

Lecture Title: Role which is not yet defined and middle leaders in schools



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**Middle Leaders and the Leadership
of Educational Institutions**
MQF Level 5, 4 ECTS



"Empowering those around you to be heard and valued makes the difference between a leader who simply instructs and one who inspires."

Adena Friedman, Nasdaq CEO



Middle leaders in the international context – a shift in focus

In the rich history of educational leadership research, the focus has been more on the important work of principals and senior administrators according to Grootenberger (2019).

Although there has been a growing interest in the work and practices of middle leader, for the past two decades, empirical research into middle leadership roles in schools tended to focus largely but not exclusively upon subject leaders and heads of department (Harris, Jamieson, and Russ 1995; Harris 1999; Busher and Harris 2000).



Current literature

- Currently the contemporary literature on middle leadership has expanded to include a far broader variety of middle leadership roles, positions, and perspectives (e.g. Fitzgerald and Gunter 2006; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014; Thorpe and Melnikova 2014; Ng 2015; Carter 2016; Irvine and Brundrett 2016; Kiat, Heng, and Lim-Ratnam 2016).
- Harris and Jones in Alma Harris & Michelle Jones (2017) *Middle leaders matter: reflections, recognition, and renaissance*, School Leadership & Management, argue that “While the contemporary literature is far from extensive, it offers empirically based accounts of the nature, practice, and influence of middle leaders in schools. It is important to underline, however, that this evidence base is different from that associated with system level change or, as it has become known, ‘Leading from the Middle’.



A change in context

Consequently the focus of research has shifted according to Harris and Jones (2017).

According to Harris and Jones in recent research the literature on middle leadership has dissipated a little. They argue that “while the job demands of, middle leaders could feasibly be the same, the context in which they work is now, radically different. Hence, a renaissance of research into middle level leaders in schools would seem both timely and important.”



Expected outcomes

According to Gurr D (2021) there are various statements that can be made about middle leaders:

1. Middle leaders can have a positive influence on teacher work and student outcomes, particularly when principals and middle leaders act together.

2. Middle leaders help improve student outcome, by establishing the parameters that lead to collective effort by a group of teachers to improve teaching and learning.

Developing staff collegiality that focuses on improving teaching and learning can have a positive influence on students' outcomes, besides being beneficial in itself.



Role definition

- 3. High expectations and role clarity are important for these people to have a leadership focus rather than a managerial or administrative focus. High expectations come from both the middle leaders themselves in terms of their sense of agency, and from principals and senior leaders about what they want from the roles.
- 4. Recruitment and professional development are important both in terms of the quantity and quality of middle leaders. To ensure there are enough teachers who have the skills and qualities to be successful middle leaders there is a need to encourage teacher aspirations, have appropriate selection and induction processes, and ensure there is on-going review and development. Gurr D (2021).

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|-------|
| Self | values | establish relationships | organisation | ethos |
| Team | results | teacher development | curriculum | |
| School-wide | partnerships | | projects | |

Effective middle leaders

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFSGbodqosg&ab_channel=QELiTV



IMPACT OF MIDDLE LEADERS

Middle leaders positively influence most significantly: curriculum, teacher practice, collaborative practice and professional learning.
(Grootenboer, 2018)

Distributing leading practice to the middle is likely to have greater influence on students than practices carried out at only the school level.

(Leithwood 2016).

School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning.

(Hoy et al 2006, Leithwood et al 2004, Leithwood et al 2008).

Reforms leading towards decentralisation

- In the local context, in the past ten years, a number of important reforms were implemented in the Maltese education sector which affected the management and the organization of the schools (Bezzina and Cassar, 2003).
- Reforms initiated by the Education Division of the time shifted greater decentralization to the school (ibid, 2003) and like in other countries, this decision increased the demands on the institutions (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).
- According to the official documents published by the Education Directorate (2010) about the roles and duties of the senior leaders in Maltese schools, every head of school in Malta is expected to primarily provide professional leadership and implement the National Curriculum Framework.



Education Techn



Changes in the roles of senior leaders

- HOS is also expected to promote the holistic education of every student; organize, manage and control the human, physical and financial resources of the school; collaborate with other heads and establish partnership with other schools and home-school community links Directorate for Quality and Assurance, (2010).
- Moreover, the senior leader is also expected to “share his/her leadership and the decision process with other members of staff who should be given the opportunity to work in teams.” according to the Directorate for Quality and Assurance, (2010:9
- Bezzina and Cassar (2003) agreed with other studies conducted earlier in England and the USA (Flath 1989; Fullan, 1991) and seem to suggest that the work of school leaders in Malta is becoming more complex because school leaders do not have enough time to fulfill all their duties especially due to increased paperwork and stakeholders’ expectations. 8).



Hydrate

Make a coffee

Be back in 5



[INSERT STUDY
PROGRAMME NAME]

Deputy heads are more involved

- School leaders feel more pressured, are expected to deliver more and in a short period of time (Mertkan, 2014).
- Nowadays, heads are expected to work with other schools and other school leaders, collaborating and developing relationships of trust OECD (2008)
- In the local context research states that Maltese heads are administering their institution rather than managing it or leading it forward Abdilla and Spiteri, (1999); Micallef, (2002); Quintano, (1999) and Xerri, (2000).
- Dixon (2007) argues for the necessity for the head of school to be encouraged to be active and ready to distribute his/her leadership to others, especially other members of the senior leadership team and his/her middle leaders.
- In Kenya (Philip, (2011) concluded that the leadership of the school is more effective if deputy heads are involved in working on a number of daily tasks like maintaining discipline; time tabling; supervision and implementation of the curriculum distributed to them by school principals.



Middle leaders entrusted to lead

- In Maltese schools, the assistant head is expected to assist and deputize for the head of school as well as to contribute in the management of the human, physical and financial resources; offer professional leadership in the implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum; assist in the management of the institution; undertake any professional duties delegated to him/her as well as provide professional support to teachers and other members of staff Directorate for Educational Services, (2010).
- Consequently, international and Maltese literature appear to agree strongly that middle leaders should be consulted by the head of school, should be given a chance to lead and be involved in the decision making process.
- During the past decade educational officials in Europe and in other countries became more aware of the relevance and the importance of implementing a distributed style of leadership in educational institutions (Bush, 2014).



Middle leadership in a context of distributed leadership

- According to the official policy documentation NCF, (2013) in Malta distributed leadership is also being promoted in the three education sectors (state, Church and independent).
- Vella K (2015) doctoral thesis argues that “organising distributed leadership as a principle may well become one of the middle leaders’ own roles in time and hence there is the need for them to know how to manage distributed leadership in preparation for headship.”
- Bush (2014) argues that some countries like Norway, Australia, USA, Venezuela and England find middle leadership indispensable, as in these countries it is believed that schools are more effective when the leadership is shared and does not rest solely on the head. Moller (2007) claims that “when different members of staff are willing to hold different roles of leadership and when power and authority are shared amongst different members of the organization” schools are more effective.
- Moreover in the last decade schools have become more complex Lashway, (2003) with their leadership changing considerably as educational institutions now form part of a globalised knowledge economy with every head being constrained to work in a policy-orientated context Day and Leithwood, (2007).





Discussion regarding the role of the middle leaders in the Maltese educational system

- This situation is also similar to the Maltese context where although leadership is being distributed between the different strata in schools, the senior leader is being constantly pressured by strict centralised policies and procedures. For this reason a need was felt to develop in every school a number of “learning-centred leaders” Southworth, (2004:63).



Moving away from a top-down style of leadership

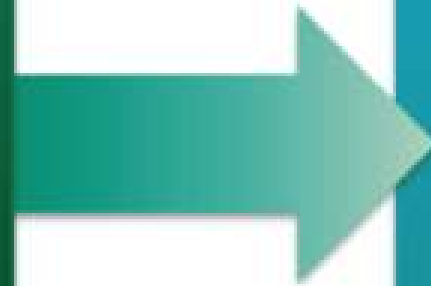
- Distributing and sharing leadership is also the model that has been recommended for all Maltese schools during this decade.
- This move can be mainly attributed to the seminal document *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995), followed by the *National Minimum Curriculum* in 1999, the document *For All Children to Succeed* (2005), the subsequent *Amendment to the Education Act* (2006) which all prescribed the importance of moving away from a top-down managerial model to a more consultative style of leadership.
- In this sense, the head of school is expected to follow a collaborative approach to decision making (Ministry of Education, 2010).



Traditional Leadership

The Team Leader :

- Takes decisions
- Gives instructions
- Controls whether people do what he told them to
- Is the super expert
- Delegate tasks



Shared Leadership

The Team Leader :

- Enables people to act
- Establishes shared vision
- Facilitates Teamwork & information sharing
- Installs collaborative decision making and problem solving
- Stimulates experimentation
- Delegates responsibilities
- Coaches & gives feedback
- Is open for feedback

Towards a collaborative culture

More recently, in the official document entitled *“Towards A Quality Education For All - The National Curriculum Framework”* that was published in 2013 by the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family it was suggested that Maltese schools should have

“a leadership model that promotes distributed forms of leadership...whilst school leaders play both a visionary and strategic role, they also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the full range of professional skills and expertise to be found among the members of the organization (2013:22).”



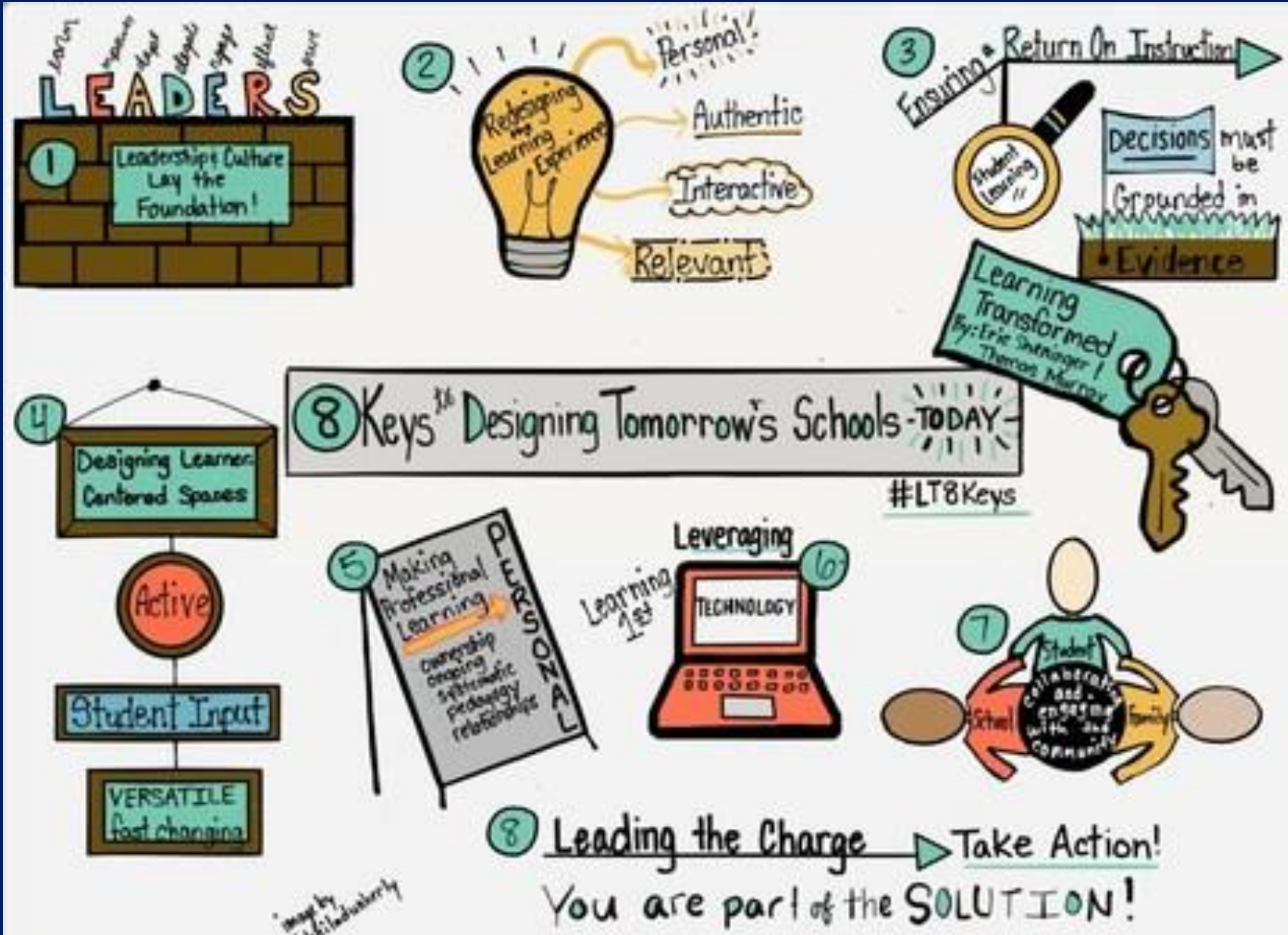


image by @kikiindustri



TRUST = LEADERSHIP GLUE

Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds relationships together.

Stephen Covey

Leadership is an achievement of trust.

Peter Drucker

-
- What do you think are the qualities of an effective middle leader?

UNIQUE POSITIONING OF MIDDLE LEADERS

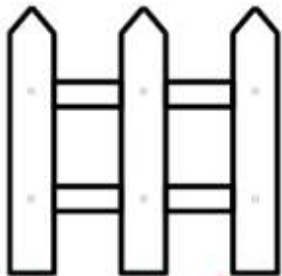
WHAT MIDDLE LEADING ISN'T



A foot in both camps



A finger in every pie



Sitting on the fence

WHAT IT SHOULD BE



A bridge between
teachers ("on the ground") and
senior leaders (guiding the big picture)

Mrs Fintelman Teaches



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**LET'S
DISCUSS**

Middle Leaders and the Leadership
of Educational Institutions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIXsBF5MMUA&ab_channel=NiallBrennan

[What Is a Teacher Leader? - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIXsBF5MMUA&ab_channel=NiallBrennan)



Teachers' Beliefs and attitudes

- The majority of the studies referred to seem to highlight that distributed leadership values the role and work of middle leaders. They also outline the importance that teachers need to work in teams, share their goals and beliefs, in a way that they become more motivated in their work Lakomski, (2005).
- It is implied from the literature that in a distributed leadership environment, the decisions that are taken are not imposed by the head but are discussed and negotiated by all stakeholders.
- It is also contended that the success of distributed leadership depends to some degree on the size and complexity of the school; the ability and readiness of the head to empower others and the willingness of the middle managers to contribute in the running of the institution.



Teachers' reactions to reforms

- Baldacchino and Farrugia - Volume 16, No. 1., 25-44 (2022) argue that teachers are the most important players in the successful implementation of educational reform (Stolk, de Jong, Bulte, & Pilot, 2007; Vos, Taconis, Jochems & Pilot, 2010; Farrugia et al, 2017).
- Baldacchino and Farrugia (2022 ibid.) argue that “Teachers’ reactions to an education reform may also depend on whether they perceive their professional identities as being threatened or strengthened by that reform (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Self-efficacy beliefs will determine whether they are prepared to try out and eventually implement new classroom practices (Stolk, Bulte, de Jong & Pilot., 2009a)”.



Moreover, PD opportunities where teachers build their own knowledge and learn with others, where existing beliefs are challenged and they take charge of their own learning, have been found to be favourable learning environments for teachers (Stolk et al., 2009a) argue Baldacchino and Farrugia (2022)

[What Is a Teacher Leader? - YouTube](#)



How do you know you
have the trust of your
colleagues?



RELATIONAL TRUST

Interpersonal

Others might ask:
Are you
trustworthy?



Ask yourself:
Does everyone
feel included?
Am I acting in a
trustworthy way?
Do I know who I'm
working with?

Interactional

Others might ask:
Can we
collaborate?



Ask yourself:
What activities
should we do
together?
How can I create
a safe place to
collaborate?

Intersubjective

Others might ask:
Are you part of
the team?



Ask yourself:
Am I willing to
learn alongside
others?
Do we have
shared beliefs and
understandings?

Intellectual

Others might ask:
Do you know your
stuff?



Ask yourself:
What knowledge
and wisdom do I
bring?
How do I get
others to share
their own?

Pragmatic

Others might ask:
Is the work doable
and worth it?



Ask yourself:
Can it be done?
Is it practical?
Who will do what
and when?

Mrs Fintelman Teaches, Adapted From the work of C Edwards-Groves and P Grootenboer.

<https://www.griffith.edu.au/engage/professional-learning/content-centre/trust-leadership-glue>

Challenges to distributed leadership

- Senior leaders have a responsibility to create the right conditions for distributed leadership to succeed argues Harris (2013).
- Some research showed that distributed leadership can sometimes cause pressure and increase the responsibility on teachers without increasing their power, Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss (2009).
- Timperley (2005) argues that distributed leadership is only desirable if the “leadership activities contribute to more effective teaching and student achievement.”



Challenges mentioned by middle leaders

- De Nobile (2018) outlined the greatest challenges faced by middle leaders as follows:
- Workload and time
- Relationship challenges (colleagues and parents)
- Human resources management



- In your roles as middle leaders what were or are the challenges that you have come across?
- What are the areas of training or support you feel would assist you in carrying out your middle leadership roles better?



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"Culture eats strategy for
breakfast!"
Peter Drucker



The culture of a school will overpower any strategy put in place to enable improvement. Creating a culture that supports, empowers & celebrates learning in all its guises, is the crucial first step in the school improvement journey.

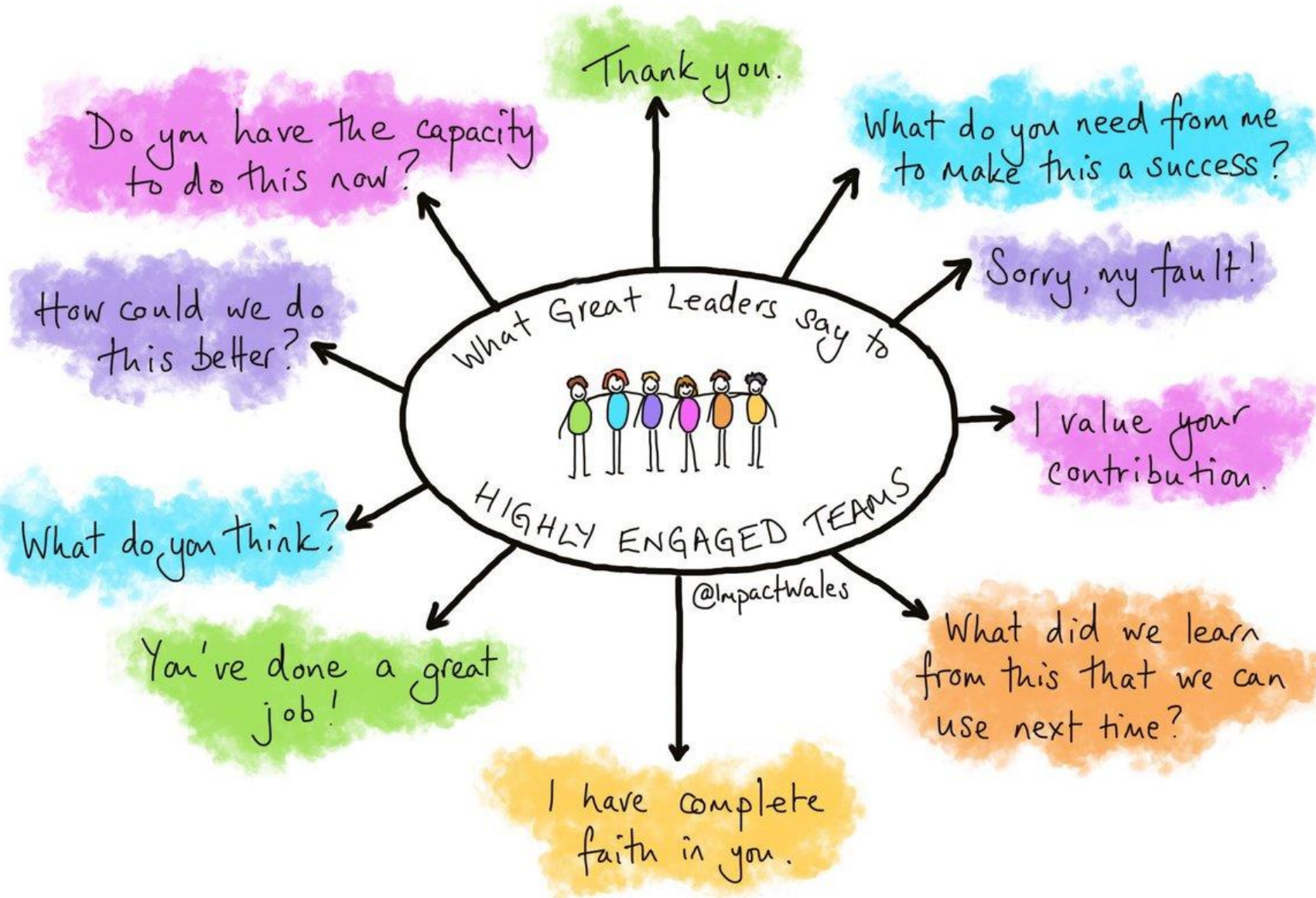
To access school leadership support that creates an effective learning culture contact:
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Identifying Training Needs

- Managing Conflict was the most pressing need identified for training followed by:
- Time Management
- Dealing with Parents
- Pastoral Care of students
- Self-Management
- Dealing with Colleagues
- Working with Senior Management
- Dealing with Discipline
- Presentation Skills
- Communication



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Dimensions of Teacher leadership

- According Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) a model of seven basic dimensions has been proposed for teacher leaders' development namely:
- **Developmental focus:** teachers should have the intrinsic motivation to increase knowledge.
- **Recognition:** acknowledge and validate professional roles and positive achievements in increasing students' performance.
- **Autonomy:** being supported and provided with authority.



- **Collegiality:** promotes collaboration and cooperation.
- **Participation:** involved in decision making.
- **Open Communication:** senior leaders promote a healthy environment.
- **A positive environment:** beliefs and opinions are valued.



WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT TEACHER LEADERSHIP?



“Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change.”

- *Marilyn Katzenmeyer & Gayle Moller, *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*, (2001)*

**LEADERS THINK AND
TALK ABOUT THE
SOLUTIONS.
FOLLOWERS THINK
AND TALK ABOUT THE
PROBLEMS.**

BRIAN TRACY

BRIANTRACY.COM



Click to watch video

What type of leader are you? Take the
quiz

<https://richardstep.com/dope-personality-type-quiz/dope-bird-4-personality-types-test-questions-online-version/>





Middle Leaders and the Leadership of
Educational Institutions

Showing gratitude to middle leaders and educators

- <https://neu.org.uk/empowering-and-developing-middle-leaders>



What stuck with you today?





Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions

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