

# My 5 top tips for MAT leaders



Jon Chaloner  
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# Introduction



# Experience

- **Began teaching in 1992**
- **Assistant Head: 1998**
- **Deputy Head: 2002**
- **Headteacher: 2004 – 2006**
- **Headteacher: 2006 – 2015**
- **National Leader of Education & National Support School: 2010**
- **Executive Headteacher (secondary and primary): 2010 – 2012**
- **Executive Head of GLF Schools: 2012 – 2015**
- **Headteachers' Roundtable member 2012 – 2023 (Vice Chair 2014 – 2021). Now an advisor to HTRT**
- **CEO: full time (2015 – 31/12/2023)**
- **Leadership Advisor, Visiting Lecturer, Mentor, Speaker, Trainer, Facilitator, Chair, Trustee (2024...)**
- **101 Ofsted inspections**



# Track record & impact

- Led school from 'RI' to 'outstanding' in seven terms (2006 – January 2009). Only the 3<sup>rd</sup> secondary school in the country to move from Grade 3 to Grade 1 without stopping at 2 .
- Led the school to a second 'outstanding' Ofsted report in 2012.
- Led trust of 2 schools in 2012; 42 schools in 2022.
- All 42 schools had an Ofsted judgement; 40 are at least 'good', including 7 sponsored academies and 11 brand new schools (9 primary, 2 secondary). 12 'outstanding'.
- All 35 primary schools are rated as at least 'good'.



# 5 top tips



# 1. Leadership



# Seven Principles of Public Life

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- **Leadership**



# Pankaj Srivastava

**“Good leadership is about others. It’s about community and connection.”**

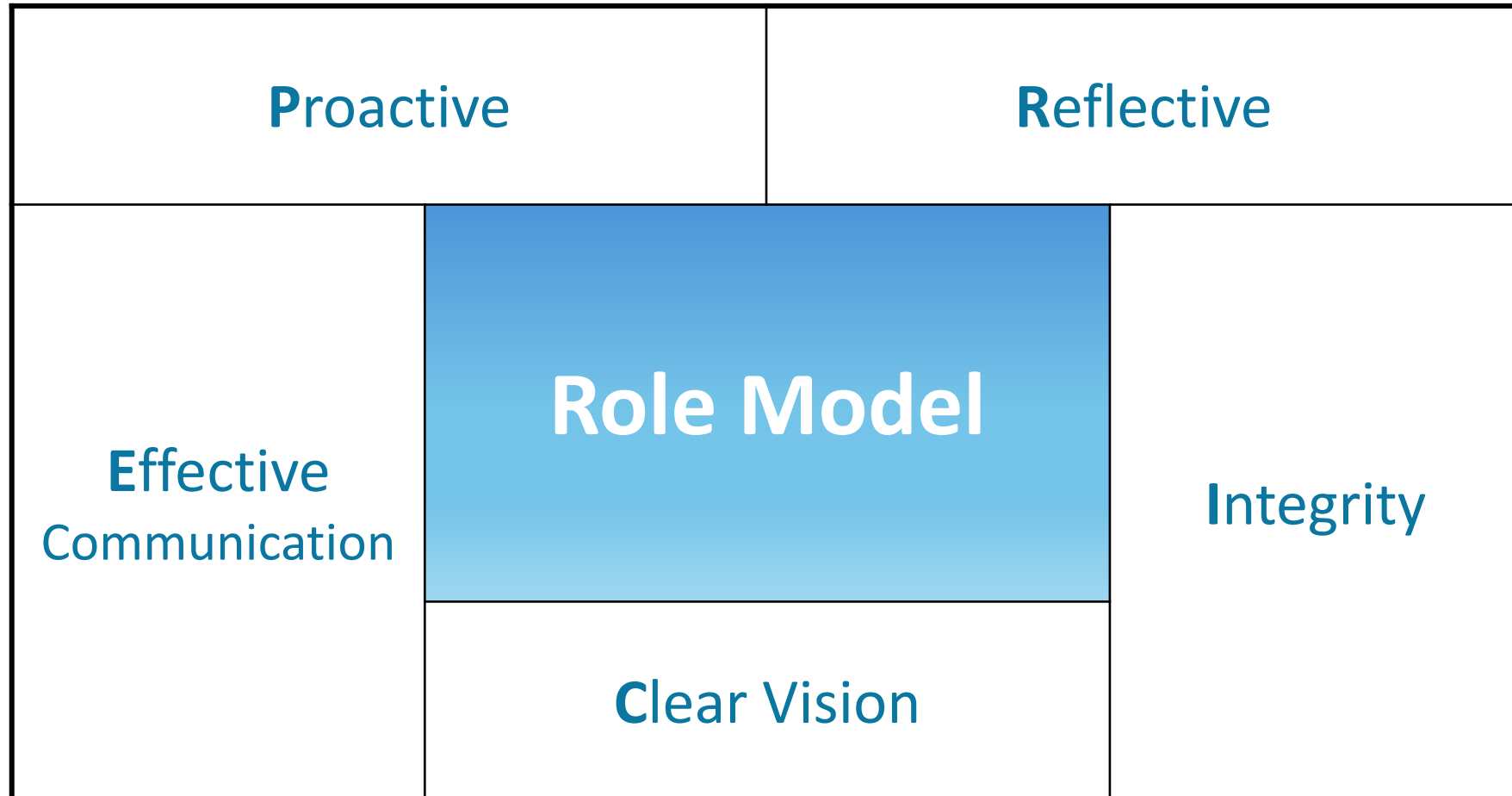


# 6 things as leaders

- If you want to build something worthwhile, be ready for criticism
- Be okay with people not liking you
- Choose a direction and destination, then make sure you surround yourself with people who want you to get there
- Not everything will go to plan. Always be ready to adapt
- Work hard. Work smart. It's not one or the other. It's both
- Smile. Even when things are grim!



# PRICE Leadership



# When leadership stutters

- Leadership fails in schools when leaders fail to develop other leaders
- It is a common challenge. Leaders are so busy and stressed with their own to do lists that they don't make the time to invest in developing leaders on their team and in their school.
- As a result, there is **subpar leadership and subpar results** throughout the school... except where you have a naturally gifted leader or a leader that has developed themselves by reading books, learning from mentors or attending training. These colleagues are outliers, not the norm.
- Leaders also fail to develop leaders on their team and in the school because they lack the skills and strategies to develop (their leaders).
- This is why schools can lose their culture and success at the middle leader level. **Leaders at the top are not modelling great leadership and they aren't cascading leadership down throughout their school.**
- Great leaders model great leadership and they coach and develop others to lead well. It requires time, energy and attention but it IS well worth the effort.



# Leading Change

- Management is the eyes down, day to day; leadership is looking up and beyond, deciding where you want to go and how to get there
- Comfortable with ambiguity
- Comfortable with change; innate acceptance that change is continuous
- Communication has to be constant and convincing; show it and live it then people see it and understand it
- Live the why
- Silent and Listen

*TT1 – Learn how to lead more effectively – do not stand still*



## 2. Challenge



# Chris Donnelly

**“One of the healthiest habits to learn:  
Take nothing personally.”**



# Context is everything: I

**The Office for National Statistics (2022): 50% of children who were entitled to FSM were earning less than £17,000 a year by the age of 30.**

- **48%** of state educated children **entitled to FSM** went on to complete a qualification at a higher level than GCSE
- **71%** of state educated children **not entitled to FSM** went on to complete a qualification at a higher level than GCSE
- **96%** of **privately educated children** went on to complete a qualification at a higher level than GCSE

## **JAM Families**

Our families on Universal Credit who are not entitled to FSM are often ‘just about managing’ (JAM). They may be earning barely more than the £7,400 a year FSM threshold. A significant majority of these families are on zero hours contracts; many such families have parents who work shifts, particularly night shifts.

*[On Universal Credit, you can qualify for free school meals if your income is no more than £7,400/year (after tax and not including your benefits) in total for your household.]*



# Context is everything: II

**The Impact of FSM** ([Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#))

24.6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, up from 23.8% in 2022. This represents 2.1 million pupils.

- The total number of children in Barking & Dagenham rose from 43,722 to 45,886 between 2018-19 and 2023-24 – an increase of **4.9%**.
- In 2023-24: 12,180 {26.5%} children in LBBD are in receipt of FSM, up from 7,141 (16.3%) in 2018-19 representing a **71%** increase.
- In 2022-23: 22,715 children in Surrey were in receipt of FSM, up from 13,281 in 2018-19 representing a **71%** increase.

*TT2 – Know the context of your trust, your schools and see how much it has changed.  
Has your trust changed in response, in anticipation or not at all? Have you?*



# What are the challenges?: I

- **The policy and societal picture**

Schools and colleges are at the heart of a community, and it can often feel as though they ‘pick up the pieces’ of many other services which are hard to access.

At the same time, it feels like there is a changing ‘social contract’ between the public and schools & colleges – a sense of ‘entitlement’, poor attendance and an increasing number of complaints. Are we a part of global turmoil – environmental issues, conflicts, the changing digital world...?

- **Challenging economic times for our communities**

Our children and their families are becoming financially poorer before our eyes.

- **SEND**

More children with more and more complex needs - navigating the ‘system’ for parents in this situation is not easy.



# What are the challenges?: II

- **Workforce recruitment and retention**

This is a national challenge – some would say crisis, and we are not immune from it – finding the right quality of person to work with us (in whatever role) is challenging.

- **Finance**

The picture is that we need to do more, but the funding for education remains stubbornly small – we have to secure the best for our children out of every penny.

- **An insecure and unpredictable regulatory environment**

There is a confused picture between local authorities, Ofsted, the ESFA and the DfE including the Regions Group.



# How we lead

- **Valuing People:**

Leaders should value people for who they are, not just for what they give to their workplace.

- **Humility:**

Leaders should not promote themselves; they should put other people first.

Our leaders should know that leadership is not all about them but that great things are accomplished through others.

- **Listening:**

Leaders should listen receptively and without judgement.

They should be willing to listen because they truly want to learn from other people.

Our leaders should seek to understand first, then to be understood.

- **Trust:**

Leaders should trust their colleagues.

They should be trusted because they are authentic and dependable.

- **Caring:**

Leaders should have people and purpose in their hearts; they should display a kindness and concern for others.

Leaders should care about the people they lead and the people they serve.

Leaders are here to serve, not be served.



# Rosalynn Carter

**“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be.”**



# Context is everything

*“We have a once in a generation opportunity to build system coherence and create a school system that can potentially become the best system in the world at getting better.*

*If the new system governance arrangements mean any children fall through the gaps, these will be gaps we have created. We must be sure this is a system that works for all children.”*

CST February 2024



# Keeping it simple

Keeping it simple = taking people with you

Taking people with you = investing in positive and professional relationships

Investing in positive relationships ≠ keyboard warrior



# 3. Change



## ***TT3-***

- ***Be consistent***
- ***Be clear***
- ***Be courteous***



# Change is sometimes difficult

5 main dimensions of leading through a period of change:

- moral purpose
- understanding change
- relationships
- knowledge creation and use
- making it coherent



# TTYP

**If you are embarking upon a programme of change, what will the future look like?**

**Which actions to take?** Depends upon what the future will look like.

**If you do not know what you are trying to create, how will you ensure that the right actions are to be taken?**



# Task

- 1. This is where we are heading:**
- 2. This is why we are heading there:**
- 3. This is what we are creating together:**
- 4. This is why we are creating it:**
- 5. This is underpinned by:**



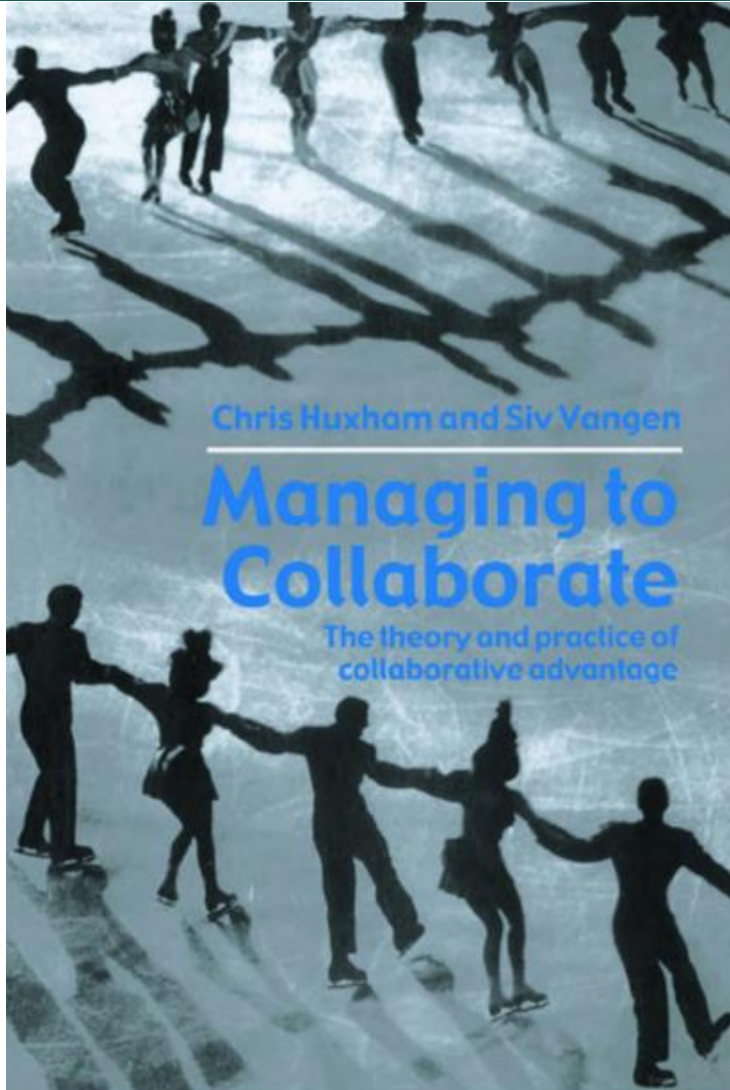
# 4. Collaboration



# Collaborative Advantage vs Collaborative Inertia



Confederation  
of School Trusts  
Professional Communities



- Collaborative Advantage:
  - The potential value available through collaboration - knowledge and skill growth, improved performance
- Collaborative Inertia:
  - The potential for slow progress, frustration, time-wasting, opportunity costs



# Clear and Effective Purpose and Process

*We collaborate so that our schools become better, faster...*

*...because collaboration helps us to choose optimal improvement strategies for our context and implement them well.*

Sharing Knowledge  
and Resources

Mutual Support and  
Challenge

Peer Review



# What does effective collaboration need?



Confederation  
of School Trusts  
Professional Communities

1. Clear and effective purpose and processes
2. 'Collaboratively literate' participants - training and shared understanding of how to work positively with difference



# Is your school or trust an island?

- Island or archipelago education?
- No school should be an island, only archipelagos allowed
- No trust should be an island either



# Keeping it simple

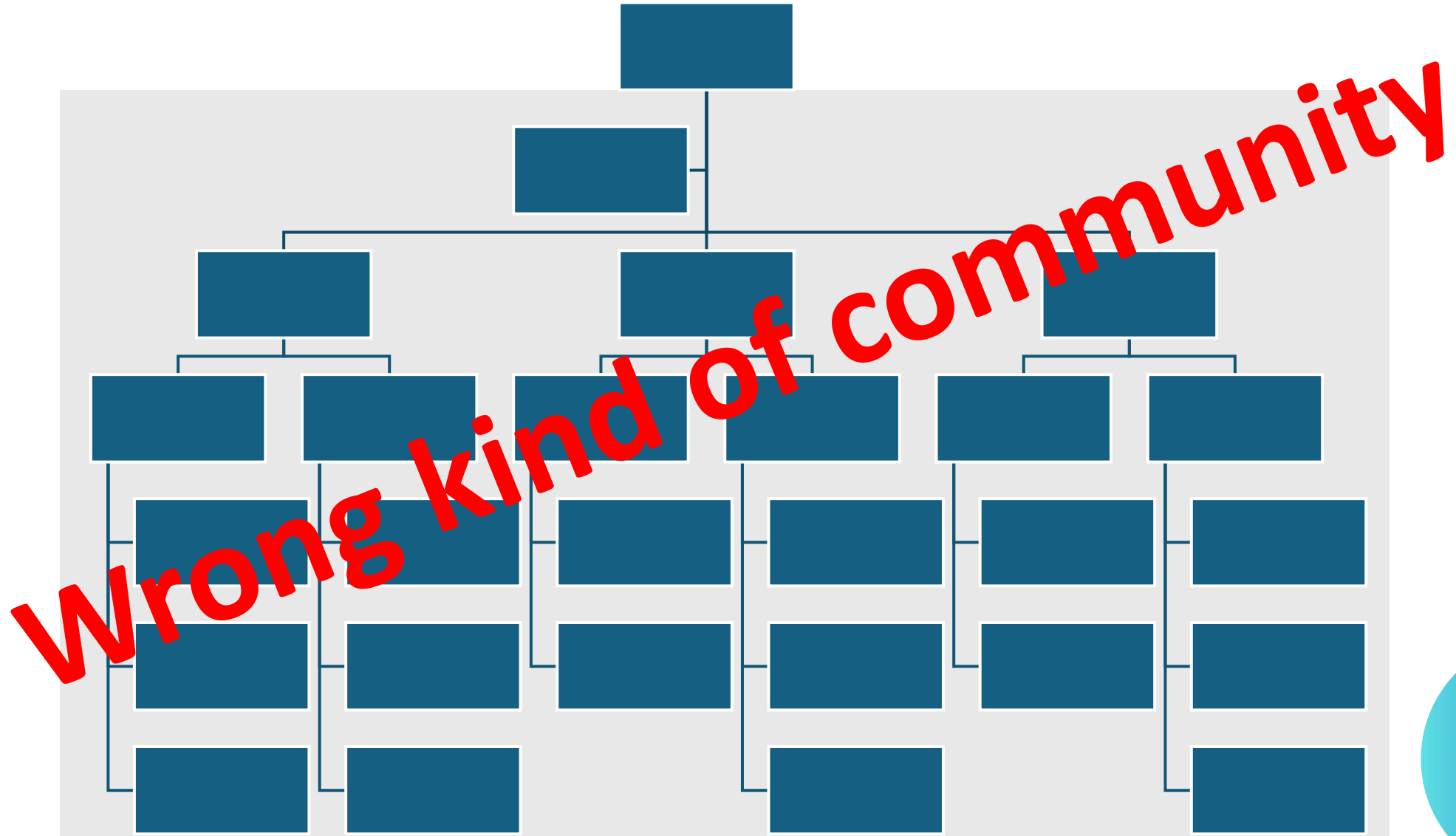
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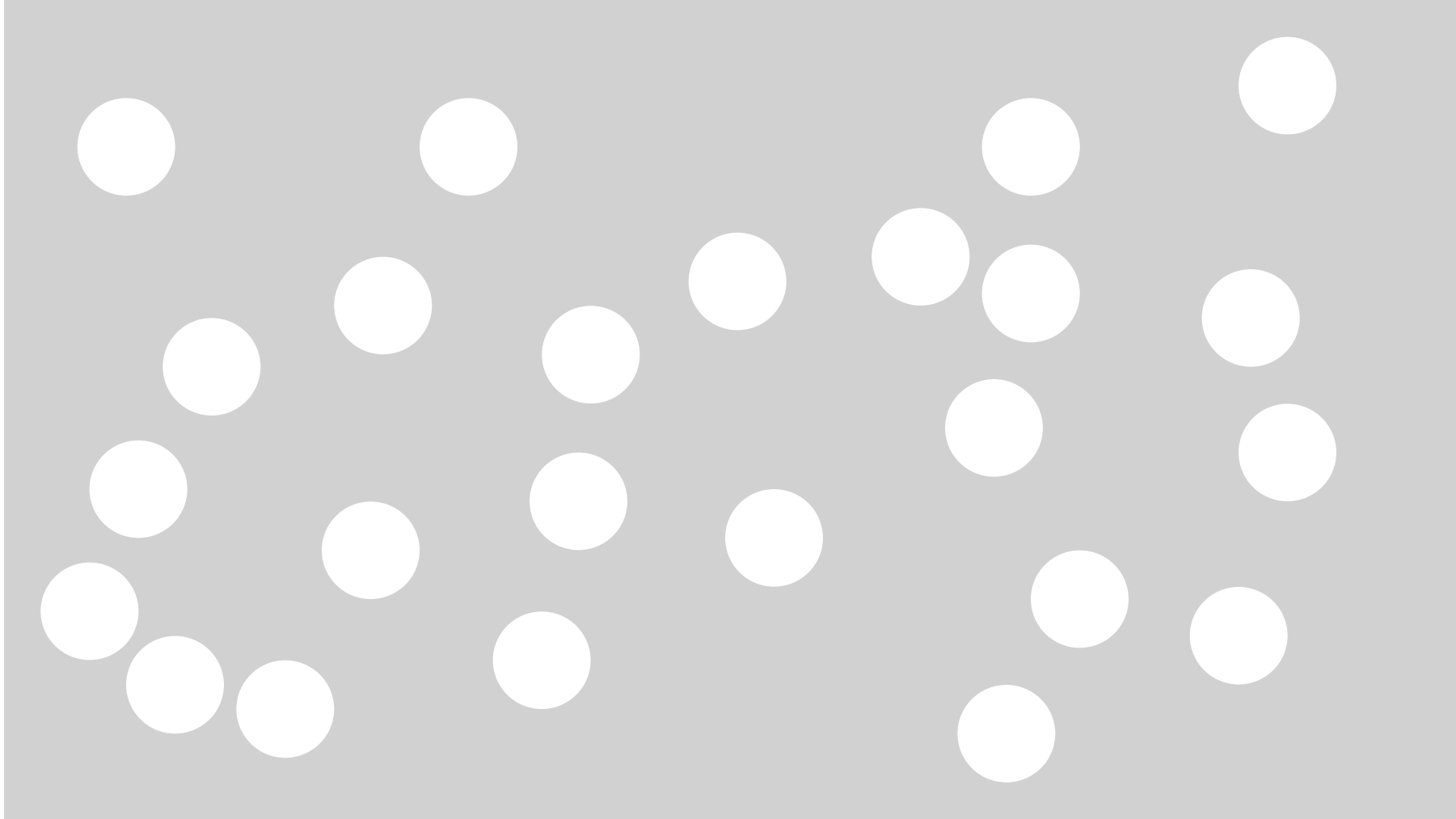
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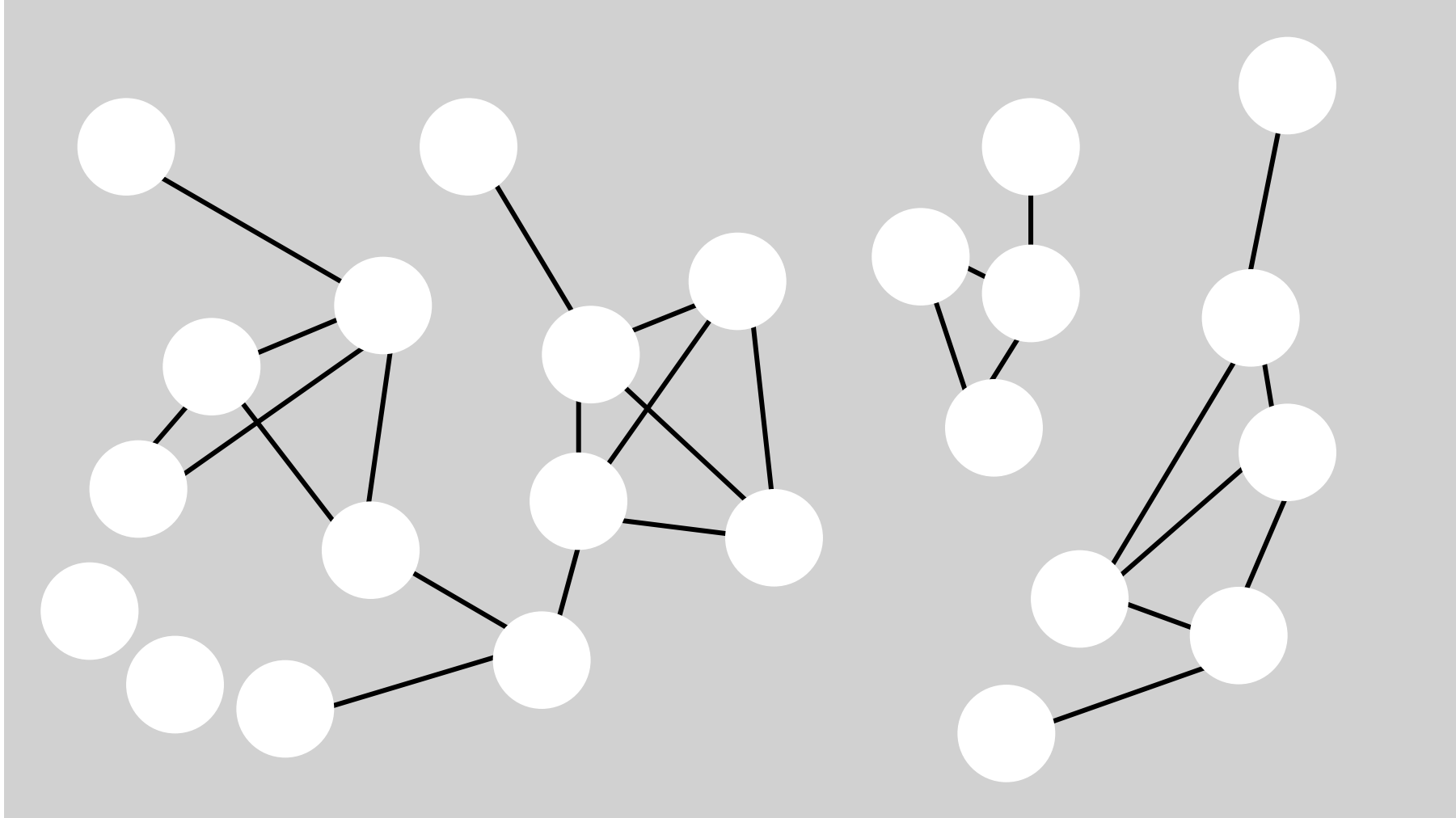
# The formal organisation



# The real organisation



# The real organisation



# Informal organisation

- Hubs
- Nodes
- Transmitters
- Receivers
- Mavericks
- Partnerships
- Gateways



# Teamwork

## Some thoughts:

- Teams rise and fall on culture, leadership, relationships, attitude and effort
- Sometimes you are the star and sometimes you help the star
- One person cannot make a team, but one person can break a team – stay positive!
- Great team members hold each other accountable to the high standards and excellence their culture expects and demands
- **We > me**

*TT4 - Collaboration is about connection*



# 5. More about change



# S. McNutt

**“Overthinking is the biggest waste of human energy.  
Trust yourself, make a decision and gain more experience.  
There is no such thing as perfect.  
You cannot think your way into perfection, just take action.”**



# Great trusts = great schools

## Common Characteristics:

- Positive and visible leadership
- Unrelenting focus on quality of L+T
- Continual feedback loop to improve further
- No child or member of staff can slip through the net
- Slick systems for everything
- Cherish colleagues
- Culture of belief
- Everyone knows the data and is accountable
- Right people on bus in right seats
- Collective high expectations re: behaviour



# Task from earlier

- 1. This is where we are heading:**
- 2. This is why we are heading there:**
- 3. This is what we are creating together:**
- 4. This is why we are creating it:**
- 5. This is underpinned by:**



# Collective Ambition

- [The Power of Collective Ambition \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org)
- *collective ambition*—a summary of how leaders and employees think about why they exist, what they hope to accomplish, how they will collaborate to achieve their ambition, and how their brand promise aligns with their core values.
- These companies don't fall into the trap of pursuing a single ambition, such as profits; instead, their employees collaborate to shape a collective ambition that supersedes individual goals and takes into account the key elements required to achieve and sustain excellence.



# Collective Ambition

The seven points in terms of the 'Elements of Collective Ambition':

1. **Purpose** – reason for being/mission
2. **Vision** – Status you aspire to achieve in given timeframe
3. **Targets and Milestones** – assess progress towards vision
4. **Strategic and Operational Priorities** – actions to take/not take in pursuit of the vision
5. **Brand Promise** – the commitment to stakeholders
6. **Core Values** – guiding principles
7. **Leader behaviours** – how leaders act every day in the implementation of the vision, priorities and values



# Change is our opportunity

## Change is our opportunity

- Develop and foster improved leadership cultures

## Change is our opportunity, but...

- It will be bumpy
- It will take us outside our comfort zone(s)
- It will not be seamless
- There will be mis-steps
- We will be bold
- It will be scary
- You can trust us to make decisions in the right way
- We cannot lay out every nuance at every junction
- Trust and moral compass are essential



# Question

- What do you think is the most fundamental change (or transformative change) required to make your trust even better?



*TT5 - “Preserve the best, improve the rest”*



# 5 top tips



*TT5 – “Preserve the best, improve the rest”*

*TT4 – Collaboration is about connection*

*TT3 – Be consistent, be clear, be courteous*

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