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THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC
RISK MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

**A whole-society argument for the Empty
Minute and Project Resilience UK**

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INTRODUCTION

There is a widening gap between what the public expects the state to deliver and what any state can realistically achieve. The United Kingdom feels this tension daily. Services are stretched. Communities feel fragile. Trust rises and falls with each crisis. The pressure is real and so is the uncertainty. The Empty Minute and Project Resilience UK (PRUK) were developed with this truth in mind.

The Empty Minute recognises the unavoidable period between the moment something goes wrong and the moment professional responders can take over. PRUK focuses on the long term, giving children and young people the practical and social skills to contribute to their communities and to the country.

Both require leadership that tells the truth, strengthens trust and gives people a reason to act. Leadership with integrity sits at the heart of that. It is not ideological. It is human. It begins with honesty and ends with responsibility.

This is the leadership required to close the gap between intention and reality.

Key message: **There is a growing gap between public expectations and what the state can deliver, and closing it requires honest, integrity-driven leadership that empowers people and communities to act—especially in the moments and years before formal systems can respond.**



THE TWO GAPS THAT SHAPE MODERN BRITAIN

THE OPERATIONAL GAP

In a serious incident, there is always a period in which no professional responder can be present. That gap is structural and cannot be eliminated. National data on out-of-hospital cardiac arrest shows that 30-day survival in England was around eight per cent in 2022, and improves significantly when bystanders intervene (Resuscitation Council UK 2014; NHS England 2024). Recent OHCA registry reports show that bystander CPR occurs in roughly half to three-quarters of cases depending on region, and that survival almost doubles when it is provided (London Ambulance Service 2024; South East Coast Ambulance Service 2025).

These are not marginal effects. They are the difference between life and death. Research on trauma systems supports this. Immediate action by the person standing next to you is often the deciding factor long before advanced care arrives (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine 2016). Similar principles underpin the US programme *You Are the Help Until Help Arrives*, which trains the public to act in the first critical minutes (FEMA 2017–2020).

This is the Empty Minute. It belongs to the public whether they want it or not.

THE STRATEGIC GAP

The strategic gap is quieter but just as important. It is the distance between what government intends and what communities experience. The UK Government Resilience Framework makes this clear by describing resilience as a whole-of-society responsibility and acknowledging that government cannot deliver it alone (Cabinet Office 2022).

Independent reviews identify the same issues. Capability varies across regions and implementation is uneven, with a clear need to engage citizens more systematically (National Preparedness Commission 2023; National Preparedness Commission 2025). Evidence from international and UK research on social capital shows that societies with stronger local networks, trust and shared norms cope better with shocks (Aldrich 2012; Boin et al. 2016; Norris et al. 2008). UK-based studies on community responses to heatwaves and flooding point to the same conclusion: neighbourhoods with stronger social bonds respond more effectively and recover more quickly (Gooden 2023; Grant and Falconer 2025).

The strategic gap is therefore not a sign of state failure. It is a structural reality in a complex society. The question is not whether it exists. It is what we do about it.

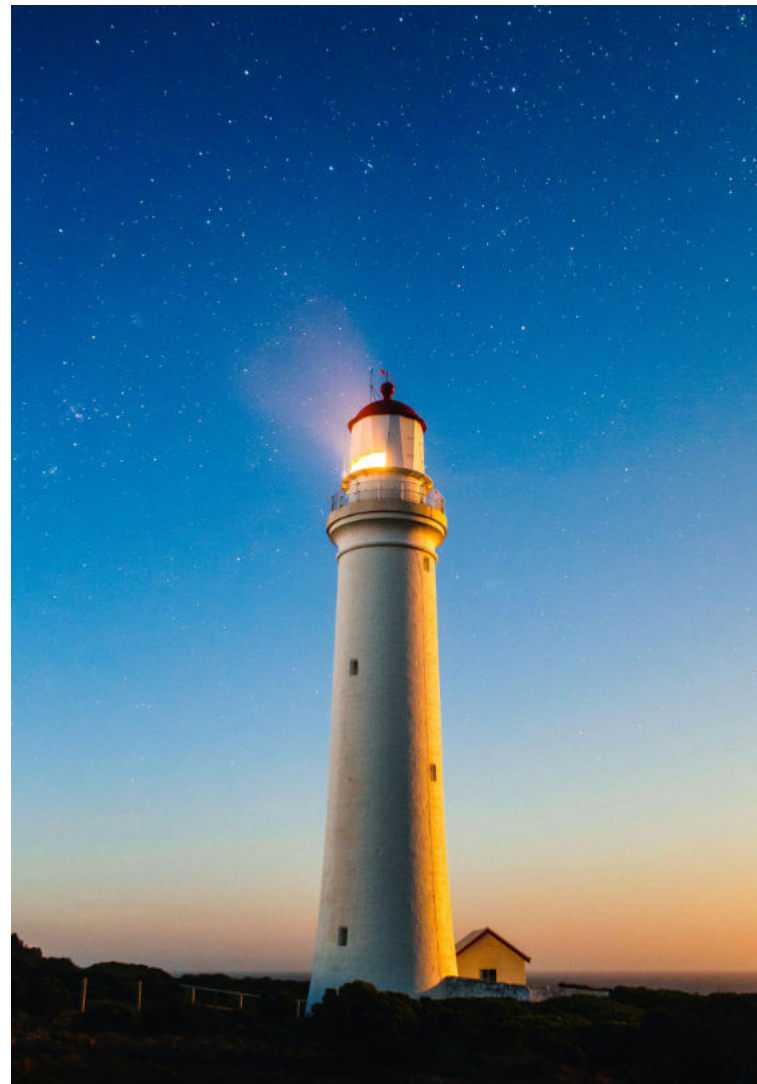
LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

Leadership with integrity begins with the truth. It does not dramatise. It does not use fear as a tool. It avoids promising what cannot be delivered. Instead it explains what systems can do, what they cannot do and how the public themselves form part of the solution.

Joanne Ciulla's work on ethical leadership argues that leaders are responsible for the moral use of their power and for building trust through fairness, clarity and honesty (Ciulla 2014). This aligns with wider research showing that when people feel treated fairly and included in decision-making, trust grows. When they feel ignored or misled, cohesion weakens (Tyler 2006; Putnam 2007). Studies of social cohesion during the pandemic show that where people felt respected and involved, neighbourly support and local solidarity increased (Abrams et al. 2021; British Future 2025).

Leadership with integrity links the operational gap and the strategic gap. It explains the role that only the public can play. It equips them with the skills and confidence to act. It builds not dependency, but contribution.

Key Message: **Leadership with integrity builds trust by telling the truth about limits, rejecting fear-based narratives and empowering the public as active contributors—linking ethical use of power with social cohesion and shared responsibility.**



WHY SHARED OWNERSHIP MATTERS

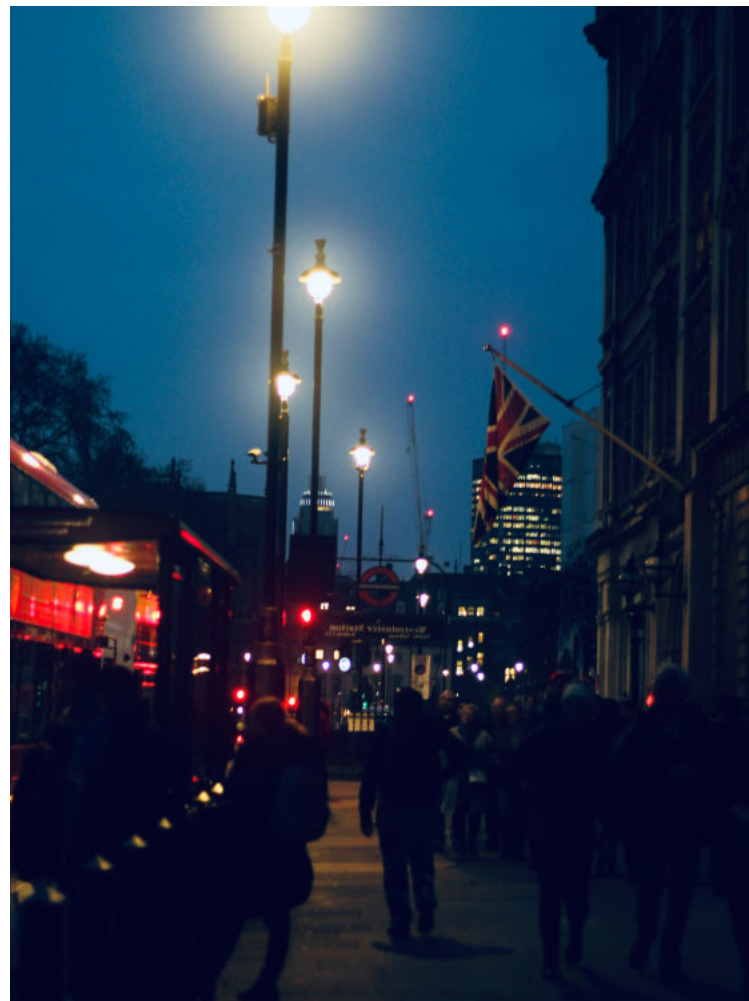
Shared ownership means that resilience and community strength belong to everyone. It does not reduce the role of the state. It reflects the evidence. Communities with stronger social bonds, higher trust and wider participation cope better with stress (Aldrich 2012; Norris et al. 2008). This is not theory. It is what the data shows across multiple types of crises.

Education research also shows that capability, agency and contribution are built over time. Social and emotional education improves wellbeing, behaviour and long-term outcomes (Cefai and Cooper 2018). These findings align directly with PRUK's design. It focuses on both social and practical skills, because both contribute to confidence and civic engagement (OECD 2018; OECD 2019).

There is also an important truth we often forget. Despite narratives of national decline, many people risk their lives to reach the UK because they believe it offers safety, fairness and opportunity. Migration research confirms that people migrate towards perceived stability rather than away from certainty (Carling and Collins 2018). It suggests that others see qualities in the UK that we may overlook.

Shared ownership helps restore that perspective. It strengthens the belief that people have a role in shaping the future. It demonstrates that belonging and responsibility reinforce one another.

Key Message: **Shared ownership strengthens resilience by combining the state's role with empowered, capable communities—building trust, skills, and belonging over time and reinforcing the idea that responsibility and participation are central to a confident, stable society.**



PARTNERSHIP, NOT SUBSTITUTION

There is a legitimate concern that encouraging public responsibility risks reducing the role of the state. The evidence shows the opposite. No system can eliminate the Empty Minute. Even with increased investment, emergency response cannot be everywhere at once. National data, trauma research and OHCA outcomes confirm this (NHS England 2024; National Academies 2016).

Partnership means the state does its part and the public do theirs. Government provides the framework, investment and standards. Institutions deliver services. Communities organise. Individuals act when only they are present.

This is not a withdrawal of responsibility. It is a realistic division of labour based on the way complex systems actually work.



THE EMPTY MINUTE AND PRUK

The Empty Minute is simple and achievable, equipping people with the skills to act when seconds matter. It turns fear into capability and strengthens social cohesion through shared responsibility.

PRUK extends this approach across compulsory education, from Year 1 in primary school through to Year 11 at the end of secondary education (up to age 16), embedding preparedness and resilience from an early age. It gives children and young people practical safety skills, emotional skills and social understanding. It mirrors approaches used in high-trust, high-resilience societies where preparedness and civic responsibility are integrated throughout education and community life (OECD 2019).

Together these frameworks help align government ambition with citizen capability.



SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

For credibility, the argument must recognise its limits.

Social capital is not automatically positive. Bonding capital can reinforce divisions. Bridging and linking capital are needed to ensure inclusion and access to resources (Aldrich 2012; Norris et al. 2008). PRUK and the Empty Minute must therefore strengthen inclusive networks, not closed ones.

Bystander action improves survival but cannot resolve wider inequalities. OHCA rates and outcomes vary significantly by region and deprivation. This reflects deeper structural issues. Public capability helps, but does not replace professional services or broader social reform (Resuscitation Council UK 2014; NHS England 2024).

Education builds capability but cannot solve every challenge. Employment, mental health, housing and inequality remain critical factors.

Acknowledging these limits strengthens the argument. It keeps the work grounded in reality.

Key message: **Credible leadership acknowledges the limits of community resilience—recognising that social capital can divide as well as unite, that public action cannot replace professional services or structural reform, and that education alone is not a cure-all—because honesty about constraints strengthens trust and keeps solutions grounded in reality.**



CONCLUSION

Leadership with integrity starts from the same place: the truth. It acknowledges the operational gap that no service can close. It acknowledges the strategic gap that no government can bridge alone. It then builds the shared responsibility needed to close both through partnership.

The Empty Minute provides the immediate pathway. PRUK provides the generational pathway. Both rest on the belief that people can do more than they think, and that when they are supported to act, society becomes stronger.

If we do this well, we give young people a future shaped by competence, contribution and hope. A future they can take pride in helping to build.

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