-the-call, pass-on, what-I-noticed (see **The card** below).

- A visible timer — each round is a hard ~4 minutes, and the rotation is the point.
- Put `rotate-the-lead-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) on the wall so the two rules stay in view.
- Print one `rotate-the-lead-worksheet.pdf` per group — the one-page artifact sheet the room fills while it talks.
- Put one `rotate-the-lead-workbook.pdf` at each seat if people want their own copy; the sheet above is the group version.
- Optional: open `rotate-the-lead-slide-deck.html` in any browser to run the 12-slide deck on the wall (S opens the presenter drawer, T starts the round timer); `rotate-the-lead-slide-deck.pdf` is the same deck for print.
- Online: the rotation runs in a fixed order on a shared doc; the worksheet lives on the screen, the timer on the call.

How to run it

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–4	Set	Pick the real small task, name the first lead, hold the room until “done” is agreed	Agree out loud what “done” looks like before the clock starts
4–20	Rotate	Call hard ~4-minute rounds; watch every handover for restatement-before-directing; never say who leads next early	Four leads in turn: restate goal / done-so-far / next in one breath, make one visible call and name its owner, close on a clean summary and pass on — while the room keeps the artifact moving on the worksheet
20–25	Name it	Ask each person for one leadership move they saw work — or didn’t	Each person names one move; write the good ones down as the team’s handover pattern

Then run the debrief — see `rotate-the-lead-debrief.md`.

The card

The sheet from `rotate-the-lead-prop-cards.pdf` (poker spec, 63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides, branded back, blanks) carries six faces: **handover** — restate before you direct; **lead-now** — this round is yours; **listen-first** — hear the room before calling; **make-the-call** — one visible decision, one named owner; **pass-on** — close on a clean summary; **what-I-noticed** — for the seat watching the thread. Put the **handover** card where the room can see it; it is the rule every round is testing. Blank faces take your own wordings.

Failure modes

1. **The task is too big to move in four-minute rounds.** Shrink it before you start. A task that can’t advance in four rounds isn’t a rotate-the-lead task; it’s a project, and everyone just flails in the same place.
2. **The real manager keeps re-taking the pen.** That’s the finding, not a foul. Note who it displaces and what the room does when they return — then ask them to take a normal turn near the end instead of hovering.
3. **Everyone just repeats the previous lead.** Restating is not parroting. Require the new lead to name the *next* move as their own call, so each round actually changes the direction of the work.
4. **The rounds run, but the artifact stalls.** Leading is being performed while the output dies. Send the next lead’s first sentence to the worksheet: name what the group produces in this round, then start the clock.

Variations

- **New manager onboarding:** rotate the least-senior person first; it's the safest place to practice holding the thread.
- **Distributed team:** rotate in a fixed order on a shared doc; the restatement-before-directing rule matters even more when no one shares a room.
- **Deeper read:** after the rounds, ask who felt the thread get *stronger* and who felt it wobble — the pattern of where it wobbles is your real handover risk.

Facilitation notes

- Name the first lead deliberately. The least-senior person is the safest opener, and it sets the tone that the pen is movable.
- Don't soften the clock. A squeezed handover — ninety seconds instead of four minutes — is the sharpest data the exercise produces: it shows exactly where the thread drops.
- You are timing the relay, not judging the leadership. The debrief names moves; keep your own read of "who was best" off the wall.
- The handover pattern written at 20–25 only survives if it leaves the room — the worksheet's last box exists for that; copy it into the team's real doc before anyone stands up.

Put it on the wall

Print `rotate-the-lead-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to put the run of show, the two rules and the handover pattern the room fills in on one wall while you facilitate.

Props in this folder

- `rotate-the-lead-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): the six card faces, branded back, blanks
- `rotate-the-lead-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `rotate-the-lead-debrief.md` — nine debrief questions with what each targets, plus failure modes of the debrief
- `rotate-the-lead-worksheet.pdf` — the one-page session sheet, print-and-fill: four rounds logged — restatement, the call, its owner — and the handover pattern the team kept
- `rotate-the-lead-workbook.pdf` — participant workbook: the sheet in plain words, the artifact as fill-in pages, session notes, a before-you-leave page
- `rotate-the-lead-slide-deck.html` / `.pdf` — the 12-slide deck for teaching or projecting: presenter drawer (S), round timer (T), built-in QR, print fallback; the `.pdf` is the same deck for print
- `rotate-the-lead-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks
- `rotate-the-lead-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole activity on one A3 wall sheet: run of show, the rules, watch-outs
- `rotate-the-lead-tool.json` — machine-facing file (not listed in the download table): the artifact as a machine-readable template: columns, flow, fields, prompts, watch-outs

- `rotate-the-lead-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
- `rotate-the-lead-license.md` — what you may do with all of this: run it, copy it, translate it, rebrand it; keep the attribution line
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter editions of the print documents

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the props, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version itself needs no screen at all: no projector, no accounts, just a real task and a timer.

Rotate the Lead — Debrief

> Nine questions, three failure modes of the debrief itself, one rule: name the move, not the person.
>
> Use with `rotate-the-lead-guide.md`. The debrief runs the last five minutes of the twenty-five.

How to run this debrief

- Put the filled worksheet on the table first. The four rounds are the evidence; nobody has to recall them from memory.
- Let people note their answers for a minute before anyone speaks — the quietest reader of the room has the best material and gets talked over first.
- Hold a pen over the team's handover pattern: a move that can't be written as an instruction for the next handover hasn't been debriefed yet.

Read the rotations

- Look over the four rounds without talking. Where did the thread get carried cleanly, and where did somebody have to pick it up off the floor?
- Notice whose round produced the most work — that is data, not a verdict.

The nine debrief questions

1. The clean handovers.

"Which handovers landed cleanly, and which made the team lose a beat?"

→ What was different about the restatement — it is the one skill that transfers.

2. Directing before restating.

"Did any lead direct before restating goal / done / next? What did the team do — follow, correct, or quietly stall?"

→ Whether the rule actually holds the room, or just decorates the poster.

3. The surprises.

“Who surprised you — someone you didn’t expect to hold the thread well, or badly?”

→ The team’s unstated map of who can lead; today redrew part of it.

4. The minimum handover kit.

“What’s the minimum the next lead needs to take over without losing progress? Name it in your own words.”

→ The team’s own handover pattern — the artifact this whole folder builds toward.

5. Visible and owned.

“When a call was made, was it visible and owned? Or did it evaporate because no one knew who was doing it?”

→ The difference between a decision and a mood.

6. What the rule prevented.

“What did the one-visible-call rule prevent from being decided by drift or silence?”

→ The hidden decisions the room was already making by default — the exercise just forced them into the open.

7. Where it really rotates.

“Where does the lead genuinely rotate in your real work — standups, incidents, reviews? Should the handover pattern apply there too?”

→ Transfer. The pattern earns its keep after the room empties.

8. The one move you keep.

“Which single handover move from today will you keep doing when you’re not in an exercise?”

→ Commitment — small enough to survive Monday.

9. If the real leader is always in the room.

“If the real leader is always in the room, what does this exercise reveal about what others *could* carry if asked?”

→ Latent capacity — the reason to run this again on a different task.

Failure modes of the debrief

1. **It turns into a coronation.** The room praises the best lead of the afternoon instead of naming moves. Rescue: ask what they *did*, not who they *are* — the move is what generalizes; the person isn’t.
2. **The room edits the truth.** Everyone reports handovers that went “great.” Rescue: go back to the worksheet gaps — the restatement nobody finished, the call with no owner. The sheet argues with polite memory.
3. **The pattern gets written and orphaned.** The handover pattern fills its box, the team leaves, and next week the thread drops in the same place. Rescue: before anyone stands, name who owns the pattern and which real doc it lives in.

The clean handovers.

Which handovers landed cleanly, and which made the team lose a beat?

Directing before restating.

Did any lead direct before restating goal / done / next? What did the team do — follow, correct, or quietly stall?

The surprises.

Who surprised you — someone you didn't expect to hold the thread well, or badly?

The minimum handover kit.

What's the minimum the next lead needs to take over without losing progress? Name it in your own words.

Visible and owned.

When a call was made, was it visible and owned? Or did it evaporate because no one knew who was doing it?

What the rule prevented.

What did the one-visible-call rule prevent from being decided by drift or silence?

Where it really rotates.

Where does the lead genuinely rotate in your real work — standups, incidents, reviews? Should the handover pattern apply there too?

The one move you keep.

Which single handover move from today will you keep doing when you're not in an exercise?

If the real leader is always in the room.

If the real leader is always in the room, what does this exercise reveal about what others *could* carry if asked?

Session notes