

# Six Keys to Effective Leadership

## Serendipity

*Leadership learning resources for copy and use*

**SAMPLE**



**A Management Learning Box Book**

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## Serendipity training and learning resources included in this E-book:

- ➔ *Serendipity in management, leadership and the team* – a 6-page synthesis exploring the what, why and how of generating fortunate discovery
- ➔ 5 self-assessments enabling you or your learners to pinpoint levels of serendipity and areas in which to focus on.
- ➔ 6 games and teasers making serendipity both challenging and fun.
- ➔ 3 hands-on activities for the individual and team
- ➔ A role play to put the practice into the effective learning of serendipity
- ➔ 22 high-impact coaching and self-coaching tools to inspire, create and generate serendipitous discoveries and outcomes
- ➔ An interactive serendipity case study including self-study questions, discussion topics, additional approaches and answers.
- ➔ Quotes, tips, suggestions and video links



# Six Keys to Effective Leadership

## Serendipity

Tom Gamble



**The Management Learning Box**

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### **The author**

Tom Gamble is British and has been living and working in France for twenty years. He has a MA in human resource management and is accredited in TMS, NLP and 360° appraisals. He has wide experience of teaching at all levels and has been a freelance trainer-coach for many companies including the Thales Group, Groupe Spie, Sagem, BP, Renault and Alexander Proudfoot Consulting. At Crossknowledge, he notably wrote and developed a twelve-module Vision and Leadership e-learning programme with Robert Dilts and an eight-module intercultural programme with experts Nigel Ewington and David Tricky. His passion for writing spans advertising, learning content, scripts, poetry and novels and he has published a short collection of poetry and two books. His innovative new business venture, The Management Learning Box, provides the training community with multi-format, ready-to-integrate, ready-to-adapt management and leadership learning content. He has three children and his pastimes include writing, desert trekking and mountain biking.

### **The publisher**

The vision of The Management Learning Box is to provide a quality, time-saving and flexible source of raw learning content for all those connected to the management and leadership training fields. Centred around a series of qualities featuring in many corporate leadership frameworks, The Management Learning Box learning content can be copied, adapted, immediately deployed in the training room or integrated into any final training format including coaching sessions, e-learning modules, videocast add ons, e-books, books, training manuals, self-coaching media or training programmes. The Management Learning Box also provides bespoke learning content development services and has provided many leading companies and organisations with e-learning and film scripts, book content, training programmes and case studies. A second major aim is to act as a platform for training professionals and academics to market and sell their learning content on The Management Learning Box website. Part of Management Learning Box yearly profits are donated to learning projects throughout the world, specifically aimed at improving the knowledge of young people in developing countries.

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*Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.*

***Einstein***

# Introduction and acknowledgements

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## The topic

As management and leadership competences move forwards to explore beyond the boundaries of traditional soft and hard soft skills, serendipity naturally finds its place – or rather *discovers its place*. Throughout history discovery, invention and world-changing entrepreneurship have been triggered by that special, unexpected event involving happenstance or even pure luck – where everything comes together and breakthrough is suddenly achieved. Science and medicine are obvious examples. Today's tough and challenging times, where constant change is a common feature of our working lives and the demand for greater goals objectives for leaders and teams is the norm, the capacity for fortunate discovery or occurrence is a notion that is slowly but surely rising to the top of the leadership skills wave. Can luck, happenstance and discovery be learnt? Can they be encouraged or broken down into processes? The answer is yes. Scientists have been doing it for years, so why not managers? While "spiritual" serendipity will always retain its unique notion of luck and happenstance, "scientific" serendipity lays the processes and foundations for reaching discovery and results. Both use and promote the various conditions and actions that can be use to incite serendipity. If you wish to obtain that key account; if you want to find that key information you're looking for; if you want your team to turn from simple doers into entrepreneurs and if you're looking for that ground-breaking product or service that will positively change yourself and others, then serendipity is worth learning about.

## How to use this book

The *Six Keys* series of downloadable books in PDF and Word formats contain a condensed essential best of the four hundred or more available learning formats featured on The Management Learning Box website.

*Six Keys* has been tailored to both the individual manager and leader seeking soft skills development, the trainer-coach wanting to explore and include essential leadership framework themes in his/her training offer, and training providers developing training material in traditional, blended, mobile, distance or e-learning format.

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## Acknowledgements

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# 1 A summary of serendipity

**Training uses:** Analysis, Discussion trigger, Example, Introduction to topic/theme, Marketing document, Stand-alone exercise, Summary/synthesis

**Associated words:** Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

**Recommended public:** Project managers, Managers, Directors, Leaders, Entrepreneurs, Masters+ students

## 1 Serendipity in management, leadership and the team



**F**or long an exclusive and esoteric notion, absent from other languages and as

evasive and enchanting as its occurrence itself, serendipity has nonetheless been at the root of countless breakthroughs, discoveries, inventions, theories and encounters throughout history. Today, it also has its place in business and management, with more and more organisations working in or concerned by the new technologies actively attempting to promote the occurrence of this bringer of unexpected and beneficial discovery. For the manager and leader, serendipity can mean an encounter with a solution, the discovery of a new product, market, pool of talent, insight into greater performance or financial results, golden opportunities and change, new processes, partnerships and successful outcomes to projects which in all appearances initially seem headed for disaster. It is one of the most exciting and desirable of the new – or at least re-discovered – ways in which to embrace and master today's highly changeable, highly demanding, and ever uncertain business world.

*Continued*

## 8 Six Keys to Effective Leadership – Serendipity

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*What is serendipity?*

The word first appeared in the English language in 1754, coined by the politician, writer and aesthete, Horace Walpole, from a Persian tale called *The Three Princes of Serendip*<sup>1</sup>. Serendipity can be defined as *the art of unexpected and happy discovery and the gift of stumbling across them*. A notion of luck, hazard, coincidence and happenstance – being in the right place at the right time - is often included. Moreover, serendipity is *a discovery, provoked by an attitude of mind, rebounding on the consequences of an adventure, experience, meeting, research or experiment*. Some researchers claim that serendipity arises in moments of misfortune<sup>2</sup> and that misfortune is a necessary experience before luck, happenstance and fortunate discovery occur. It is in these definitions that we can find serendipity's true scope, basis for occurrence and realistic application.

While many qualities and attributes of serendipity are shared by leaders, scientists, pioneers, inventors and entrepreneurs alike, there are said to be two approaches to serendipity<sup>3</sup>: "spiritual serendipity" (or *true serendipity*) – where awareness, faith, openness and luck influence its sudden occurrence; and "scientific serendipity" (*pseudo serendipity*), where knowledge, analysis, calculation of probabilities and dogged endeavour path the way to discovery or at least a change that will eventually lead to discovery. Put simply, in the first instance the individual, while not actually actively seeking or expecting anything, possesses the attitude of mind to invite the occurrence of serendipitous discovery related to a subject that wholly concerns him; in the second instance, the individual attempts to recreate a step-by-step path to discovery by basing his/her search upon knowledge, analysis, trial and error and continuous work upon the subject in question. Today, attempts are made to draw best practice from both forms of serendipity to develop ways and means to make it happen.

From a gift presented only to the lucky few, serendipity is becoming a quality and skill that can be broken down, learnt, practised and encouraged to occur.

*Continued*

*Serendipity in management, leadership and the team*

The impact of serendipity on the workplace can be multiple and powerfully beneficial. Faced with a multitude of daily and long term challenges, managers, leaders or teams are inevitably in search of a discovery of some sort. They want something that will give them a business edge, create new markets or business, trigger great achievement or performance or reveal the way to personal and collective success.

Organisations are also concerned by serendipity. It is not only discovering ways to adapt to the market that ensures success, but also discovering something that *makes the market adopt* the organisation <sup>4</sup>. Entrepreneurship is a key factor in encountering business serendipity for it only by venturing out into the unknown, trying different things and taking risks that discovery is made. Business serendipity is said to be the discovery of a better solution than the previous one without knowing the ideal solution from

**Full Serendipity summary included  
in**

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Serendipity**

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## 2 Serendipity assessments and self-assessments

Training uses: Activity, Analysis, Exercise, Profiler, Self-awareness exercise

Associated words: Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

Recommended public: Project managers, Managers, Directors, Leaders

### 1 Do your leadership, management and working approach encourage serendipity?



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Read the questions and assess yourself by giving a score from 1 – 5 (1 is lowest, 5 highest). All statements are positive-oriented for rapid and easy assessment. A low score indicates that you would have to consider changing ways, methods, processes or outlook.

1. To what degree do you try to obtain a maximum of knowledge about the issues and challenges surrounding you at work? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
2. To what extent are you willing or capable of freeing up time to listen to your colleagues' or team members' ideas, concerns and opinions? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
3. To what extent do you encourage communication and regular exchange between yourself and your colleagues, team members or hierarchy? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
4. To what degree do you encourage mobility for yourself, your team or colleagues? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
5. To what extent can you effectively use techniques such as brainstorming, SWOT analysis and mind-mapping in your job? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

6. To what degree have you set up an information/data gathering system or process in your job/team? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
7. To what extent are you able to prioritise and interpret key information/data? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
8. To what extent are you capable of bouncing back on mistakes and learning from them? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
9. How good are you at improvisation when faced with a task or challenge? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
10. To what extent do you regularly question old behaviours, ways and methods of doing things in attempt to improve performance and results? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
11. To what extent do you actively build up internal and external networks? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
12. To what extent do you correctly use benchmarking in your job? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
13. To what extent do you encourage a degree of trial and error in yourself and your team? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
14. To what extent do you give space for initiative and time for reflection and research for you and your team? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
15. To what extent do you actively socialise? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
16. To what degree are you open to speaking and interacting with people, whatever their social or professional status? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
17. To what extent do you analyse issues and events in order to understand and add to your knowledge? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
18. To what extent are you actively curious about the events, issues and concerns affecting you, your team and your organisation? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
19. To what degree do you plan right moments and right places to be in? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
20. To what degree do you believe in discovering solutions not only for personal benefit but for the benefit of your wider environment or purpose? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

*Continued*

## Full Serendipity assessments included in

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Notes/Action

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*Serendipity is putting a quarter in the gumball machine and having three pieces come rattling out instead of one—all red.*

*Peter H. Reynolds*

### Video:

David Carson talks about design and discovery

(Visit TED at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com))



## 3 Serendipity games and teasers

**Training uses:** Activity, Analysis, Discussion trigger, Exercise, Introduction to topic/theme, Personal profiler data sheet, Profiler, Self-awareness exercise, Team-building activity

**Associated words:** Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

**Recommended public:** Project managers, Managers, Directors, Entrepreneurs, Leaders

### 1 Exploring for serendipity



#### **Instructions**

- On a piece of paper/flipchart or on screen, write down a list of all the positive “*what ifs*” relevant to your professional and personal life.
  - Examples: *What if I changed jobs within the company? What if I decided to change my working hours? What if I changed my working approach by doing Y? What if I used X instead of Y to solve problem Z?*
- Provide answers for each *what if* statement.
- Sort the statements and answers into categories: zany, daring, risky, dangerous, do-able, beneficial, breakthrough.
- Choose 3 to actually do over the next three months.
- Write up an action plan, search for information, help, advice and contacts to build on the project and make it grow.
- At a later stage, analyse the outcomes and results. Where did they take you? What were the outcomes? What did you learn from them?

*Continued*



Notes/Action:

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## 4 Serendipity puzzle

### *Instructions*

- On separate pieces of white paper, each individual writes down a “nightmare” scenario/misfortune they have lived through or experienced (professional or personal). This constitutes the *Misfortune* pile.
- On a second set of paper (coloured), each individual writes down the solution/discovery/serendipitous occurrence/fortunate event that either drew them out of the misfortune or presented them with an opportunity/fortunate outcome to it. This constitutes the *Fortune* pile.
- Collect the two sets of papers and put them into two separate piles. Shuffle each pile carefully.
- Either in pairs or groups, the first player chooses a piece of paper from the *Misfortune* pile and lays it down on the table. The second player picks a piece of paper from the *Fortune* pile and tries to match it with the *Misfortune*, justifying if this solution/discovery/serendipitous occurrence corresponds or not.
- The game continues until all the *Misfortunes* and *Fortunes* have been matched.



## 4 Serendipity activities

**Training uses:** Activity, Analysis, Assessment/self-assessment, Discussion trigger, Exercise, Introduction to topic, Personal profiler data sheet, Self-awareness exercise, Team-building activity, Warm-up exercise

**Associated words:** Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

**Recommended public:** Project managers, Managers, Directors, Entrepreneurs, Leaders

### 1 Serendipity networking



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#### Instructions

- In a group, each member writes down a challenge, problem or issue to resolve that is relevant to his/her work.
- In four “networking sessions” of five minutes, group members have to move about the room and “meet” the other members to present their challenge/problem/issue.
- Keep the group circulating and communicating until a group member (or members) encounters someone who comes up with a serendipitous answer/path/solution to the issue.
- Stop the game. The group member reads out his/her issue and the answer that has just been encountered. The other group members build on this and offer comment (criticism, advice or further leads/insights).
- After five minutes, resume the game, group members returning to moving about the room and meeting others to present and discuss their challenge/problem/issue.
- Call the game to an end after the four five-minute “networking sessions”.
- Call for results, outcomes and conclusions. Discuss.

## 2 Opportunity search

### Instructions

- In pairs, look at the unexpected events noted overleaf (or alternatively, have learners invent a list of unexpected/unfortunate events).
- Your objective is to find any opportunities in these events and propose a course of action to turn them in your favour. Let your mind work freely to encourage a maximum of creativity.

### Unexpected events

- when giving a presentation to a group of managers/clients, your projector breaks down
- One day, out-of-the-blue, your HRM informs you that you are on a shortlist of 7 people to be made redundant
- Your boss informs you that you are likely to be sent to work overseas in a foreign country for three years
- While commuting to work, the train you are on breaks down in the middle of nowhere

You happen to be consulting you-

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# 6 Serendipity coaching and self-coaching exercises

Training uses: Flashcard, flowchart, checklist, action card, tip, self-awareness exercise

Associated factors: Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

Recommended public: See individual coaching exercises

## 3 Being open to your search for discovery



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Recommended public: Project managers, managers, directors, entrepreneurs, leaders

- Choose an issue/subject that concerns you:  
.....
- How much do you know about the issue/subject?  
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- What *don't* you know about the issue/subject?  
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- What interests you in searching for discovery? How will it benefit you?  
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- What prevents you from knowing more about the subject?  
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- What would make you *not* want to explore the issue/subject further?

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- What would make you want to continue your search for discovery *despite* the above reasons?

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- What actions, methods, techniques, tactics or processes have you already used in your search for discovery?

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- What experiences and new territories have the above led you to?

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- What additional new experiences, experimentation, novel, unusual or original ideas can take you farther into your search for discovery?

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- Why would you want to follow these?

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- Why would you not want to follow these?

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- What would make you follow these despite the things that would hold you back?

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- What would happen if you didn't try out new ways, ideas, experiences and techniques in your search for discovery?

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- What benefits and advantages might arise if you were wholly open-minded to new ways, experiences and techniques that would help you in your search for discovery?

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Notes/Action:

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## 7 Speaking to potential gatekeepers

Recommended public: Project managers, managers, directors, entrepreneurs, leaders

In the context of serendipity, gatekeepers are people who unexpectedly present themselves as providers of information and ideas that lead you to discovery.

- What issue/subject are you concerned by and in which you are searching for an answer of some sort?  
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- Who are you in relation to that issue/subject?  
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- What are you trying to achieve?  
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- In what way do you respect this issue/subject? How does it create a feeling of awe in you?  
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- Think of four people (at hierarchical extremes) who work in your environment whom you respect and feel somehow linked to, but whom you have never dared or bothered to talk to. Show humility in your choice:  
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- During one week, make it your goal to talk to these people about the issue/subject you are concerned by. Listen attentively to everything they have to say.
- What do they have to say about it?  
.....

*The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!', but 'That's funny ...'*

*Isaac Asimov*

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# 7 Serendipity case study

**Training uses:** Analysis, Discussion trigger, Example, Exercise, Introduction to topic/theme, Script, Team-building activity, Test

**Associated factors:** Discovery, Breakthrough, Chance, Luck, Hazard, Happenstance, Synchronicity, Coincidence, Unexpected, Fortunate, Beneficial, Quest, Search, Happy occurrence, Trial and error, Inflexion, Sagacity, Entrepreneurial, Adventure, Exploration

**Recommended public:** Project managers, Managers, Directors, Entrepreneurs, Leaders, Masters+ students

## 1 From engineers to innovators



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Gatte SA celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence via a three-page internal communiqué sent by its CEO to its 20,000 or so employees. It was characteristically low-key, mapped out the transition the organisation had made over the years from a civil engineering company to its current position as a player in the energy services sector and stated the figures showing the organisation's quiet and steady growth over the last five years.

Oliver De Silva, reading between the lines, judged the situation as successful. His career in Gatte, since joining as a young engineer in the nuclear-electric branch some fifteen years before, rather reflected the character of the company. He had learnt the art of patience. Steady work, discretion, respect for seniority and compliance with the system of procedures had seen him move from his early years in the field to project management at the French headquarters and a two-year stint heading the company's technical training department.

He liked his company and any frustrations he may have once had regarding the ideas and improvements he felt would make the organisation more dynamic were more than compensated for by the comfortable and restrained atmosphere in which he had always worked. He knew what was expected of him, knew how he was supposed to behave and was more or less certain of the discreet, though

sure progression of the company. Reward, whether through the various employee benefit schemes or through peer recognition for being a solid and reliable manager, was a pleasant feature of company culture. Senior management had passed through the same top engineering universities as himself and many had even graduated with the same degree. He was a “member of the club”, trusted his directors and what they did and knew that they trusted him.

Several weeks after the Gatte SA anniversary, he was notified of his new post, having known from the outset that technical training was to be an interim position while the retirement cycle turned in his favour. John Faraway, the corporate Health and Safety director was about to leave after twenty-five years loyal service and Oliver De Silva had been chosen to take his place.

With Faraway’s departure, the department would be called the corporate HQSE department and its role was to be widened. Not only would it deal with health, safety and quality throughout the organisation, it would also cultivate and foster an environmentally responsible strategy to be deployed top-down through the various layers of engineers, technicians, project managers and admin staff. Sustainability had been a rumour circulating among senior management for several years now and at last they would have the opportunity to be on a level with their competitors.

One of the major challenges facing Oliver De Silva was that Gatte SA was made up of twenty or so subsidiaries - independent business units which had been developing and setting up their own sustainability departments and systems over the last three years. Each regional subsidiary had its own language, its own policy and even marketed their sustainability in different ways. Harmonising it all and persuading the subsidiaries to follow corporate HQS and sustainability was the first and most important of Oliver De Silva’s objectives.

De Silva’s team was made up of eleven people, nine of whom had been with the company for ten years or more. Most of the team members were women and they included four assistants, an accident report manager, a communications manager, a training officer and two secretaries. The two men in the team were ex-engineers who, like De Silva himself, had spent a few years on project sites

before moving on to headquarters. Indeed, he'd occasionally worked with them on various transverse projects since his arrival at headquarters. Their tasks were respectively maintenance auditing and safety auditing.

The welcome he received was encouraging and the team looked enthusiastic and motivated when he called them to an initial meeting to explain the new approach. "The first thing is to inform the subsidiaries," he told Rebecca, in charge of internal and external communication. "Make it clear that corporate strategy on HQSE matters must override everything. It would be nice to go and see the health and safety managers too over the next few months, to get an idea of where they are on things." Jen Turnbull and Flo Mesonge, the assistants, were to deal with that. Inse, in charge of accident reports, was to set up a centralised information system that gathered stats on accidents and use the company intranet to publicise H&S issues and alerts. From now on, she would .....

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### Questions

- How does the Gatte SA company culture tend to restrict the occurrence of serendipity (creativity, surprise discovery, "magic")?

**Full Exemplarity case study is included in**

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