# Transcript

## Vivienne Robinson on the three capabilities for leading school improvement

KATE MORRIS:  
Good afternoon, everyone. Kate Morris here. I'm the director of leadership at the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, and I encourage you as you join the room to pop in the chat your name, where you're joining us from, your school and the Indigenous lands and country that you are joining from today. We'll get going in a couple of minutes. I hope you've had a fantastic day. And you can see the Term 1 holidays ahead after a really productive term. Thanks to the Academy team who've got us here today with Viviane Robinson, who's going to be presenting fantastic work from our learning design team and the principal program team. And particularly, I like to thank Gabriela, who's with us today. Thanks, Gabriela, for your work organizing us and ensuring we have a great learning experience today. We're ready to go, Gabriela. Thanks, Kate. We are ready to go. Fantastic. Good afternoon, everyone. I'll introduce myself again. My name is Kate Morris. I'm the director of Leadership Excellence at the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, and absolutely delighted to be joining you today and Viviane, for the workshop.

Three Capabilities for Leading Improvement. For many of us, and I know probably most of you in the room, we know and understand the work that Viviane does, but really want to take some time to introduce you. Viviane. Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Auckland and visiting Professor at the University College London. Viviane dedicated her career to improving educational leadership, policy and practice through a programme of research and development. Focus on the impact of educational leaders, on learning and the well-being of their students. Your academic research on how leaders build trust while attempting to improve teaching and learning has informed the profession and our work at the Academy. And I'd really like to now speak to the work that you've done with us across the last couple of years to help us shape the Academy Leadership Excellence framework that will be launching in June and you will be referring to today. So, thank you for partnering with us and the profession who've worked beside us and provided input and guidance to the development of that framework.

And we really look forward to launching resources to support that framework for use by leaders in schools with phase one of that being in June. So, it's a privilege for you to be working with us today, Viviane, and we look forward to the workshop learning beside you, building our knowledge and capabilities and dispositions to impact and affect change in our school for the students we teach. Thank you.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Thank you. Thank you so much, Kate. It is a real pleasure to be working with you. And I think what I might do is in terms of acknowledgement of country, maybe talk about the lands that I'm on at the moment. I'm speaking to you from my home, which is in Piha Auckland. Piha is a Maori word for the wave that comes up in front of the prow of a canoe. And the (UNKNOWN) that are from this land are (UNKNOWN). So, I want to acknowledge them and the way they protect and look after the land at Piha and also acknowledge the Indigenous people that belong to the lands that you all come from. So, thank you so much for being here and I'm really excited to work with you on introducing aspects of the Academy Leadership Excellence Framework. As Kate said, we've been working on this for a couple of years. And the framework is an aspirational framework designed to clarify what is the standard that the Academy is striving for in terms of its programs and its support of you. And we're hoping as well, of course, that you endorse and aspire to this as well.

The framework consists of domains of practice. These five domains are not the same as those that (UNKNOWN) has included within its professional standard for principals, but they are quite similar. We have added a focus on well-being in that first domain of practice. So, these are the five domains of practice that (UNKNOWN) and the Academy now think are critical to excellence. But that's not sufficient, of course, because that's the set of practices or five sets of practices that are involved. But then there's the question of what are the capabilities that you need in order to work in those five domains in excellent ways. So, you could say the domains are the what of leadership, the capabilities are the skills, the how of leadership. And there are three which I'm going to be going into in this talk this afternoon using relevant knowledge, solving complex problems and building relational trust. What is new for me and maybe for you as well, is really being explicit about the qualities of leadership character that motivate and support those capabilities in those domains of practice.

And these are and the ones that I have worked with the Academy to develop and select because there are hundreds that you could put here are these three, which we think are critical for particularly the leadership of improvement, open-mindedness, interpersonal courage combined with empathy and perseverance. So, there'll be a lot more said about that framework and those components of it, the domains, the capabilities and the dispositions unpacked in the next few months, all leading, of course, to outcomes for students, equity and excellence and student learning and well-being. So, given that I'm going to talk about three capabilities, let's just start by saying, well, what's a capability? It's a combination of knowledge and skills that enable a leader to undertake the work required by their role. So, a capability is specific to a particular role, and it's a combination of knowledge and skills that enable you to do the work that is involved in those five domains. How did I choose those three capabilities?

Well, this is the argument that I have gone through. The first question I asked myself is what is the primary purpose of the role of the educational leader? What is the primary purpose? And having settled on that, by going back to philosophies of education, realizing that it is somewhat contested, but that there is broad agreement about some of the purposes, the major one being preparation of students to lead fulfilling and worthwhile lives and contributing to civic society. So, that preparation that we do so that the students have a number of options. They don't have pathways closed off because they don't have the relevant knowledge, skills and capabilities. The second purpose is to develop their autonomy as persons so that they can be self-regulated learners. And there's quite a lot to be unpacked there, which I won't be doing this afternoon about what counts as autonomy. And it's much more than just giving students options and choices, although that is part of it. Then the third purpose is socialization into various communities of practice, whether it's becoming mathematical thinkers.

So, you're part of the community of the mathematical practices involved in learning mathematics or whether it's socialization into the particular cultures that are relevant to the communities of those schools. So, preparation, the development of autonomous self-regulated learners and socialization. Given those purposes, what work is required to fulfil the purpose and that is answered by the five domains which of course are incredibly abstract at this stage. And then what capabilities are required to do that work? So, the moral purpose should drive what we specify as the nature of the proper work. And then we can ask the question what capabilities are required to do that work. So, that's the argument I've been making. And here's the three capabilities. And for those of you that have read the background reading in my book, you will recognize these. The capabilities are that you use relevant knowledge, which is mostly educational knowledge, but also some management knowledge, non-educational knowledge.

And you use that knowledge to solve the complex problems that stand in the way of improvement while building relational trust with the people you need to work with. Now, this image portrays the interactive and holistic nature of those capabilities. We don't solve problems on our own in schools. We have to build trust with those we are working with while solving those problems and bringing relevant knowledge to bear. So, it's that holistic, integrated notion of leadership that I'm trying to capture. The last thing we want is a long list of capabilities. So, I'm going to be now talking about capability one, using relevant knowledge. This is not a capability that is often emphasized, and I think it's not given enough focus. It's more than qualifications. You all know people who've got advanced degrees, but they struggle to use their educational knowledge to help students to write good school policies etc. So, it's using relevant knowledge to make decisions that are informed by high-quality evidence and argument using that educational and to a lesser degree, non-educational knowledge.

Now, why is knowledge important for leaders? The more knowledge you have, the higher the standard you will set of what counts as excellent teaching in your school. You will have a vision of what is possible that is anchored in your knowledge of teaching and learning, your knowledge of best practice in other similar schools. And if you have educational knowledge, you're able to make arguments and give reasons to your staff that remind them that encourage conversations that are educational rather than managerial. So, if you go into classrooms and you see that teachers don't have learning outcomes on the whiteboard, and let's say your team or your staff as a whole had agreed that that was a good teaching practice. Instead of saying we had agreed that that was a good teaching practice and so you're not doing it, which is seeking compliance with a prior agreement, which I call managerial leadership. You're able to say, why for you having students aware of learning outcomes in a given lesson is educationally important.

I think many educational leaders, they want to be just that, educational leaders rather than leaders who are managerial and seek compliance. And it's impossible to do that if you're not able to give educational reasons for your decisions and for what you wish your staff to be doing. I think we greatly underestimate the knowledge base of our profession. We know a whole lot now about how the brain works. We know how the brain works in terms of learning to read. We know how the brain works in terms of memory, how information gets from short-term into long-term memory, how that affects attention span and cognitive load. So, I used to think that we didn't know how to teach certain groups of students. I don't think that's any longer the case. I think what the problem now is, is having the profession realize the complexity, the importance, the rigour of the knowledge base that constitutes the science of learning and teaching. And of course, it is that knowledge base and the insistence of the profession that it is known, shared and developed, that contributes enormously to the status of a profession.

Professional status is not enhanced by just claiming that it ought to be recognized. Professional status is largely dependent on the specialist knowledge base being honoured, known, shared and grown across a profession. So, how much knowledge is needed? Well, I'd say sufficient to be competent in the five leadership domains, to recognize shortfalls between the standards you hold based on your knowledge of what is possible in your contexts and what is currently happening. Knowledge that is sufficient to lead the educational discussions, like in the example I gave on the previous slide. And knowledge that enables you to generate hunches about the causes of problems and how they may be resolved. So, if you know something about the causes of attendance problems, not only from your own practice context, but a little bit, let's say from resources that distill research for you, or you may even be able to read the research on absence yourself, you will now be able to generate some hunches about what's causing it and about what potential solutions might look like.

And the other reason is that you need to have enough knowledge to know what you don't know. And because it's important to recognize that the scope of knowledge across particularly secondary school leadership, is enormous. It is absolutely impossible to even aspire to know it across all subjects, but to know enough about what good teaching looks like across subjects to be able to know what you don't know and know and detect in respectful conversations what others don't know in their areas of responsibility. So, I love these three books as just examples of the sorts of books that only in the last few years would I be talking to leaders about immersing themselves in this science of how students learn and therefore how students need to teach. Now, two of those books are Australian Ollie Lovell's fabulous 'Tools for Teachers', which distils the best science from around the world in a very accessible way. Many of you will know Ollie's work and then John Sweller's 'Cognitive Load theory in Action', which Ollie has distilled in a more practice-friendly little book.

And then Daniel Willingham's book 'Why Don't Students Like School?' And he's an American cognitive psychologist and his book is absolutely packed with practical, classroom-based examples that help one understand the type of teaching that helps students to succeed and the type of teaching that may be responsible for them failing at certain units of work. So, that's my sort of summary there. Professional reading is really important and I'm giving that a lot more emphasis when I'm talking with leaders about this capability than I did just a few years ago. And I myself am now reading a whole lot about the science of teaching and learning. I'm not just reading in leadership. So, this is our first group activity. I want you to discuss and give you an opportunity to discuss as a group the adequacy of the opportunities you have had to get up to date with the science of learning and teaching. I want you each to your group to present, sorry, to appoint a reporter who can summarize your group's views about the adequacy of those opportunities and of your knowledge of the science of learning and teaching.

Just briefly, report those if you're called upon, and we will do that for 10 minutes. Thank you. So, I'll probably call you back after about eight, and then I'll take some of the questions that are in, I think, in the chat. Thank you.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Viviane. And Rosie is going to send everyone off into their breakout rooms. And she's also just put the activity in the chat. So, if you want to take a snapshot of the activity so that when you get into breakout rooms, you know what it is or you can copy it from the chat as well.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
So, am I calling for reports or are you Kendra or managing the chat? How's this working?

KENDRA PARKER:  
Well, we'll just work as we go. Great. Welcome back, everybody. Fantastic. Hopefully, you got the instructions. I've got one of our participants sitting behind me. Came over and snapped a photo of them over my shoulder because they've got to grab them before they got into their breakout. So, I hope you all knew what you were doing. And looking for reporters to summarize your group's view. And Viviane will respond as we go through, I think, of the things that we want to respond. And if you've really got a thought that you would like to address, please put it pop it in the chat if it doesn't get mentioned through your group. And we will try and respond to those as we go through the session. Do you want to just go? How many groups did we have, Rosie?

ROSIE COLOSIMO:  
10.

KENDRA PARKER:  
10. Well, maybe we'll just pick a few of them. Viviane, do you have a favourite number?

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
10.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Group 10. They might not know who they are.

MATHEW MCLEOD:  
I was hoping you weren't going to start with ten, Viviane, but yeah, we had a sort of a discussion around the catchphrase to around the science of things where it's sort of certainly a buzzword at the moment. But inside our group, we all have great intentions of trying to stay up to date with the latest research. However, things do get in the way and so, we're trying to we talked about the importance of prioritizing.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. Giving yourself time to do some professional reading. Yeah, I think departments are doing an increasingly good job of making that research available to practitioners because you don't have time and nor should you need to go back and read all the original academic articles. But I think accessing it through the resources that colleagues give you or better still that have been curated through the department is the way to go. And what did your group think about the adequacy, Matthew, the adequacy of the opportunities to actually get up to date?

MATHEW MCLEOD:  
I'll probably speak to the folder group here. We didn't get to that part, but there's lots more opportunities now where you can go to podcasts and you can do catch-up videos and like knowing that even this session's recorded so people can have access to that. But I spoke about my own experience where we did prioritize professional reading and chapter studies within our leadership group and that type of access.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. Thank you very much, Matthew.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Matthew. And there's a comment Viviane which sort of answers. I think Matthew's comment responds to that. Someone from Group six said, you know, there's a barrier of time to engage in professional reading and learning and often only initiated by the individual. However, we could utilize print network meetings, communities of practice, etcetera, to share key takeaways. And someone else has said they had the same reflection. So, I think definitely those opportunities across our networks and our communities of practice. But also I know for me, as Matthew said, now I drive a lot more than I used to when I worked in my school and podcasts are fantastic for that when you're in the car.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. Yep. And I think, you know, and I think also the group that said, well, it's a bit of a buzz, the science of, you know, the science of reading, the science of learning and teaching. I've just been listening to a podcast about the science of reading and they're critiquing a bunch of, you know, this is still the reading was carrying on. And so there's sort of two sciences going on and how you navigate your way through that. You navigate your way through that by testing whether or not the choices you have made about what programs to have in your school are working for your students. That's how I think practitioners should be navigating their way through these contested ways, particularly contested ways of teaching. Yeah. And if you do some reading, you're alert to the fact that some of it is snake oil, you're more likely to be able to detect which is snake oil and which is actually more rigorous science. So, maybe, Kendra, we should move on in terms of time, I think.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Yes. Yep. Thanks, Viviane. We'll hear more after the next breakout as well.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
OK. Alright. So, that was capability number one, quick introduction. Capability number two, solving complex problems. So, let's look at what's involved here. So, the first thing to sort of be comfortable with is what is a problem? And some leaders are not comfortable with that word because they think it's negative. And I think that's a really problematic way of framing it. I think problems are opportunities to learn and reach better situations. So, a problem is a gap between what you've got now and what you and irrelevant others would desire. So, the gap might be in student outcomes, the gap might be in, you know, your current situation in a team is that there's considerable mistrust and your desired situation is that there's greater trust. So, there's not only a gap, though, there is a demand that the gap be closed because there's an infinite number of gaps we can notice. But as leaders, your job is to decide which ones are you going to create a demand that the gap be closed and you do that when you do your annual implementation plans, set your strategic goals and your annual implementation plans.

They are responsive to gaps. And so your goals reflect what you would desire. Your baseline data, the current situation, the fact that you have put this in your annual implementation plan is one aspect of creating the demand that the gap be closed. So, problem-solving is absolutely critical to pursuing your improvement, to pursuing your priority goals. In fact, I'm somewhat perhaps this might be unusual in your way of thinking, but the business as usual that is absolutely essential. It's those sets of practices, that domain of practice around school management. That's the hundreds of routines that need to work smoothly in order to be able to do the improvement work. Those routines. Just think about the difference between the first time you did the timetable and the sixth or seventh time. The first time it was a complex problem. Then it's embedded. You tweak it, it becomes almost business as usual until something really changes. Then you have to do it all over again. Think about crises and surprises.

There are gaps between what you have now and what you would wish for that have come up really quickly and need to be dealt with straight away. So, that's fast problem-solving. And what we are focused on mostly with the framework is the improvement, which requires slow and deliberate and systematic problem-solving because they are tough problems that many good people have attempted to solve and not been successful enough in the past. One of the biggest challenges in learning complex problem-solving is how to unlearn the quick fix, which is and here we have a picture of a doctor. The patient's walked in, complained of a back problem. The doctor hands the prescription. We would be horrified if our doctor did that because what's been most is the diagnosis of the back problem. But in education, we do that all the time. We are under pressure to come up with solutions, to provide support, to ask teachers what strategies they would try before we've done the inquiry into what is the diagnosis, what is the cause of the problem.

So, unlearning the quick fix is important. So, in order to interrupt that quick fix process, I'm suggesting and it's outlined in detail in the framework, a five-stage systematic process of problem-solving. First stage, you agree there is a problem. You agree the absence is too high and you create the demand that that be escalated to an improvement problem and the gap be closed. The second one is you systematically inquire into the causes of the problem of absence, giving priority to those school-based causes that you can leverage. Then you set solution requirements, which is what would count as a good solution. What would count? Well, what would count as that our solution is an educational solution, not a disciplinary punitive solution? That might be one of the requirements. A team that has mistrust and is not working well enough to do collaborative planning of a new curriculum. And one of the things that the leader is up against is that some of the team want more autonomy and they don't want to work collaboratively.

So, there's two sets of competing solution requirements, autonomy and collaboration. Both of them need to be on the table so that everybody in the room recognizes their importance and works to reduce the tension between them. You don't know yet how to do it, but that's on the table. We have to get down in the detail of what we mean by autonomy and where are the spaces for autonomous practice and where are those the requirement for collaboration and collective effort. And once you do that well, then the problem solutions become fairly obvious. That's your action plan. The who's doing what, when, and then the problem outcomes. In other words, have we closed the gap? To what extent is the gap closed? And so those are I'll just pause for a minute and let you read that those are the outcomes of each stage of what you as a leader are working towards in each stage. And of course, you go backwards and forwards and you think you've progressed and then you meet another group of teachers and they're way back at stage one.

So, you have to go. You keep cycling and recycling. So, it's systematic and it's collaborative, which is why we've called it in the framework Collaborative Complex Problem-Solving. CCPS. Very few problems in your schools that you can solve on your own. So, there is an interweaving of the trust-building capability and the problem-solving capability and the knowledge capability as you move through these five stages. Now, you don't mean to read this slide, but what I'm indicating is that we have actually got some indicators of what good practice in each of these stages looks like is a guide for self-assessment or others' assessment of your problem-solving practice. So, let's just look at the standards of good practice for that first stage of problem identification. And we have little case examples which illustrate how schools have done this. And the particular example I'm thinking of is a Victorian secondary college that used this model with the help of a wonderful seal to address a long-standing attendance problem in their school.

So, those are... Six standards that you can look at and think about in terms of how you get agreement that this attendance problem is worth working on so that we close the gap. And it is leader's job to create that demand, and that process is raising the standard of what we are striving for. But they are doing it. Not doing it unilaterally. They're doing it collaboratively. I mean, this might take... I've got a video in which this is achieved in 30 seconds. In one case, in the attendance at the Victorian Secondary College, this took about three meetings but with different groups of teachers and parents. And of course, the conversations are really important in terms of being able to get quickly to what exactly are we talking about in terms of this gap. So, this is a primary school example taken from Jackie Patois research on solving reading problems of target students with this model. And before training in this model, the leader would say things to the teacher, 'oh, we're supposed to have a conversation today about Zali and her reading.

So, where did she come in?' So, the leader is not able to own the problem. It's about we're supposed to have it. So, this is a compliance thing, and it's pretty vague. Compare that to after training how the leader spoke to the teacher about this conversation. And in fact, there was a series of conversations which Jackie tracked throughout the year. So, in that post-intervention script in eight lines, the outcome for stage one has been established by the teacher saying, yes, I agree that they've made very little progress. So, here's our second group activity, and I'd like you... And you'll be assigned one of these questions because there isn't time for each group to address all three. So, I think Kendra is going to take you through how this activity works. Thank you, Kendra.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Viviane. Rose has just popped a link into the chat that if you click on it, it will tell you what your group is looking at. So, groups one to three, you're gonna look at that very first question. How would you respond to someone who does not want to use the word problem because they think it is negative? And I was in a session yesterday actually where this was discussed. And someone said school... I've just realised my microphone wasn't down. Sorry, I hope you could have heard me. And (UNKNOWN) said that we often find that school leaders and staff in schools are problem phobic. So, I thought that Viviane, you would like that?

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. Yeah.

KENDRA PARKER:  
How do you respond to that? Groups four to six, you'll look at what is the difference between solution requirements and solution strategies. I think that's a really great clarification to think about. And group seven to ten, you'll look at why is it important to specify and agree solution requirements before settling on solution strategies. And again, it'll be eight minutes and then we'll have a couple of minutes of reflection. And groups two, five and eight, be prepared to be called upon to give us some feedback. And the other groups, feel free to pop your comments in the chats when you come back. Thanks, Rosie. I think we're all back. I've got one of our participants - thank you, Alex, sitting behind me, as I said before, and it's great. So, I can sort of gauge the conversation and how it's going. Just terrific.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yeah. I need to catch up a few minutes in the next one.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Yeah, but we'll just get some brief reflections. I said maybe group two, if you could give us a snapshot of your discussion around how you would respond to someone who does not want to use the word 'problem' because they think it's negative.

GILLIAN CONNOLLY:  
Yeah, we spoke about it can depend on the context and the tone that the word is used in. And initially, some people have a problem with talking about a problem of practice because it seemed to be more of a deficit model. But we talked about naming it straight up so that it didn't feel like a negative connotation, rather a problem to be solved or an area to be improved. We liked the use of the naming what the problem is and using the word gap and that we're looking at it as a now situation that we need to put steps in place to reduce that gap or narrow the gap and then creating that demand within the team. So, making sure the team is well versed in the (UNKNOWN) goals which inspires people to work in the space. But it ultimately can come down to the level of trust within a team and learning to challenge each other using a particular process or formula.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Great. Thank you. I think those are really useful strategies, actually.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Yeah. Interesting.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Someone else?

KENDRA PARKER:  
I think we're gonna go to group five to give us thoughts about the difference between solution requirements and solution strategies.

RACHEL GRIFFITHS:  
Hi, everyone. I'm Rachel, and I worked with Sarah and Melissa around the difference between the two. So, we talked a little bit about the requirements being perhaps the boundaries that are put around to what you're trying to solve. It could be to do with policies and procedures. What's the specific student outcome that you're wanting your solution to be about and staying within the bounds of that? You might have some constraints around resourcing or things like that that you would have to consider. Whereas the strategies are sort of all of those possible solutions, then coming up with your action plan and how to monitor that, what data you're collecting. And Sarah, Melissa if you wanna add anything, jump in.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Well, (CROSSTALK), yes, I think so, too. This is a complex distinction, but one that I think is important. And that example I gave of a team, the problem is the team is not working well enough. There's mistrust in the team. Some people want a solution which increases their autonomy and some people want a solution which increases collaboration. Those are two solution requirements. They're in great tension, but they both need to be taken notice of. And then there might be practical requirements in terms of the amount of time we have to sort this issue out because we have to get some shared new curriculum units planned. So, the solution requirements, we need to have we're not sure how we're going to satisfy all these things, and there are tensions between them. But that's our job, is to find a strategy for this team where there is autonomy about these sorts of things and shared work that everybody adheres to for others.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Viviane. And justly, group eight, did you wanna add anything more? I think Viviane's expanded a bit as well. But why is it so important that you agree on solution requirements before settling on strategies?

AARON HALSTEAD:  
Yep. That's me. My name is Aaron, guys. So, we talked about mainly that it gets everyone to give that buy-in and have that shared responsibility, that shared efficacy around getting on the same page, acknowledging that there is a problem and that everyone is part of that solution and everyone has a part to play in that solution as well. I think if not everyone is on the same page, then you're gonna have bi-standards, barriers and all those sorts of bits and pieces. We also talked about the vulnerability of the team to be able to have those conversations and the importance of making sure the foundations are right and you've got a culture in your school or within your team to be able to have those open conversations. Sometimes the problems can be very specific and targeted and individuals may feel like they're the ones being targeted. So, it's really important to be having that shared space that you've got that trust as you were alluding to earlier, and being able to have that vulnerability in those conversations.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Thank you, Aaron. That's great. And your group's given me a segue into the next capability actually, which is the building the trust, because as several of you have pointed out, this requires a certain sort building, taking care of relationships at the same time as you're doing those systematic problem-solving work. So, I'm just gonna go through some points about this third capability. It's obviously about the relational work of leadership. It's applicable to every interaction, including emails and phone calls. People are watching leaders in terms of their trustworthiness all the time. And trust is not something that you put in the bank and then you withdraw trust from the bank in order to do the work. Trust is something that you build while doing the work together. So, how does that happen? Let's just look at a theory of what are the determinants of teachers' trust of leaders. And I like this model. It is based on a longitudinal study of hundreds of schools undergoing improvement efforts.

And there are four key determinants, all of which are within the leader's control. That they're interpersonally respectful, which means that they listen, particularly when teachers disagree. They care about their staff beyond seeing their staff as holders of roles that serve their own purposes or that even serve the school purposes. That there are other things happening in people, in staff's lives as well as their particular role, responsibilities. Competence and role. Teachers have difficulty trusting leaders that they don't see as competent, and that's because leaders who are not competent in their role create more work for teachers, they make teachers more vulnerable because the problems that those teachers are experiencing, they do not trust that those leaders are going to be able to help them resolve them. Indeed, they may in some ways make them even worse. And personal integrity, we know, is walking the talk. If you say you're going to follow up, you follow up. And in high-trust cultures, there are good outcomes for the adults, and those are some of the outcomes for adults which empirical research on this has established.

But even more exciting is that there is a relationship between the degree of trust between teachers and leaders and student outcomes. It is very hard to improve academic or even well-being outcomes in schools if there isn't high trust. Why? Because you have to have those challenging conversations. You have to give each other feedback. You have to try new things. You have to fail and pick yourself up again. And so, that is why trust is important for the work of improvement. I wanted to give you the slide with that reference because that enables you to go and look up the theory of trust and the empirical basis for that theory in Phi Delta Kappan article, which is quite short and written for busy professionals. Now, one of the issues that I encounter all the time with leaders when we're talking about how to have these conversations is the dilemma that they frequently experience between tackling the problem and maintaining the relationship. How do we raise the issue of the gap? How do we raise the possibility that teaching practice itself is a cause of the low student, poor student outcomes, etc?

How do we do that while maintaining the relationship between the adults? And leaders typically deal with that dilemma by doing one or the other. They typically, in education, attempt to maintain the relationship and then their conversation or their behaviour is pussy-footing, minimizing the concern, delaying having the conversation, giving up altogether, or being incredibly vague about it. And so, the task of improving teaching and learning is somewhat sacrificed. Or they might focus on the task in a controlling way, give it to them straight, put your foot down. And of course, that means they're sacrificing the relationship. And they may switch between the two. Starting off with focusing on the relationship, the pressure comes on from parents or external forces or their own frustration, and then they switch to this controlling task-focused stance. And of course, both of those responses are ineffective. The delay, the vagueness, the procrastination or the issuing instructions to your colleagues.

And we know those are both ineffective. So, we have done a lot of work studying how leaders have these conversations and some of the references of my own team and another person down at the bottom of the slide so you can check them out if you want to. But here's a very brief summary. Through analysing hundreds of transcripts, there's very little critical evaluation in face-to-face encounters between teachers and between leaders of teachers. Even in contexts like professional learning groups where that is intended to happen, it's quite rare that it does. Discussion of concerns is avoided or delayed, and if it's discussed, the seriousness of them is often minimized. So, those are the behaviours. But let's look at why. So, when we ask leaders about this, this is what they tell us. And I imagine you will recognize one or more of those thoughts and stumbling blocks yourselves. And those, of course, are legitimate concerns. It's not that you should ignore the relational side of things at all.

What we're looking for and what we're teaching when we teach this capability is we're teaching leaders how to get out of the dilemma altogether, how to not have that terrible dilemma between dealing with the teaching and learning concern and risking relationships. So, the origin of the dilemma is in leader's thoughts. 'Jane's reading program is terrible. I know she doesn't have any recent assessments of student progress. I have to do something'. Now, with that in your head, it is impossible to avoid the dilemma because you have one of two choices. You either ask something soft and through a series of leading questions - how is your reading program going? When I was on the other day, the student seemed to be enjoying themselves, which is a patting on the back reassurance that somewhat irrelevant. Do you have any recent assessments of their progress? Which is a leading question because the leader believes that the teacher doesn't. Or if their frustration and pressure increases, getting really tough.

'I'm really concerned about your reading program. I'd like you to go and observe Jane's program and let me know how you're going to make changes so your class catches up'. So, a series of instructions in quite a closed-minded way, instead of doing this. So, that's the leader's original thoughts. And this is the reframing in your head that gets you out of the dilemma. 'When I went into Jane's classroom, I was shocked to see the book levels being used. I suspect, rather than no for the absolute truth, that the students are well behind where they should be. I must talk to Jane about my fears and check this'. So, it's the open-mindedness about checking the space for difference and disagreement that gets that leader out of the dilemma because those words can be uttered in a way that the teacher might feel challenged, but they feel respected and as if they've got a space in which to say how they're seeing their classroom and their students. And so, respectful disclosure of the concerns and the grounds for it is key.

Not being vague and wussy. It's still quite direct, but it's much more open-minded than that previous speech because the thoughts are more open-minded. So, that is where we are at in terms of building relational trust. It's just a really an introduction to it. There's a whole lot of work that the Academy is doing and some of you will have heard of Leading by Learning, which is a two day course which teaches the skills which I've just been able to skip over the surface of, quite frankly. But I want you actually now to have a chance to reflect on these three capabilities and to identify gaps between your current level of expertise in each of them and the standards outlined in the workshop. So, which gaps are your priority and why? And do you have some strategies with the help of the Academy possibly, that will help you close those gaps? And I think, Kendra, we've actually got time to do this in a discussion forum rather than just individuals making a few notes. So, actually talk to your colleagues about how you see yourself within these three capabilities.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Yeah, we do have some time, so that's a great idea. So, once again, have a look at the reflection questions there, identifying your gaps and what do you think might be a priority and what strategies might you use to close those. And Taylor or Rosie, we might just ask you to put people back into the same breakout groups or...

SPEAKER:  
This is not a breakout, this one. This is not a breakout.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Oh, that's fine.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Sorry. Thanks, Alex.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
That's fine. Let's just have people thinking, making notes, and then we've got a good chance for Kendra and I to pick up that chat and then have some discussion with people. That's what I'm hoping for. Will that be possible, Rosie?

ROSIE:  
Absolutely.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Great.

ROSIE:  
So, I've just put a timer up on the screen.

KENDRA PARKER:  
So, I think that's a couple of minutes up on the timer. Hopefully, you just have a nice... And thanks, Alex, for jumping in there with that, just a bit of piece to just have a little time to think and reflect. We've certainly covered a lot in just over an hour, Viviane, so thank you so much. But maybe we can just open up the floor, so to speak, for people who would like to come off mute and just share your reflection about your own understanding and where you feel you - where you're operating in regards to these three capabilities and get some feedback and share your conversation with Viviane, while you're very lucky to have her attention here this evening. And as we often hear here in the academy from our director Kate, who introduced us, feedback is a gift. So, if you'd like to open up and share, sure that we can give you some great feedback to help you progress your learning and your thinking in this space.

JOSHUA HALL:  
Could I go first?

KENDRA PARKER:  
Please do.

JOSHUA HALL:  
Groovy. Hi. I'm Josh, firstly. So, in regards to the questions, one of my strengths, or at least how I see myself, would be in the whole relational trust field. However, after getting a lot of feedback from a couple like an exec prin and like APs and principals in my school, it seems like the main thing I need to work on is just my knowledge. So, what I've been doing over the past couple of years in my current role is just getting feedback from different teachers and leadership who have already been through everything just to find out what I should be doing. So, from the exec prin, this was one of the PLs that she suggested along with a couple of other bits and pieces just to build my capacity.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Thank you, Joshua. So, you're saying that you feel as if your capability in building trust, you're happy with that, but you're working on the knowledge, the using knowledge capability. Do I like hear you correctly?

JOSHUA HALL:  
Correct. Yeah. I guess the strategies that I've - sorry, I had missed that last question, would be seeking support and feedback from leadership, which is also turning to them suggesting that I go to other schools to build the breadth of my knowledge because I've only been at one school since starting this whole journey.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yeah.

KENDRA PARKER:  
And I think... Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you did our Leading by Learning conversation.

JOSHUA HALL:  
Sure, I did.

KENDRA PARKER:  
So, I remember you.

JOSHUA HALL:  
I keep telling everyone I was like, this is the best.

KENDRA PARKER:  
I think it was the facilitator.

JOSHUA HALL:  
I think so.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Good on you, Josh.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Good on you, Josh. A great example of someone who's working to build your capacity and your knowledge. Terrific. Thanks for sharing.

JOSHUA HALL:  
Thank you.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Anyone else? (CROSSTALK).

AARON HALSTEAD:  
I can jump in, Kendra, if you like.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Aaron.

AARON HALSTEAD:  
My role at the moment is coaching, so I thought I was doing this building relational trust quite well. However, on reflection, there's been a few times where I've had a bit of a closed mindset in terms of seeing a problem and wanting to solve that problem. So, I've just been reflecting on just a recent one where just changing that mindset a little bit to being a bit more open in the problem and making sure that the person I'm having a conversation with is also agreeing sort of on that problem as well, as opposed to me saying there is a problem, which is quite tricky to do in some cases.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. And so, those five stages that I outlined for complex problem solving, those five stages, each one of them requires agreement. So, agreement that there is a problem, there is a gap, and it's worth working on and attempting to close the gap. Agreement with the causes of the problem. Agreement with solution requirements. Agreement with the solution strategies. Agreement with how to evaluate and monitor impact. So, yes, and that can happen. That can happen actually very quickly or it can take months depending on the complexity of the problem and the size of the group or groups that you're working with.

AARON HALSTEAD:  
I think it's just that opening conversation to get the ball rolling is probably the missing piece sometimes.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes because I'm...

AARON HALSTEAD:  
(INAUDIBLE).

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yeah. I'm always listening in workshops to conversations and three minutes in, I stop the conversation and I ask the teacher, I say to them, what's this conversation about? And it's amazing the number of times the teacher doesn't know what the leader is talking about. Because they've been so indirect or vague or pussy-footing or whatever. So, I agree with you that getting it right at the start is important. Thank you, Aaron.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Aaron. And say hi to Karen and the kids. Aaron's wife teaches at my school. So, there's a comment in the chat, Viviane, from Rachel Griffiths, about using relevant knowledge, and in particular the domain of leading improvement, innovation and change. To be clear with our vision for change and our pace for change, ensure we are building commitment and communicating the why for change.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. Well, that's why I wrote a book called 'Reduce Change to Increase Improvement', Kendra. So, I think that one of the strategic skills that that leaders need is being able to reduce the amount of change that's going on at once, take stuff off the table, and when they are required to do certain things, to be able to integrate those external requirements with what they are currently doing, if they can do that with integrity. I mean, there's two... I see two big problems with the way improvement tends to be tackled. One is the quick fix, and the other is too much change. And of course, they feed into one another because if there's too much change required or happening, then leaders have no choice but to reach for the quick fix. So, I wonder if that comment came from Rachel. I wonder if she's still there and if she wants to say whether or not she's happy with the answer.

RACHEL GRIFFITHS:  
Yeah. Thanks, Viviane. Definitely has made me have a little think about where we're currently going at our school with a new leadership team. And I think that relevant knowledge piece, when I first read that, I was thinking about, do I have the knowledge in curriculum or these areas, but wasn't really considering the change management aspect of the relevant knowledge. So, it's sort of opened up a broader perspective on that. So, thank you.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Yes. And of course, one of the things that used to happen - I think this is changing, is that it was assumed that because you were experienced teachers before you became a leader or in most cases that's true, that you didn't need to learn any more about the science of learning and teaching. You just needed to learn about leadership. And in fact, with the advances in cognitive science and brain science and the science of reading, and this links into the issue of phonics and the reading wars and all the rest of it. That's not a fair assumption to make about leaders. They need opportunities to keep up to date. I mean some leaders have come through where they haven't been strong in curriculum because they've been on the pastoral side of the school, for example.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Rachel. Thanks, Viviane, for sharing your thoughts about people's reflections. I noticed Jason has put a great reflection in the chat as well, but we are just getting to the end of our time. But thanks, Jason. Great to see that you've put such thought in such short time to really think about these three things. That really brings us to the end of this webinar tonight. Thank you so much, Viviane, for sharing your expertise and your knowledge in these three areas and really helping us get a picture of these capabilities for school leadership. And particularly, I really love how you always talk about 'it's the work of improvement'. That we're constantly working a way out here. We're building our skills and our capabilities, and it's all about the work of improvement, so that we're making sure that every child in every school is getting the best outcome for them. So, thank you so much, Viviane. I'm sure everyone has really gained a lot out of the session.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Thank you, Kendra and Kate and all of you that have helped put this together. And thank you for those of you who came to the session online and, hopefully, more will see it in their own time.

KENDRA PARKER:  
Thanks, Viviane. A couple of things. Just a lot of you might have noticed, and Josh, I know you did the Leading by Learning conversations recently. Some of you may have done Open to Learning in the Past and you start to see how all of these things really fit together. I've been working at the Academy as a principal in residence for just over a year and first did Open to Learning conversations many years ago. I think now, probably 7 or 8 years ago. But every time I listen to Viviane, whether it be in that format of Open to Learning or Leading by Learning conversations or talking about leadership capabilities, I learn something new and I see it from a different angle. And I've done that again tonight thinking about that concept of trust again, is one that resonates with me so much, Viviane, about the determinants. And as you said tonight, we fall into that trap of going, oh, we'll put some trust in the bank and then we can take it out. And that's just such a wrong way to look at it. But so many of us have in the past thought about that.

So, thank you for bringing that again. Just for people that are online, a couple of things. There is a survey in the chat that we'd love you to fill in because obviously feedback really gives us an idea that we're on the right track and we're hitting the mark. And so, we'd love your feedback from that if you've got a minute at the end of the session. These thought leadership series that we're doing go hand in hand with some of the other longer-term programs that we're doing. So, if you go on to the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership website, you can find links to some of the courses. For example, Viviane's work here really links to our program on Leading School Improvement, which is open for registration now. We also have Innovating for Student Engagement for our secondary school leaders about how to think about school engagement and engaging students in learning. So, other webinars coming up. We've got Andy Hargreaves coming up, Helen Cahill coming up, Yong Zhao coming up. So, make sure you visit our website regularly to look into those programs and see what you might be interested to support your learning even further.

Finally, just thank you to all of you. As Viviane said, very busy professionals at the moment in schools and for you to take time out at the end of what I'm sure has been a busy day, to sit and listen and do your own professional learning just shows your commitment to developing yourself and obviously to developing others in the schools that you work in. So, thank you so much for coming along and we wish you all the best for the remainder of the term as we, possibly in schools, crawl towards that Easter break that you all deserve so much. But thanks, everybody, and thanks to Viviane and thank you to Gabriella and the team at the Academy.

VIVIANE ROBINSON:  
Thanks, everybody. Go well.

SPEAKER:  
Have a good night. Thank you.