



# NPQML: Thoughts and Reflections

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NPQML	2
Leading Through Trust: NPQML	2
NPQML: Leaders vs Managers	7
NPQML: Reflecting on Effective communication –	9
Conversations of a Middle Leader	11
Thoughts on Developing Teams: NPQML	12
NPQML: Reflection on my Leadership Journey 1	16
NPQML: Final Reflection	20

I hope you find this ebook useful. It is a collection of the blog posts I wrote in response to tasks set during my NPQML that I completed in June 2016.

They may help you formulate your own ideas or even save you a bit of work.

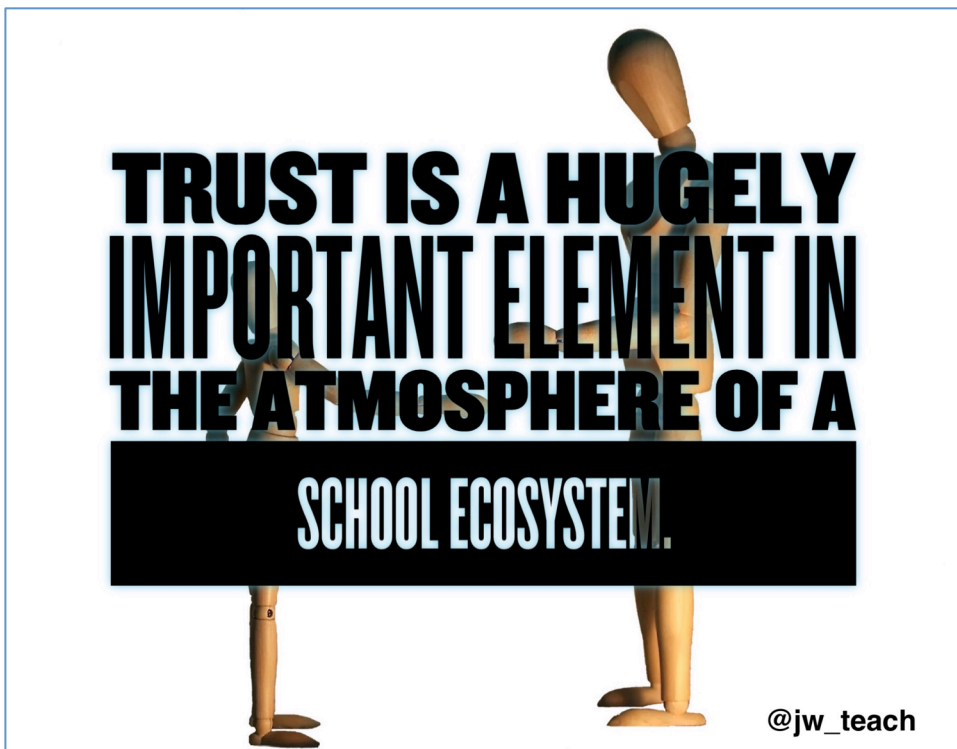
Please feel free to share and point people to my [blog](#).



# NPQML: Leading Through Trust

Clearly trust is a hugely important element in the atmosphere of a school ecosystem. Given the level of vulnerability of our students the organic trust (Bryk and Schneider (2002)) within the school community is of paramount importance. However it should never be unquestioning.

This would lead to complacency in, and over reliance on the effectiveness of procedures rather than the relational trust that should be (and is) proven and tested over and over. This is developed through the interactions between all teams, parents, and students.



In this case I am talking about relational trust both in terms of freedom for teachers to teach what they believe is best in the best way, as well as for staff working in caring for our students throughout the day and night.

Our learning community relies on a high level of trust between all parties it cannot be fully effective or meaningful on contractual trust alone. It must be built on relationships more than contracts and financial incentives. I don't mean staff should work for free, but that if money was the driving force then motivation to do

the job is not the best interests of the child (I know not mutually exclusive we've all got to eat. Discuss!)

In my immediate AHT team I believe Self Trust is the most discernible form of trust I consider and reflect on daily. There are some elements of the role I am confident in doing, behaviour support to give an example. I have proved that building up personal credibility and the confidence of staff in my capability to fulfill this role.

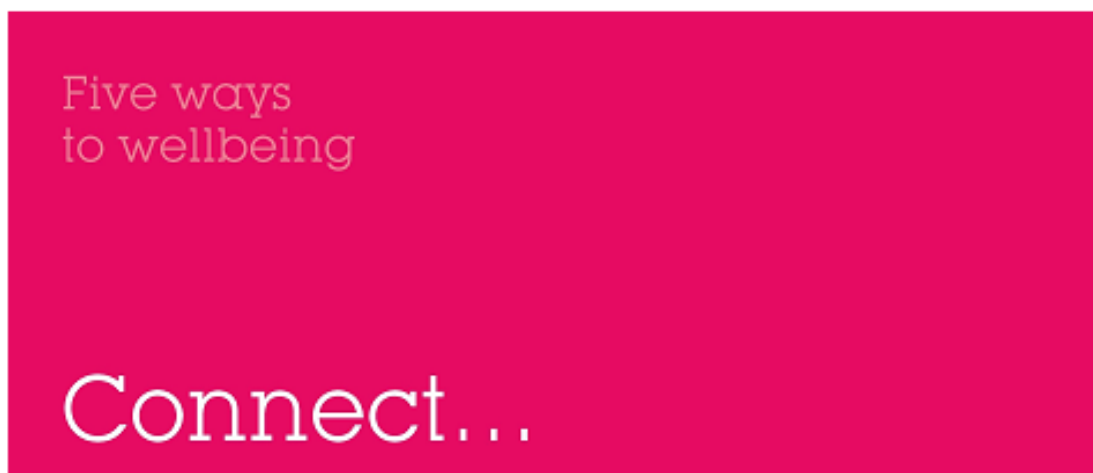
There are also areas where I have attempted to implement a change or provided guidance to staff that hasn't worked, this failure could destroy my credibility – If it wasn't for the trust built up over time.

These situations demonstrate the importance of "relationship trust" (Covey 2006). This is where consistent behaviour in our interactions, and having the confidence to admit failure, can buffer the hit our perceived capability could have taken.

This leads onto resilience and developing an ethos of risk taking where FAIL is more "first attempt in learning" than the final result.

In the AHT role within our school Organisational Trust has been hugely developed over the last year. Whilst we are still moving through the process we are now somewhere around the point of empowerment, having rapidly moved from a Newtonian Static system towards interdependency, certainly within the leadership structure. (John WestBurnham )

I personally would like to develop Market Trust – In the following paragraph will focus on trust between our team, students and parents rather than colleagues as I am new to the role and I would not like to assume. Although I think we all try to develop market trust with our colleagues through modelling expectations and holding ourselves to a high standard.

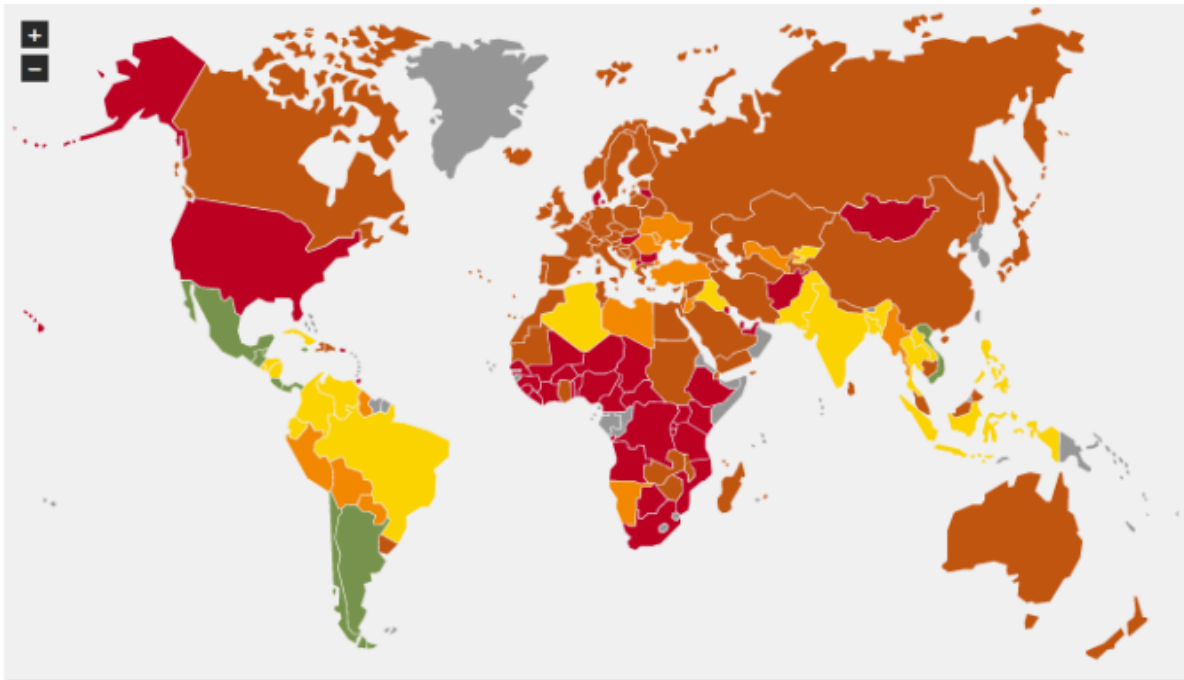


Following the now defunct link to [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org) led me to the link to the more recent research focus on the importance of wellbeing in society. Having a focus on staff and student wellbeing is a way we as a leadership team can enhance trust within our school see the link here.

<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/five-ways-to-wellbeing-postcards>

This is an initiative that has been used effectively by school leaders such as Martyn Reah from Eggar's school in Hampshire. Martyn has used this research to develop not only organizational trust in his own school but also societal trust. He has done this through his [teacher 5 a day initiative](#) based on these 5 concepts. Specifically for teachers to take time out to consider their own wellbeing so they are at their best when working with the students. To connect, exercise, notice, learn, volunteer. Initiatives supported by SLT which serves to build relational trust.

As you can see from the attached map the UK ranks as middling in terms of wellbeing. Definitely a must try harder mark there.



Whilst the perception of the school within the community is important of more immediate (not lesser I stress) concern to us as middle leaders is how we (leadership team, teaching teams, support teams, residential teams) are perceived by the students and their parents.

We can influence this in hundreds of tiny ways each day and that can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of all through the building of trust and positive relationships.

Whilst I believe we do this very well it is such an important area that it needs constant attention. The more trust parents have in us the less stress all parties are under when issues arise, we can often deal with them in partnership rather than as a conflict.

# NPQML: Leaders vs Managers

As part of my NPQML we had to complete the age old difference between leadership vs management task. These are my thoughts. The leaders project video we watched states that Manager is not seen as an aspirational job for those looking to develop their leadership role.

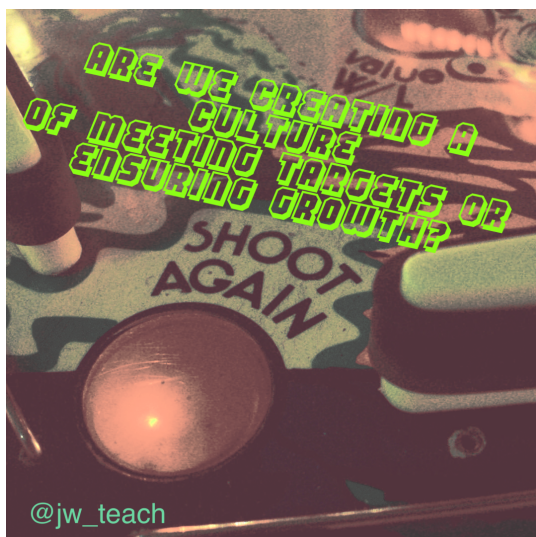
(<https://youtu.be/cbEJ-EE-hXU?list=PLEB8160CB3A881868>)

Aaron Tait hints that it does not conjure up the image of the charismatic go-getter portrayed in media. My Job title was Key Stage Manager, with a lot of administrative tasks attached but in the role I lead a team of teachers and support staff who need a leader to inspire their practice and a manager to ensure statutory tasks are allocated and completed.

Aspects of leadership are vital if we are to stop ticking boxes and begin improving our practice. Likewise improvement strategies without a managed framework will be less effective and may not be targeted at the right areas.

My definition of a leader is an inspirational force that determines momentum of a process.

A manager ensures support and direction are provided, allocated and used effectively. I have tried to avoid the negative connotations the Aaron Tait initially says can be attached to the title. Although I don't disagree with him on this. Unlike Aaron I think that a manager ensure the direction is maintained whilst the leader drives the team forward.



This is probably a question of accountability which we did touch on during our face to face day.

As managers usually have the authority of a title and given tasks they must therefore be accountable for the results, you may or may not agree. Leaders can arise from anywhere in a hierarchy, their authority reliant on their ability to inspire followers to meet a need or project, if that project fails whose fault is it? That of the manager tasked with, and usually paid to ensure its completion. Or the member of staff who led the team to an unsuccessful conclusion? If there is an ethos of support and innovation within the school the roles of manager and leader would be clearly defined.

School leaders are often those who have demonstrated vision and capability in particular areas, they are paid to lead certain areas. It is probably only those that are effective managers that progress, as both sets of skills and personality traits are needed.

The importance of growth mindsets are often discussed in relation to school improvement. Are SLT open to these ideas and are staff allowed to embrace this desire for improvement?

I manage and lead in equal amounts switching between the two many times a day. I also work as part of a leadership team whose members have differing strengths to mine.

A team whose members compliment each others skills and support those areas others are weaker in will be much more effective than a team whose strengths are all in leadership or all in management.

# NPQML: Reflecting on Effective communication – Meetings

This (<https://youtu.be/E5KCvoz4XUk>) is a video that I could have used before being a middle leader. The key point is reflecting on what and how you want an audience to hear something, what are the key words and ideas they must buy into to remain engaged and so as not to have wasted everyone's time.

Firstly the meeting must have a purpose not just be a meeting for the sake of it. Before you even begin to write a presentation think about the timing. What else is going on that may be distracting the audience. Are you launching a new initiative in the middle of assessment time? Is it too soon after a previous project? Are teachers still working on something?

If you are going to the trouble of presenting on something make sure it is something you yourself buy into and believe in. Make you are certain of the facts and the intended outcome. Your presentation will then be meaningful and the audience will want to listen and engage. If you are despondent and unclear then you will just leave all unsure and the impact of any project will be wasted or take longer.



I have attached a presentation I have written about before. It was created and delivered in order to gain support for subject leader observations. I wanted to get people to look forward to the process and understand the outcome. To be honest the powerpoint is dull and wordy but such is life at least its short.

## Prior to the lesson review

- Be clear what you want to learn.
- Determine how this lesson fits into the curriculum.
- Have you identified curriculum areas in need of review?
- Have you discussed resources available.
- Discuss your desired focus.

Context – I started by outlining the reasons for doing them, how they tied into the bigger curriculum changes. This could have been more “bigger picture”

Agenda – I didnt really include an agenda slide but split the presentation into clear sections.

The Content – This contained the process we would follow.

Engage the audience – Just about I think, the feedback was positive and they have now been completed I need to gain peoples thoughts on how they went.

To write this I basically wrote how I like to be presented to. It is not visual and doesn't really have a interest grabber. But I hadn't watched the video then.



# NPQML: Courageous Conversations

The conversations we take part in as leaders take a number of forms, informal chats in corridors, question and answer sessions where you or a colleague need a particular piece of information. Presentations to implement a new strategy with the aim of getting everyone on board with your way of thinking. Discussions where the best way forward is discussed with team members. Even the occasional “you need to do this”. Each of these is handled differently and I takes a different skill.

In my 20Q assessment for the NPQML I received feedback that an area to work on was in challenging underperformance. I would not really argue this.

It's not my favourite type of courageous conversation. This may be a future post as I work through it. If you follow David Jones's thinking that then I am most confident in dealing with conversations for which I am most prepared and have all the facts.



As a PROACT-SCIPr-UK instructor I am often required to discuss incidents of varying severity with staff or class teams. I can conduct these with my personal

experiences of similar situations or even the specific student. I have also extensive specialist training so am confident that I know the relevant rules, protocols and legalities.

Pupil achievement is a trickier conversation. If I have taught the student I know the strategies that worked with me. I think I am easily caught off guard by negative reactions to my advice. The last face to face session really helped in showing how preparation and clarity is invaluable. As a key stage manager it is my responsibility to ensure that support is provided where required and capability issues are tackled effectively using the resources I have available (usually staffing and time). Since the start of this course I have got better in targeting interventions where they are required and can have the most impact. It is a juggling act and can seem that you take your eye off one ball another will fall. The importance of dealing with situations and identifying potential problems early is increasingly clear to me. I have been attempting to do this over the last couple of weeks. Having the confidence to stick to decisions and trust in your judgement is difficult – I think I can often appear confident then doubt myself when back in the office.

Conversations about teaching and learning are great when they are two way exchanges of ideas. I can sometimes use my passion for a topic or idea to get staff engaged with new developments, and not always the staff I would expect. I have had great success getting members of our residential team onboard with my e-safety initiatives. David Jones states that when passion is seen [in a subject specialist] children get excited, I think to a large degree the same is true of staff who will often be invigorated when they learn a new skill, or to give an ICT example a new app or piece of technology. This actually happened last week with two members of staff who approached me then implemented the ideas I gave them.



It is a tribute to the skills of teachers that many go on to leadership positions and other careers well prepared to have difficult, inspiring, and informed conversations with a range of people.

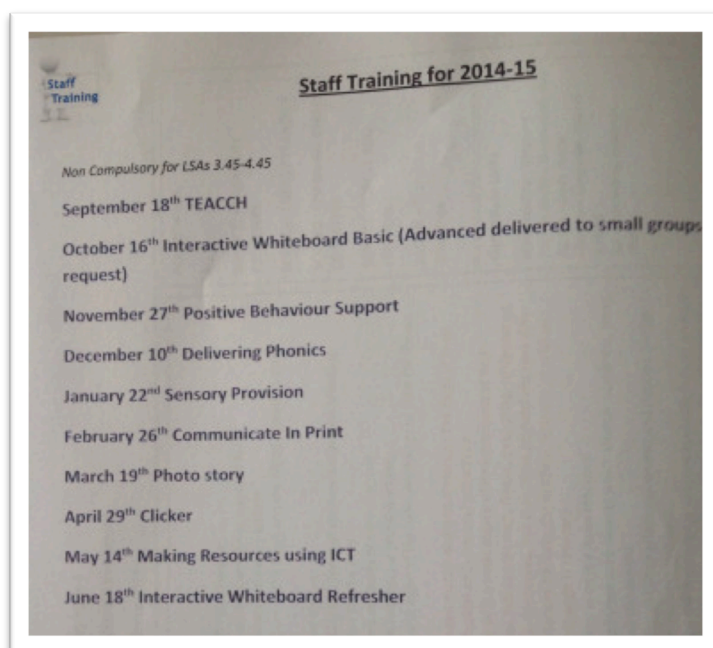
# NPQML: Developing Teams

If we acknowledge the validity of the Leithwood et al statement “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.” And that the aim of any school is to improve teaching and learning, then supporting teachers has to be the key leadership behaviour.



It is the view of school and middle leaders that it is the skill to coach and develop others that has the biggest impact on school improvement. I am hoping the NPQML will guide to be a better coach focused on the development of those teams I am responsible for. I have been attempting to do this by running training programmes for staff. By looking at the McKinsey review of Adult learning and leadership development I may not have implemented this as effectively as I could have done. For example the agenda is set by me linked to my subject develop plan (ICT) not building learning around strategic projects or encouraging a peer community to develop.

So a target to ensure improvement would be to create and sustain a collaborative culture. This could be done effectively through a mentoring system, role modeling expected behaviours or engaging teams in self reflection and analysis of the impact of their work. It would be very interesting to attempt a collaboration of staff teams across a number of local schools to share ideas and good practice.



From the study it seems research into the impact of school leadership is increasing and there are multiple initiatives in the early stages of implementation. If the idea on an international scale is to “develop the best” through formal training of school managers and leaders then surely a formalization of the in school development of learners would have a similar positive impact.

This is the theory behind appraisals and performance management but often the CPD available is piecemeal and driven by a teachers interests rather than from a strategic level. At least this is my experience, I have pushed for and been supported on numerous courses and professional development opportunities both linked to my leadership and curriculum. I can only think of 1 occasion where this has been pushed by a senior leader to meet an identified school need.



# TO ENSURE IMPROVEMENT CREATE AND SUSTAIN A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE



To motivate and develop the school teams maybe a focus on planned and intergrated CPD linked to the SIP would have a huge positive impact; but at a relatively high cost in terms of cost of courses, cover required, disruption to classes etc. This would enable a more devolved system of leadership with leaders present at every level of the school hierarchy each responsible for and hopefully passionate about a specific area.

## NPQML: Developing Teams

This post is my reflections for my NPQML School improvement unit. In it I have tried to be honest about the struggles I faced early on my leadership journey. A journey that probably started without a map, direction, or appropriate footwear. I think of myself as a learner.

I am here to guide and support my teachers to provide the best environment for the students we work with. To do this I need to be constantly reflecting on my practice and admitting (at the very least to myself) when I have made mistakes. I have based this post on an article Becky Powell posted on Sec-ed.co.uk entitled

### **THREE KEYS TO MIDDLE LEADERSHIP**

Despite the vast differences between our settings, like Becky I too found the move to middle leadership empowering. I enjoyed being able to focus my ideas for improvement onto my key stage and as leader of that group of teachers was able to start shaping how effectively the curriculum worked for the students.

It is hard to run a department without having a clear vision – and I was thrown in at the deep end when I first took my leadership post.

This mirrors my experience. I took the job with little experience of leadership and no professional development in this area. I had ideas but these had not formed into a clear vision for my department they were more a collection of projects.

My initial style was consciously the opposite of the micromanagement symptomatic of my predecessor. A good teacher, well meaning but inexperienced at leadership, and under pressures from above, was that of what one of my PGCE mentors would describe as Seagull management. Swoop in squawk (well he said poop) and fly out again. Leaving you with a deflated feeling and an additional admin task or two.

However my new laissez faire approach (to make use of my business studies A Level) wasn't overly effective either. Strong personalities, a lack of drive to improve, staff expecting me to solve their problems. Combined with my lack of experience in dealing with the administrative workload led to a rocky period with little cohesion between classes. As well as a lot of stress for me which for the first time affected my enjoyment of teaching. Although difficult I learnt a lot from these mistakes, lessons that served me well through future turbulence. I think your leadership style changes as you develop. Eventually you are able to change and adapt your style to fit or react to differing situations. In the same way you are able change your teaching style as you become more comfortable and confident in the classroom. It is through modelling of your values and personal ethos that will determine how effective these are.

The following year I changed my approach, unconsciously. I was not really a reflective practitioner at this point. This combined with a change in staffing led to the first year I felt like a leader not a manager.

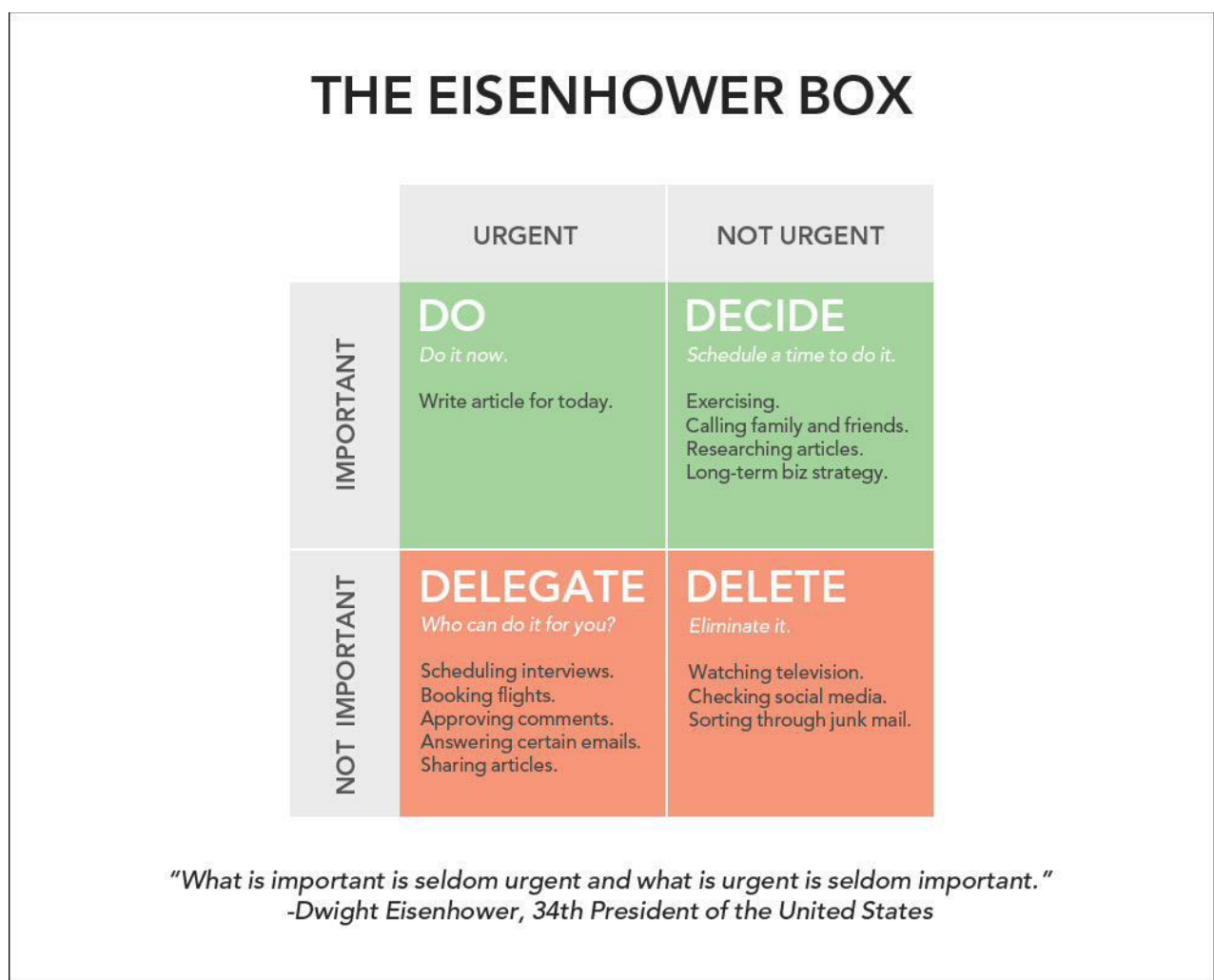
I became more adapt at completing the paperwork (Management skill Check!), more focused on which projects where achievable and of benefit to the students, and more confident in communicating. As Becky says



This is an area the NPQML has helped me with considerably although I still have room for improvement. The following couple of years have been filled with ups and downs both for me and the school.

Many more ups than downs and we as an organization have come out stronger with the focus always on what's best for the students. As a leadership team we are more confident and more capable of dealing with issues that arise.

I have come out much more focussed on the impact of my leadership than consumed by completing the management tasks I am responsible for. Part of this is confidence and part, as boring as it sounds, is prioritising and effectively completing those essential tasks. Using ideas similar to the eisenhower box below.



The greatest and most positive change this year has been the empowerment that came with promotion to Assistant Head Teacher working directly under the Head Teacher.

We don't have a Deputy Head.

This has helped be see the reasoning behind many decisions and helped me rationalize my role and purpose in the school.

It has also served to clarify the roles of our AHT team allowing us to work together more effectively.

The greatest benefit of this has been to start creating an ethos of collaboration that I hope is beginning to filter into our teacher's pedagogy. The cycle of feedback is the next area we are looking at improving, changing the negative connotations of lesson observations into a supportive prospect [see my previous post of subject leader evaluations](#).

I am enjoying my Job more than ever both the leadership and teaching sides of the role. I can see much more clearly the areas I need to improve in but also the areas in which I have improved.

I am sure it is empowerment that has helped me grow and empowerment of my teams that will ensure they grow.



# NPQML: Final Reflection.

*After about a year I have completed my NPQML. This course is intended for those in middle leadership roles to develop areas of their practice Known as competencies. This was not an easy task but I wished I had undertaken it when I first started my leadership journey. At least having some experience under my belt I could really understand the areas I needed support in.*

The main thing I have to thank the NPQML course for was starting this blog and then getting me to use twitter professionally to connect to educators outside of my little bubble. It has prompted the writing of a number of blogs as they were set tasks that crucially I could also use as evidence in my final assessment submission. I was very excited when people actually read some of these!

Many of my other blogs were influenced by content of the course as well as the tasks making me reflect on my own practice and areas of interest. My favourite part was the face to face sessions where we got to chat (I mean conduct professional dialogue with) others in a similar position. As with any group of professionals you will have your different leadership styles, ethos's, experiences. But you will learn about those and have fun labelling your new chums.

Don't be put of by those who have already learnt all the lingo and drop the names of the big players in the leadership game (John West-Burnham – Boom. Drop the Mic).



We had a nice mix of aspiring leaders and those who had experience at a multitude of levels. I had just finished a stint as Acting Deputy Headteacher – (Leave the job title at the door no one is impressed, you are all on a journey). A subject leader in one school may have had more responsibility than a phase leader in another. You are here to learn from the tutors, the impenetrable folder and the other candidates.

One of the first activities is the 20Q diagnostic, this is basically your chance to rate your strengths and weaknesses. To make it more fun your colleagues get to do the same. I asked a range of staff, some I had not worked closely with – my theory was they would be more honest (see image below). The form then compares your self assessment to others ratings.



*NPQML Diagnostic*  
Helping People Grow

## Your lowest scores (page 1 of 2)

The questions you scored lowest are:		Score
<b>Q10</b>	I reflect upon reasons for my own feelings and behaviours	3.0
<b>Q20</b>	I deal with underperformance effectively	3.0
<b>Q9</b>	I gain commitment from others for the long term plans of the team and school	3.0
<b>Q13</b>	I take the time to get to know and understand others in order to build relationships with a broad range of people	4.0
<b>Q1</b>	I demonstrate total commitment to excellence in teaching	4.0

This can throw up some common areas and be an eye opener in other areas. The image below is an area I thought I was good at. Apparently not. (my own rating – 6 was significantly higher than I was rated 4.7)

<b>Q17</b>	<b>I create opportunities for the long term development of others</b> Competency: Developing Others Q2, Leadership Area: Operational Management
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The ability to seek and respond to supportive feedback is essential for a resilient leader.

## **The Project.**

This seems daunting at first but with a canny bit of forethought you can use something you either do already, but just plan and carry out more formally or identify something that you can do without putting strain and huge additional workload on others (or yourself).

Buy doughnuts: you will have to call additional meetings, use up favours and be assertive.

The project does not have to be huge. You need three things

1. **An change/improvement related outcome.**
2. **A team (I had 4 people)**
3. **A plan (Use a Gannt Chart)**

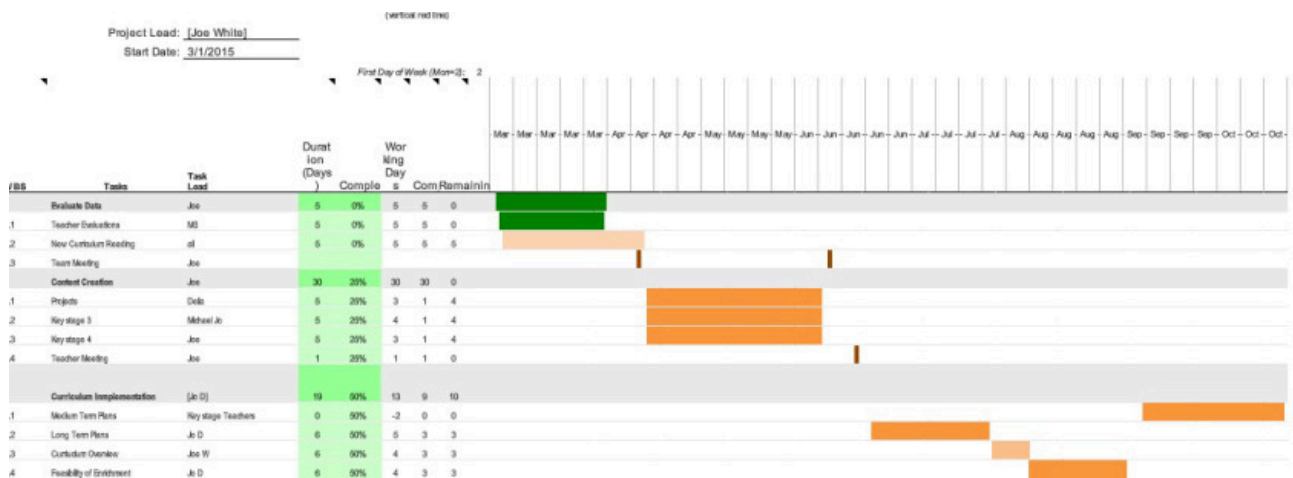
From the moment you come up with the outcome/idea record and document everything. EVERYTHING. Squirrel away every related email, every meeting agenda, post it note, research, etc. I would also either blog or keep a small diary of your thoughts. Note what problems – I mean challenges did you overcome. Shamelessly ask your team for feedback – I even made up feedback forms to analyse how they interpreted my leadership.

My project dropped nicely into my lap with the changes to the KS3/4 science curriculum. The science subject leader had left so I took on that responsibility. Normally the subject leader in our school would design the curriculum alone.

Leadership 101 – To gain buy in from staff enable the ownership and meaningful input. SEN 101 – Everything needs to be individualised. So it was the perfect opportunity to build a team to gather as many views and ideas as possible from those who will be delivering the curriculum to our diverse student group. This worked really well. You will rely on your team a lot. This is a good opportunity to engage with colleagues from different areas.



I used a [GANNT](#) chart to plan the project. This is actually quite handy. In terms of allocating roles and ensuring deadlines are met (management tasks really).



After the project is finished I asked my team to complete questionnaires about how how effective they thought my leadership was. This project must be worthwhile for your team. It can link to their development targets as well. I passed the baton for subject leader to a team member at the end of the project.

It should meet a real identified need. It should have impact. I used assessment data to identify the need and again at the end impact – I will look again at the end of this year to ensure it has had lasting impact. I'm not in the job for meaningless initiatives.

#### Joe White NPQML Project Questionnaire.

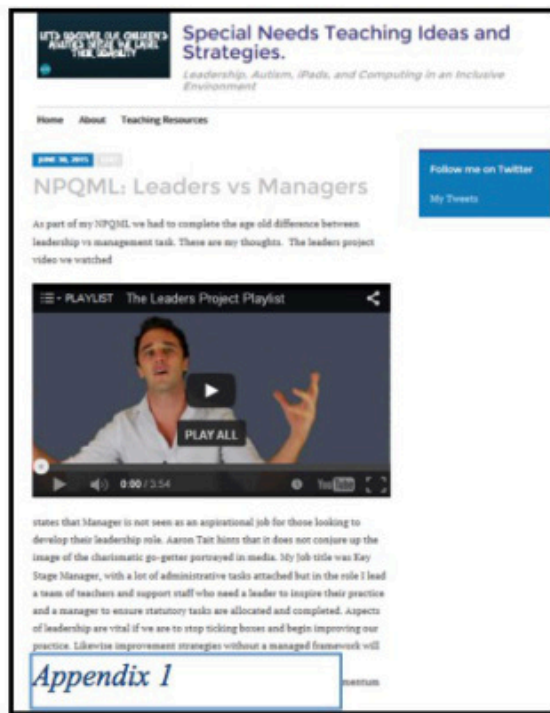
I am completing a reflective account of my leadership of the Science Curriculum project, I would really appreciate your feedback on my leadership of the project. Please complete the form anonymously and return to my pigeon hole.

Using a 1-5 scale please indicate your response to the following questions.

	1 strongly disagree	2 mildly disagree	3 neutral	4 mildly agree	5 strongly agree
I felt supported during the project	1	2	3	4	5
I was motivated by the tasks	1	2	3	4	5
The tasks were allocated appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
I was given a chance to voice my ideas	1	2	3	4	5
I felt my role within the team was valued	1	2	3	4	5
I felt my ideas were listened to	1	2	3	4	5
My role in school has developed since this project	1	2	3	4	5
The objectives were communicated clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I was accountable for completing my tasks	1	2	3	4	5
I felt inspired during the project	1	2	3	4	5

## The Final Form

This can be a pain or a pleasure (kind of). If you keep evidence throughout and link tasks to the competencies as you go it will be much easier to complete.



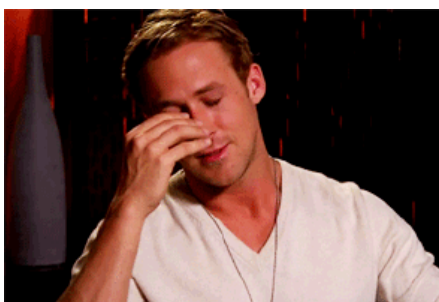
I kept screenshots of emails, meeting agendas and minutes. So it wasn't too arduous.

**Now I have a confession.**

I got referred the first time I entered it.

Why?

I hadn't read the submission criteria and forgot to include a report to SLT/my mentor.



So the result below was actually attempt number 2. My form had hyperlinks which they didn't like but they were for my mentor to check my evidence (that this blog, SLTchat etc actually existed) so best to not do this.

National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership							
Participant: <b>Joe White</b>							
<b>Result</b> We are pleased to inform you that on the basis of all the evidence available from the final assessment you are awarded NPQML. The evidence confirmed a number of strengths and some areas for development. We hope you will find the feedback below helpful in the next stage of your development as a school leader.							
Summary of Performance in the competencies							
Competency	Modelling excellence in leadership of teaching and learning	Learning focus	Inspiring others	Self-awareness	Relating to others	Developing others	Holding others to account
Performed at the required level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performed below the required level							
Summary of key strengths							

So to conclude. If you have the opportunity I would grab it just bear in mind these key ideas to make the most of it without drowning in extra work

1. Have an idea about an area you would like to use as a project
2. Make the project something that you/others need/want to do anyway
3. Get buy in from your team
4. Make [meetings](#) worthwhile/efficient as possible (there is a unit on this)
5. Keep a note of competencies as you go
6. Keep an evidence folder as you go
7. Read the submission criteria
8. Start a blog