Taking on a leadership role [1] the first time is tough. There is always pressure [2] you to do the right things, and to be seen to be doing them. But, unless there's something that needs sorting [3] urgently, your first few months [4] the role will be better spent [5] understanding the people and the situation. One easy mistake to make is to think that you, as leader, the top person [6] the top salary, have the sole responsibility and the know-how to solve every single problem yourself. And you can be sure that others will encourage you to think that way, since it takes the pressure [7] them, and it satisfies their natural urge to leave the solving [8] problems [9] others. Instead try using existing resources to identify the current position and the ways to change it [10] the better.

Start [11] consulting widely, beginning [12] the people who now report [13] you direct, as these are most likely to be the people [14] the expertise and experience to tackle some [15] the problems that are identified. A series [16] one-to-one meetings, though time-consuming, will be worthwhile, especially if they are structured to provide you [17] the information you need to make decisions later [18] . Two useful questions are: 'What do you see as the biggest problem facing the department now?' and 'What one change would make the most difference [19] our success?' [20] their answers you can build [21] a picture [22] your people, as well as of the issues. Some will consider the needs [23] the department as a whole, while others may just concentrate [24] their own particular concerns. You will also have had personal contact [25] each person and can judge who you will work well [26] [27] the future.