

Illusionary Leadership

The dangers of poor proxies



LAUNCHPAD

Learning & Development

research  **ED**

National Conference 2025



1 What is Leadership?

2 Why Worry?

3 Poor Proxies

4 A Clearer lens

1

What is Leadership?



The path to codification has been long, twisty and is still under construction



We crave cognitive closure and so the world is awash with frameworks



What we say leadership is, often clashes with what staff value

Leadership Theories

TRAIT

Leaders are **born** with and judged on certain characteristics like confidence, intelligence, or charisma

BEHAVIOURAL

Leadership is about what leaders **do**. Task-oriented (getting things done) and people-oriented (supporting others)

SITUATIONAL & CONTINGENCY

Leadership effectiveness depends on the context and leaders must **adapt** their style to fit the needs

SPECIFIC

Transformational leadership - Inspiring and motivating others
Instructional leadership - Guiding and supporting the learning process
Distributed leadership - Building capacity by sharing responsibilities

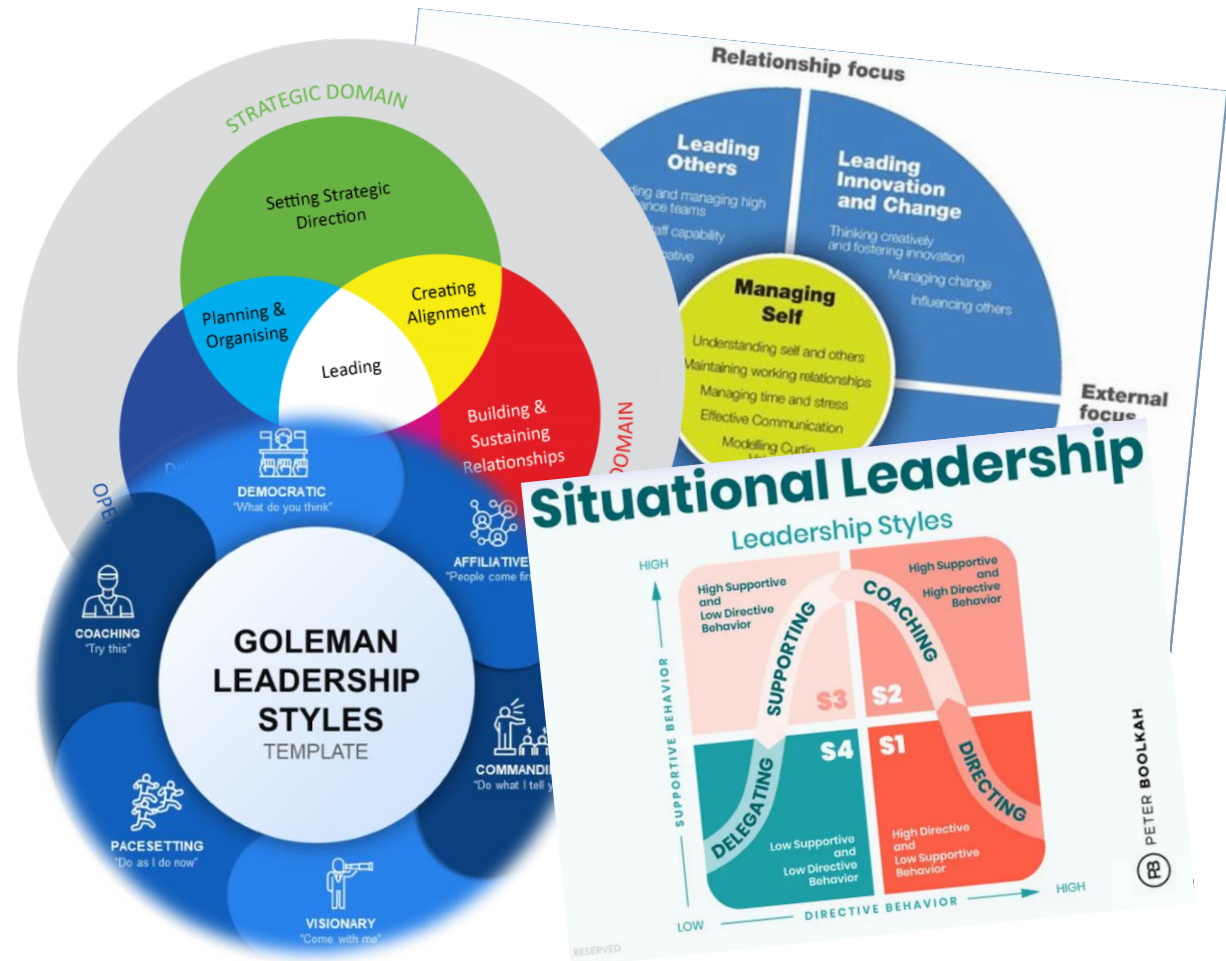
Leadership Frameworks

‘a structured approach that defines the core values, competencies, and behaviours expected of leaders within an organisation’

 Department for Education
 Education Endowment Foundation

National Professional Qualification (NPQ): Senior Leadership Framework

Culture	Teaching	Curriculum & Assessment	Behaviour	SEND
CPD	Organisational management	Implementation	Partnership	Governance & Accountability



Staff Voice

I really admire the way....

- They write a contingency plan
- They manage change
- They listen
- They back me up
- They keep commitments
- They model well-being



How would you finish the sentence
“I really admire the way they...”

- listen
- back me up
- keep commitments



1 What is Leadership?

2 Why Worry?

2

Why Worry?



Our Mental Models drive our behaviour which then dictates our impact

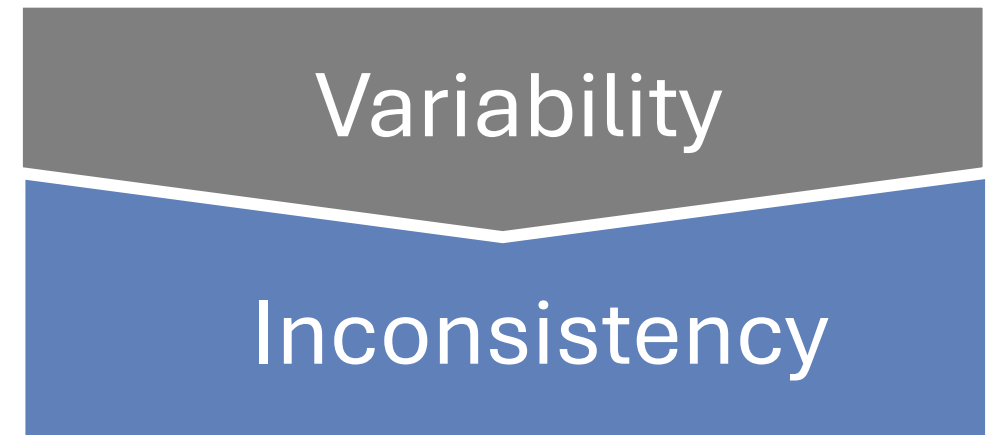
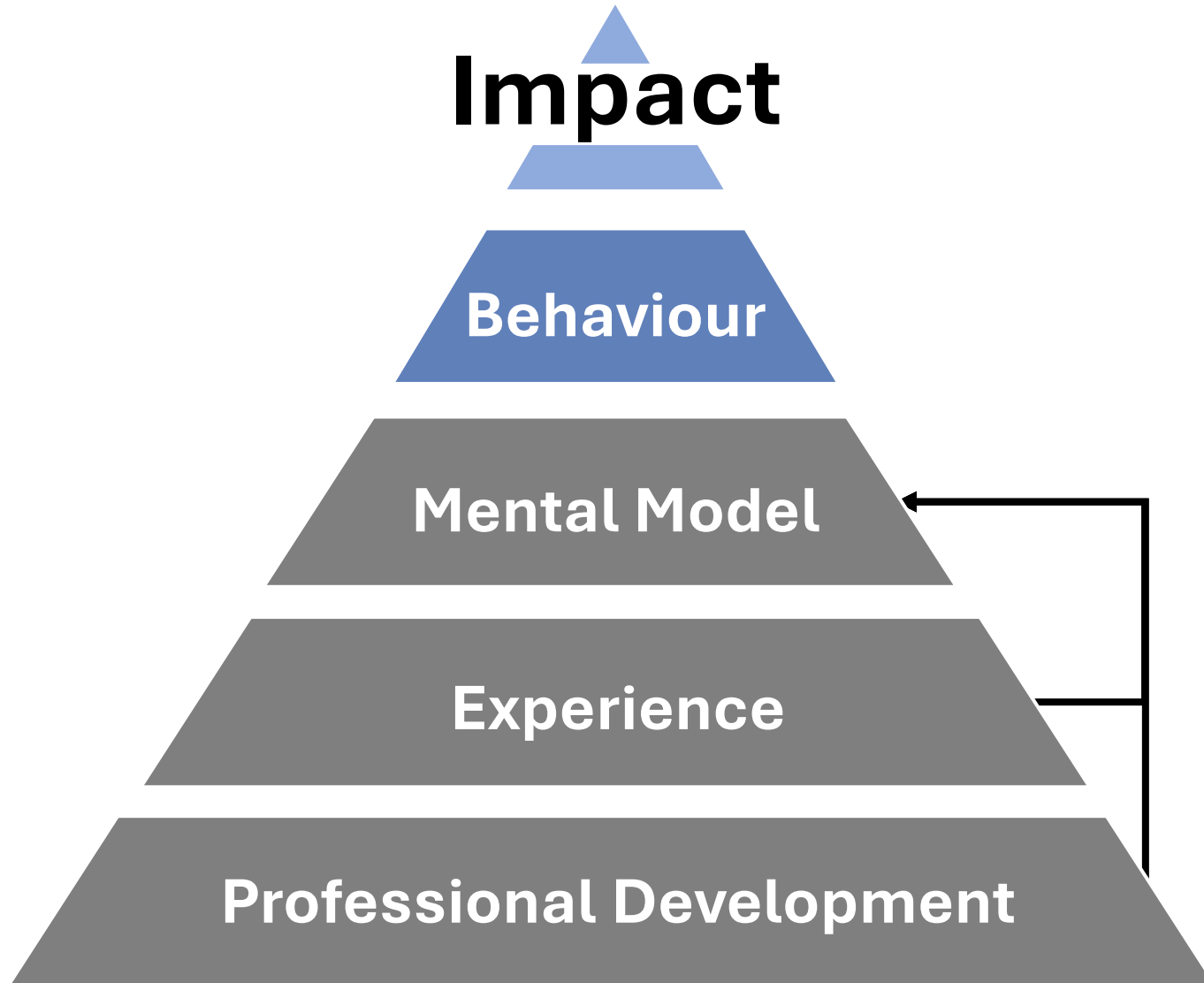


You can't develop excellence until you decide what it is

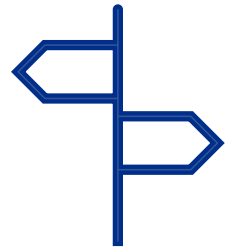


Its unwise and unfair to hold people accountable to hidden expectations

Mental Models



Leadership Development

 Curriculum Topics

 Sequencing

 Assessment



Performance Management



Expectations



Goal Setting



Challenge & Support



1 What is Leadership?

2 Why Worry?

3 Poor Proxies

3

Poor Proxies



There is an important difference between correlation and causation



We often judge the quality of our leaders inaccurately



Reinforcement of these 'poor proxies' echo in CPD and PM processes

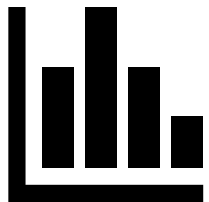
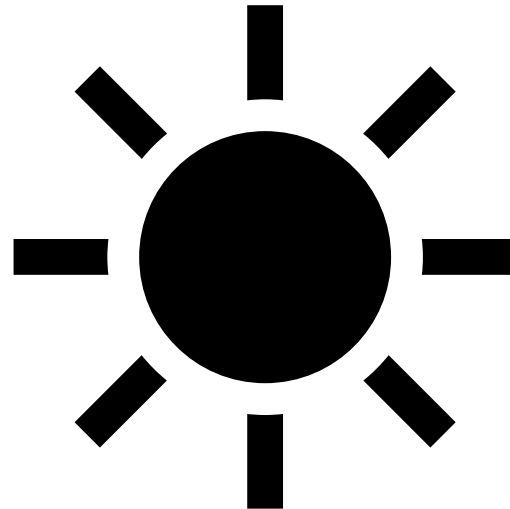
Correlation

Vs

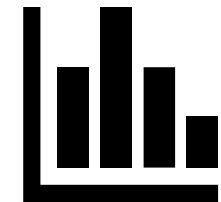
Causation?

Things happen at the same time or seem to be related

One thing directly causes the other to happen



Ice Cream Sales



Sunburn Rates

Poor Proxies for Leadership



VISIBILITY

Leaders are **visible**: they are always around and are the face of projects, activities and communications.



KNOWLEDGE

Leaders are **knowledgeable**: they have high levels of qualification and stored information.



BUSYNESS

Leaders are **busy**: their diaries are full and their pace of work is high.



CONFIDENCE

Leaders are **confident**: they communicate and act with assurance.



INNOVATION

Leaders are **visionary**: they have their own clear view of the future, lots of ideas and change things often.



APPEARANCE

Leaders are **smartly dressed**: their appearance portrays confidence, competence and organisation.



Which Proxies have you been using to judge leaders?

VISIBILITY

BUSYNESS







KNOWLEDGE

CONFIDENCE

APPEARANCE

INNOVATION

Poor Proxies for Leadership

-  **VISIBILITY** Presence doesn't guarantee impact
-  **KNOWLEDGE** Knowing better doesn't guarantee doing better
-  **BUSYNESS** Activity is not the same as productivity
-  **CONFIDENCE** Being sure is not the same as being right
-  **INNOVATION** New is not always better
-  **APPEARANCE** The package doesn't define the product



1 What is Leadership?

2 Why Worry?

3 Poor Proxies

4 A Clearer lens

4

A Clearer lens



We need to move past our impressions and focus on impact



Leadership could be judged by the way it makes people **feel**



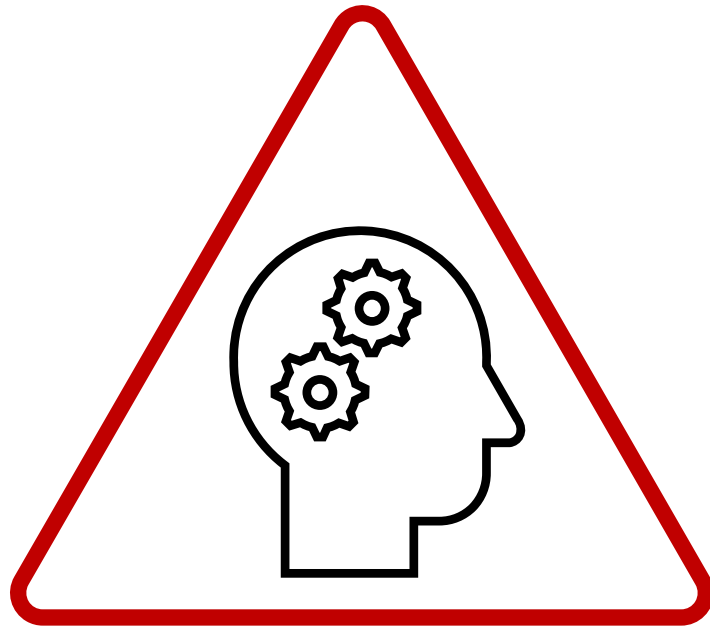
Leadership could also be judged by what it enables others to **do**

Impression

vs

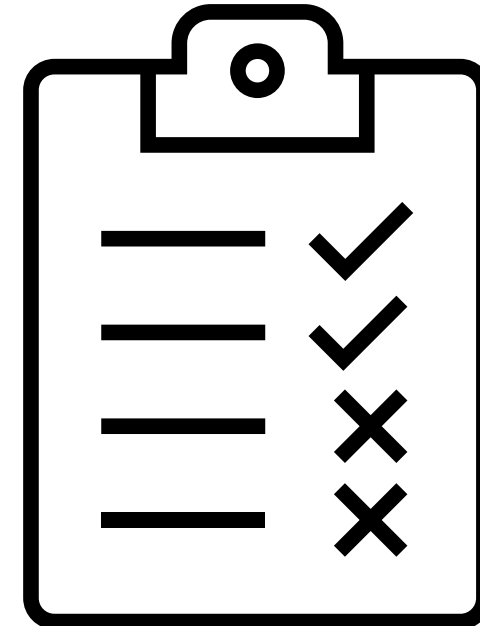
Impact

Our Impressions are **subjective** and significantly affected by internal & external factors



Expertise
Beliefs & Biases
Situation

A leader's impact is much more **objective**, measurable and reliable



People
Outcomes
Culture

Emotional Impact

Great Leaders Make People Feel...



Psychologically Safe

Staff feel free to speak their mind without fear.



Trusted

Staff feel a sense of autonomy and responsibility.



Valued

Staff feel their contributions and efforts are recognised.



Motivated

Staff feel inspired to work towards a shared purpose.



Empowered

Staff feel able to solve problems themselves.



Challenged

Staff feel professionally and positively stretched beyond their comfort zone.



Behavioural Impact

Great Leaders Enable People to...



Maintain Wellness

Staff can recognise symptoms, prioritise themselves and gain support



Develop Personally & Professionally

Staff can voice their needs and access support



Solve Problems

Staff can find solutions independently and collaboratively.



Navigate Change

Staff can emotionally and behaviorally manage changes



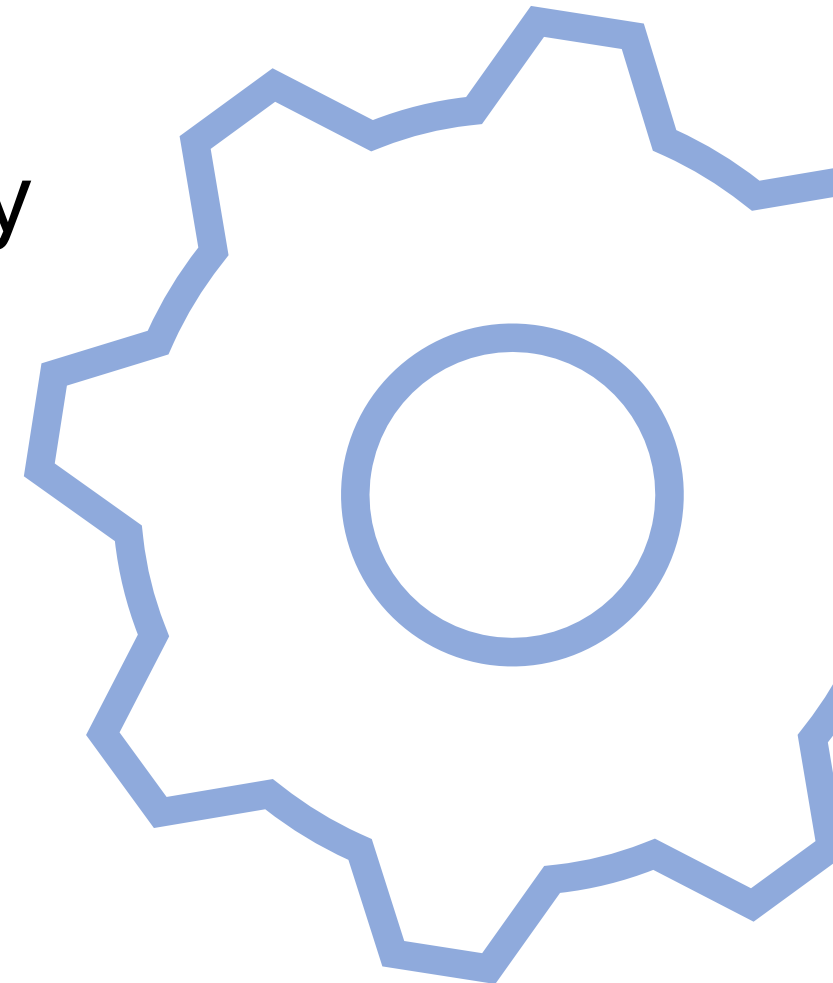
Innovate

Staff can generate and implement creative new ideas.



Achieve Greatness

Staff can produce outcomes beyond what they believed possible





1 What is Leadership?

2 Why Worry?

3 Poor Proxies

4 A Clearer lens



What we say leadership is, and what we included in our training courses often clashes with what staff value.



Our Mental Models about leadership drive our behaviour which then dictates our impact.



There is an important difference between correlation and causation, and we often judge the quality of our leaders inaccurately.



We need to move past our subjective impressions of leaders and focus more on their objective impact.



Leadership could be judged by the way it makes people feel and by what it enables them to do.





Dr Chris Baker



Drchrisbaker



Drchriswb@gmail.com



drchriswb



drchriswb



drcwbaker



drchrisbaker

