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## **A CRITICAL EXAMINATION ON IMPLEMENTING AND ESTABLISHING A PLC USING AFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examined the outcomes of implementing professional learning community (PLC) at an international school in the UAE, focusing on affective management. Exploration examining affective impacts is suited for a school as they are social environments with emotions impacting interactions and outcomes. A literature review on affective management is used to develop criteria for PLCs. Teacher recollection and school documents were used to evidence the PLC and compare to the model. Affective management of change is important in innovation because emotion influences teacher responses and outcomes. Implementation of innovations can contribute to feelings of vulnerability, discomfort and anxiety. Distributed leadership provides an opportunity for successful innovations but can result in conflict and resistance. Success is based on the shared goals of managers and subordinates. The establishment of the PLC was unsuccessful as there was no articulation of goals and lack of consistency in practice, which ultimately undermined teachers' identities. Consequently, the requirements for affective containment were not in place and managers and teachers conflicted with each other. Ineffective management led to teachers using emotional capacity to withstand*

*stresses rather than forming a functional PLC. However, failure may also have resulted from anxiety stemming from the context of the school.*

## **Keywords**

Professional Learning Community, Management, Leadership, Innovation, PLC

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Statement of Purpose**

This essay seeks to examine the outcomes of the implementation of a professional learning community (PLC) at a large K-12 international school in the United Arab Emirates (School X). In order to do so, ideas regarding affective management (James & Jones, 2008) will be used to provide the criteria which help explain the successes and challenges faced in the implementation. Additionally, the limitations of the theory will be considered in terms of the limits of affective management's applicability within the context of School X.

### **1.2. Justification**

As schools seek to increase the quality of education on offer, often the focus of administrators is teachers as they have the greatest contact with students. Therefore, they are seen as being the determining factor in increasing student attainment (James & Jones, , 2008; Goddard et al., 2000; Rockoff, 2004; Nilsen, et al., 2016). An approach has been to innovate ways to harness teachers' potential, thereby improving the quality of instruction and creating more effective learning environments.

PLCs are an educational innovation that as of late have seen an increase in interest (Stoll et al., 2006), almost as panacea by some to solving a number of school issues. PLCs are seen as valuable in increasing school capacity for learning across the whole school community (Stoll et al., 2006) and are often considered a powerful means of utilizing teachers' knowledge and skills to more effectively educate students (Harris & Jones, 2010). However, as with many innovations, implementation can limit the manifestation of desired outcomes (Harris, 2011). Additionally, the result can be a devolution that undermines the quality of education through repeated cycles of failure in which programs are implemented in quick succession, in an attempt to find solutions to persistent issues (Harris, 2011; Payne, 2008). Consequently, it is important to explore case studies as a resource for more effective implementation since PLCs are increasingly being implemented by schools.

### **1.3. Scope and Limitations**

Focusing on one case study necessarily limits the applicability to dissimilar contexts as does the focus on affective management theories. However, this approach allows for more depth and nuance in terms of PLC implementation, thereby providing a more holistic exploration. Often the outcomes of educational innovations are measured in data-driven metrics (Harris et al., 2018), but the human factor is left unexplored. Given that education is an endeavor driven by people in every aspect, it makes sense to focus on the impacts of social factors on success of implementation. This makes affective management ideally suited as it focuses on the social interactions between the actors of change implementation. It assumes that the emotions of actors have an outsized impact in educational institutions because they in and of themselves are engaged in emotional work. Therefore, there is already present an intensity of emotion that readily seeps into other aspects of school life. Additionally, individuals and groups can respond defensively when experiencing anxiety (James & Jones, 2008). Moreover, much educational research focuses on American or British schools (Miller, 2017) with limited applicability in places such as the UAE. Therefore, case studies in diverse settings help to highlight the limits of and potentially expand already developed understandings.

### **1.4. Description of Innovation**

The idea of the professional learning community was introduced at a large K-12 for-profit international school in the United Arab Emirates, which is part of an educational corporation operating in a number of countries. The student population approached 2000, consisting of over 80 different nationalities, a majority of whom are majority second-language English learners. The school followed the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program and had a staff of more than 250 teachers coming from a number of English-speaking countries and teaching assistants largely from India and the Philippines. Additionally, as an international school in a location like the UAE, both the teacher and student population are highly transient (Al Awad, 2008). The overall idea behind the introduction of this innovation was an attempt to unify a disconnected school teaching community in which individuals learn from each other, ultimately increasing school achievement as measured by metrics such as IB exam results and Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) testing.

The attempt to create a functioning professional learning community ([Appendix B](#)) is predicated on the idea that it allows teachers to learn from each other, leading to innovation and change in the classroom. This then produces better quality education and higher student achievement (Harris & Jones, 2010). Furthermore, they are “ongoing, reflective, collaborative,

inclusive, learning-oriented” (Stoll et al., 2006), resulting in a community in which people help each other improve the quality of their teaching, leading to school improvement. PLCs are to have a tightly connected community of actors to allow for the focus on these aspects of schools. Additional to the positive impact on students, PLCs are thought to contribute to increased job satisfaction amongst teachers (Harris & Jones, 2010; Stoll et al., 2006). In an international context, they are seen as important to the capability of maintaining changes over time (Stoll et al., 2006). The overall goal in the development of a PLC is a cultural shift away from traditional education, i.e. teacher centered, to one that is inquiry based for school stakeholders through the creation of a community that is interdependent, sharing in beliefs and values, even if there may be disagreement (Stoll et al., 2006). Furthermore, effective PLCs have collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, and promote group and individual learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), all of which serve to increase commitment to the institution and each other. As well as being inclusive, they have mutual trust and respect and networks that extend outside the school (Stoll et al., 2006), allowing for the increased contribution of the greater community’s resources and knowledge. Bullough (2011) sees PLCs as having positive impacts on emotional lives of teachers, giving a sense of hope that can transform education while also providing teachers with agency over their work lives and positive relationships with their work community. This agency and community would then result in decreased resistance (James & Jones, 2008), possibly as the PLC would be the engine driving further change. Additionally, the collaborative environment of PLCs would work as mechanism for affective management (James & Jones, 2008). All of these qualities create an environment of welcome and commitment to innovation, creating fertile ground for realization of goals.

## **2. Methodology**

First a justification of the choice of an affective management framework will be provided. A literature review of affective management will present the associated ideas. Also included are important concepts of distributed leadership since it is closely associated with PLCs. The description of PLCs will provide the criteria through which to examine the successes and challenges of the implementation at School X. School documents as well as my recollections as a teacher will be used to evidence the PLC. The PLC model will be compared with its implementation and outcomes at School X, while utilizing affective management to evaluate the overall impact. In order to give a more holistic view of the process, distributed leadership will be incorporated to offer another lens through which to view the process. In order to fully evaluate affective management in examining PLC at School X, the limitations

within the context of the school and the framework itself will be considered. The conclusion will include an evaluation of the limitations of this analysis and potential avenues of additional exploration.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1. Justification of Theoretical Framework**

There are a number of change management frameworks that are potentially applicable in examining the implementation of a PLC at School X. For example, focusing solely on leadership styles would provide insights to the decision-making process and impacts management styles had on the innovation and outcomes. Another possibility involves looking at permutations of Argyris' (1977) models of organizational learning loops of the processes that shaped implementation and procedures. However, these focus on the whole system and evolution of the process toward attaining the desired goal rather than at the impacts and roles of actors in the dynamism of the process. As a teacher who participated in the process, I experienced a huge amount of frustration, anxiety and resentment in attempting the PLC and I was not the only teacher similarly affected. Often, the human/emotional element is excluded in examining the outcomes of innovation and change (Day & Lee, 2011), even though it is possibly the most crucial element as the teachers, not the innovation in and of itself, are the linchpin to success. Without examining the human aspects of change, an essential component of the outcomes is omitted, resulting in a limited understanding of what can be learned to subsequently better affect change.

#### **3.2. Affective Management**

According to Rost (1991), "Management is an authority relationship between at least one manager and one subordinate who coordinate their activities to produce ... services" (p. 145). This means an acceptance on the parts of teachers that they are a resource of the school, and their activities will be deployed and coordinated in a way to meet the goal of educating students. I would also say that deployment is expected to be in a manner that meets either the stated mission and/or the curriculum of the school. The expectation, and probably the preference, of the subordinates in that relationship is that the coordination be effective. The coordination of the activities is also predicated on the idea that although the goals of managers and subordinates might differ from one another, they have been negotiated and agreed upon (Rost, 1991).

Affective management of change is important to consider in the implementation of innovation as emotion, along with reasoning abilities, are pivotal in teachers being able to implement educational change and in their responses to such (Day & Lee, 2011). “Emotions are important to pedagogical practices, to student–teacher relationships, to issues of reform efforts and processes of change, and to an understanding of power relations and social structures in schools and the society” (Zembylas, 2011, p. 44). Emotions help us to understand ourselves and how we fit amongst our colleagues and into our world (Beatty, 2002).

Furthermore, teachers’ professional identity is tied to the capacity to successfully navigate the emotional labor of teaching (Day, 2011). These identities are constructed from the fundamentals of the job like classroom teaching, student achievement and subject knowledge, but also from synergy of the social, cultural and institutional context in which they spend the most significant portion of their day (Day, 2011). Aside from this, emotions importantly form the bridge between daily actions and context. From these, identity is formed (Day, 2011). As the school is the locus of the largest part of their waking lives, that identity is also a significant part of how teachers see themselves in the larger world. It is an important valuation of themselves as individuals and possibly in their non-school community. Consequently, the implementation of innovation which introduces changes to that dynamic can have a severe impact on teachers’ self-esteem and their role in the classroom. That innovation, and therefore change, impacts the actual work of teaching and how teachers feel about their contexts (Day, 2011), is important to consider as PLCs are founded on the teachers’ commitment to the school community.

The introduction of PLC is the beginning of something new, and despite the potential gains, it introduces instability to a world that, even if not functioning effectively, is known and therefore comfortable. As a result of so much of teachers’ emotional investment is in their work and schools, policy changes destabilize the current situation and produce feelings of vulnerability (Day, 2011). Vulnerability and discomfort lead to a sense of anxiety in a significant part of one’s life. Given the importance of teaching to the identity, this anxiety can undermine one’s moorings and require additional emotional resources to manage (Day, 2011). To reduce that anxiety, people will, consciously and unconsciously exhibit defensive behaviors (James, 2011). Poorly managed change leads people to express their frustrations in a range of ways, from “passivity and anomie to sabotage and revolution” (Rost, 1991, p. 142), which serve to reduce the effectiveness of individuals and groups and reduce the success of the innovation (James, 2011).

Although these emotional responses are seemingly irrational, they are necessary to reasoned decision-making (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), and therefore should not be ignored or suppressed because decision-making is vital in navigating all components of an innovation. Instituting change without taking into account and supporting the emotional well-being of teachers will not be successful and will do more harm than good (Bullough Jr., 2011). Conditions may possibly be worse than before the innovation. Effective management of the emotional aspects of change and the resultant defensiveness can, therefore, be significant in impacting educational change outcomes. Consequently, teachers require emotional support during times of change in order to help build or sustain positive identities (Day, 2011). Managing teachers without consideration of the ‘dispositions’ results in ineffective application of their abilities (Leithwood et al., 2008) and effectiveness. This can affect the implementation itself and collegial relationships as well as altering or undermining the course of leadership through the process (James, 2011). “One way of overcoming this problem is to transform these difficult feelings through affective containment rather than attempting to control or defend against them” (James, 2011, p. 128). Affective containment or management helps to support intended outcomes.

### **3.3. Distributed Leadership**

Leadership is considered second only to teachers as having an impact on student learning because of its catalyzing effect on so many different aspects of the learning experience (Leithwood et al., 2008). “Culture forms the medium through which leadership is exercised” (Dimmock & Walker, 2002, p. 70) and PLCs function best if there is a culture of trust and respect (Harris, 2013) - the essence of distributed leadership. Additionally, shared decision-making, a cornerstone of distributed leadership, is seen as a way to enhance teacher participation and commitment, thereby contributing to the development of a school culture (James & Jones, 2008). It should also work to deconstruct the traditional combative teacher-administrator relationship (Beatty, 2002) towards one of collaboration. In distributed leadership, positions go beyond, but do not replace the formal, traditional structures (Harris, 2013). These informal leaders have influence over instruction by dint of their interactions with members of the school community. Because of the trust they generate and the influence they exert, informal leaders contribute to the success of innovations (Harris, 2013). In addition to trust, in distributed leadership, actors are dependent on and accountable to each other and share a common purpose (Harris, 2013). Leaders provide support for tasks, thereby reducing the risk of the vulnerabilities that might be exposed by working collaboratively and closely with people.

This would then reduce anxiety among teachers, who would develop shared goals, leading to a more unified direction from the school. Consequently, they can be important to supporting innovations like PLCs and given the connection between the previous and instruction, this would translate to improved education and student attainment.

However, decentralization of responsibility can also lead to conflict and resistance (James & Jones, 2008). The distribution of leadership should not be ad hoc, but well-planned and closely aligned with the needs of the school and stated goals, and be supported by the formal leaders (Harris, 2013). The formal leader must “create the time, the opportunity, and the resources for the group to function effectively” (Harris, 2013, p. 110). Success of implementation is dependent on it being “carefully constructed and disciplined” in order to cultivate teacher collaboration and learning which in turn increase student learning (Harris, 2013). However, in the case of the context of School X, management of the change may be more important than the leadership style utilized. The frequency of the conflation of leadership and management is a result of adoption and basis of these ideas coming from industrial and corporate settings (Rost, 1991). As this confusion is seen in educational leadership research and then is perpetuated in educational institutions. A very important distinction of leadership of change is that it is a “joint action undertaken with a purpose mutually shared by leaders and followers to create change” (Rost, 1991, p. 102). Therefore, managers and subordinates should possess understood and shared goals for change. During the advent of change, managers are also leaders, at the forefront, using personal relationships between them and followers to influence attitudes and, therefore, the outcomes. As a result, leaders can have a profound impact on affectively managing innovation.

#### **4. Outcomes of Innovation**

Overall, the establishment of a PLC did not result in collective capacity-building and was not successful (Appendix A). The implementation seemed quite at odds with definitions of PLCs and very few of the criteria (Appendix B) were evident. From my recollections and discussions with other teachers, we had limited understanding of what a PLC was, seemingly another buzzword. There was also no articulation of the goals that we should have been working toward and limited time was allotted to allow for task completion. There was much confusion, from my perspective as a teacher and on the part of my colleagues, on purpose and direction. The implementation process seemed hastily and poorly thought out. There was an attempt to bring the school together using online forums, as it is a large school spread over a large campus. However, these were largely unused by teachers. The focus on the PLC was



sidelined for weeks at a time in order to prepare for school-wide inspections by both corporate head office and the national government accreditation body. Year group teachers in the elementary school had shared planning time, so they were better placed to collaborate. In the secondary school, teachers within departments had vastly different timetables. Therefore, secondary teachers rarely had similar planning times as their teaching partners or across subjects. During department meetings, the focus was on regular business rather than collaborative endeavors. Additionally, some staff taught in multiple departments and, therefore, had to attend multiple meetings (Appendix C), further reducing potential collaborative time. In the secondary section, teachers were under pressure to improve external exam results. To advance the PLC, teachers led professional development seminars to share practices and resources. However, this was more limited in the secondary school.

## **5. Analysis**

### **5.1. Evaluation of Implementation**

A goal of PLCs is to harness the positive emotions of teachers in order to affect change and improve educational outcomes. Functional PLCs are also supposed to limit teacher anxiety and minimize negative emotions. PLCs at their core are supposed to be a type of affective containment that places a greater portion of the actual management within the control of the teachers. PLCs also embody the core ideas of distributed leadership and, therefore, affective containment is very much about the overall structure of implementation and achievement in establishing a functional PLC. In this case, the prerequisites for affective containment were not in place. Teachers were confused about what a PLC was, the goals, the processes and their place within. Without these, teachers felt unsure of themselves. Additionally, one of the things I understood from school-wide meetings was that the external exam and MAPS results were not sufficiently good for the reputation the school was attempting to build. Rather than the creation of a community that would support me as an educator, this process was an indictment of my work and my students' exam results. Speaking with others at the time, this interpretation was shared. As people who view themselves as professionals and experts, this lack of certainty regarding the process created anxiety and confusion. Additionally, the fact that we had to do this to increase test scores was demoralizing to me as an instructor. Focusing so much on test scores caused the administration to miss the successes that we saw in sometimes adverse circumstances. It also seemed pedagogically unsound that we would be driven by test scores rather than improvement in the quality of education. The

whole process seemingly undermined important components of teachers' identities, eroding their confidence in their expertise and negating the pride they felt in their work and interactions with students. Given that these play an important role in how individuals see themselves outside of the school setting and the need to protect themselves from perceived attacks, the outcome was resistance that manifested as limited and unenthusiastic participation.

As management is a relationship between teachers and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), there is an emotional component which must be recognized for effective achievement of goals. Without the recognition of a relationship, then the emotional aspects are more readily ignored. Teachers, in my personal experience, lacked trust in the managers and were therefore unwilling to be honest and inform managers of their needs during the process. Consequently, there were no agreed-upon goals, and it seemed to be a top-down process. Managers and teachers were then in pursuit of differing goals and in conflict with each other. Reduced effectiveness may have resulted from resistance behaviours engaged in as teachers had limited personal investment in the process.

One of the hallmarks of PLCs is distributed leadership that allows teachers to control the reins of change, democratizing the process and creating a sense of empowerment. Distributing the leadership is also supposed to help in affective management, allowing the trusted informal leaders to have a significant role as guides through the change process. The trust placed in them allow followers to willingly engage in change. On the surface, leadership was distributed. Teachers were allowed to choose the forums for participation and department heads informed us of what was to be worked on during meetings. However, without distribution of leadership to the appropriate people, the affective benefits cannot be reaped. It is possible that the SLT did not recognize who the informal leaders were in the school.

For example, in an effort to create more interactions within the whole school, secondary and primary teachers were shuffled seemingly randomly into discussion groups. My group had a primary language teacher as the leader. The questions she was given to prompt the discussion seemed to have limited connection to my concerns as a secondary teacher. Also, the majority of us had never met her before that meeting. Therefore, it was difficult for many group members to speak honestly, unwilling to open up to strangers. There was much confusion that day and the discussion leader admitted that SLT had informed her of her role that morning. I was moved from a familiar setting in the secondary school to an unfamiliar one with unknown people I had little in common with pedagogically. The discomfort of the situation meant I spent more time managing my unease and watching my words than engaging in the discussion. If people do not have a relationship, then there will be no feeling of accountability which is vital

to creating the sense of responsibility to each other and helps further the professional learning process.

Regardless of type, one of the fundamental qualities of effective leadership is the creation of an environment which allows teachers to fully engage with and utilize the whole of their emotional and intellectual capabilities (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 30). SLT did not prioritize this in the unfolding of the PLC. Secondary teachers, operating near 80% timetable or more, had limited time to devote beyond meeting their teaching duties. The single thing most requested by teachers was that of time, which would allow them the mental bandwidth to fully explore and engage with colleagues in developing a PLC. The role of formal leaders in positions of authority is that of competent management (Rost, 1991). Possibly, leadership cannot occur if the fundamental management is not in place. Quite possibly, it was not leadership that was lacking in this situation, but the managing and allocation of important resources, mainly that of teacher time. Without time, the requirements of PLC establishment become a distraction from what teachers believe is their real work, causing anxiety and becoming something to resist. Furthermore, complex organizations must be managed. As there are so many moving parts, failure to manage would result in a catastrophic breakdown of function as it is this management that facilitates, coordinates, provides stability (Rost, 1991) and allocates the range of human and material resources of a school, thereby allowing for teaching and learning to take place.

## **5.2. Limitations of Explanation**

Despite the importance of affective containment and distributed leadership, these cannot fully explain the outcomes at School X. PLCs are impacted by associated differences of their national contexts (Stoll et al., 2006), and School X has a context different from the majority of the literature, which focuses on school systems in Western countries. As the core of every community is the relationships between people, the high transience of teacher population impact the establishment of PLCs as much as affective containment. In order for personal trust to grow, there must be enough time for meaningful relationship development. Since there is constant change in staff– up to 35% yearly turnover – quality relationships have limited time to flourish. In my experience, staff that have been there the longest resist interactions with newer people deeming this a wasted effort since newcomers soon leave. Also, those who have made the decision to leave resist making connections because these will be truncated. With high turnover, there is limited development of the trust needed within the

community for people to be willingly vulnerable in order to learn from each other and form a cohesive PLC.

Additionally, PLCs require institutional knowledge development and continuity of practice to provide a base comfort level for community members. Teachers must have familiarity with one another's classroom practices to begin to open themselves to the potential of learning. And, there must also be a pool of knowledge from which people can draw. With a transient population, there is limited time for development of that pool before teachers leave the school and remove their expertise. PLCs also function best when there is a shared culture and experience. Given the transience of the staff, it becomes difficult to establish those commonalities. Possibly in the case of school X, with these barriers to establishing a coherent communal culture, it is not management that limited PLC success, but the fundamental aspect of community transience.

Furthermore, staff are constantly in a state flux with new jobs, country and life. Possibly it is these changes, rather than school management, that create anxiety. Management can seek to minimize some of the discomforts that come with adjusting to new circumstances but cannot eliminate them completely. Therefore, until staff settle and normalize in their new environments, they are in a continual state of vulnerability and anxiety. Possibly the issue was not PLC management, but its introduction in an unstable school is not the most fertile context for success. The base anxiety may be greater than in most national schools because resettlement is added to the inherent emotional challenges of schools. It might be prudent to develop two separate programs, one that focuses the PLC on returning staff, i.e. people who have built relationships and understand the organizational structure of the school. A second program would concentrate on the newer staff to minimize the affective dissonance of transplantation to a new school and national culture. As new staff acclimate, they can be incorporated into a PLC which will be less overwhelming.

However, Western countries also have schools with high levels of transient staff, so this is not unique to School X. However, in the context of international settings, challenges are compounded by the multinational nature of the staff. As teachers and support staff come from different countries and educational training backgrounds, it then becomes more difficult to establish a communal culture upon which to build the consensus needed for PLCs. Distributed leadership calls for more democratization and decentralization of power to those outside of the senior management team, while PLCs call for a community approach to education. In an environment like School X which itself is multicultural, the social cultures of actors or groups can conflict with the stated goals, resulting in confusion and chaos. This then appears as

mismanagement, which results in anxiety amongst teachers and staff. There are vastly differing approaches amongst culturally similar countries like United States and United Kingdom have, let alone when a staff spans several continents as in School X. If management assumes a shared culture where one does not exist, some groups will be discomfited by the processes implemented. Although the majority of the teachers come from English speaking countries, this includes a variety of teaching systems, expectations and pedagogies. There is a dissonance between the cultures of leaders, teachers and teaching assistants, which precludes the formation of a community through shared goals and common ground. Given that social cultures are slow to evolve and organizational culture is generally shallow (Dimmock & Walker, 2002), frequent movement of people does little to impact the former and develop these. This lack of commonality coupled with teacher turnover is possibly a source of anxiety amongst staff even before considering the affective impact of introducing a PLC. Additionally, PLCs are predicated on the idea of a commonality of shared goals. The variance of perspectives and expectations is a barrier to staff sharing and learning from each other as well as to the development of group responsibility, without which there is limited motivation to participate in and make a success of a PLC.

In the UAE, school fees are connected to the results of yearly reports issued by the government educational inspection authority that are increasingly based on external exam results (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2017). Moreover, as a profit generating school in an international corporation, managers' actions toward affective change are circumscribed by corporate policy and the national school culture. Therefore, affective containment of innovation may be precluded by the very nature of the school. Managers are expected to deliver results that enhance earnings, not necessarily the quality of education. There is corporate pressure to increase fees and enrolment to maximize profits. Additionally, managers' positions are connected to their ability to deliver these profits, resulting in pressure that is passed down to teachers. Consequently, it is imperative that teachers' timetables be as full as possible to accommodate the number of students without increasing costs by employing additional teachers. The result for the teacher is limited time to meet the demands of the curriculum, achieve high test results, complete the other requirements of the school day, and carve out the collaborative time needed for a functioning PLC. All of these pressures do result in affective issues, but given that the corporate pressure overwhelms managers themselves, it would be incredibly difficult for them to have the wherewithal for affective containment. The challenge may not be with the microcosm of the school, but rather the corporatization and industrialization of education. These processes simplify structures in order to produce a

mechanical operation of human systems. In doing so, the human needs of teachers and managers, which are messy and difficult to quantify, are instead minimized and removed from the equation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Affective management can have a large role in the success of change implementation in a school. Ineffective management can result in demoralized teachers who resist the change and therefore limited achievement of intended outcomes. The benefits of distributed leadership are contingent on informal leaders who have earned the trust and developed a relationship with the staff, without which a fundamental aspect of PLC function is missing. PLCs have the capacity to be a source of long-term affective containment through the creation of an interconnected network of commitment, trust and responsibility. But, they can become the source of anxiety rather than a means of alleviation. Although, attempts were made to address some important hallmarks of PLCs, e.g. leadership, forums, teacher teaching sessions, these were superficially addressed, even as the core, the psycho-emotional component was ignored. Given the already existing stresses of teaching at School X, ineffective management left teachers to use emotional capacities to withstand the stresses rather than engaging with each other to create a PLC.

However, it is possible that the context of the change has a greater impact on success rather than the management itself. The conditions for success must be evident and affective management is the midwife that helps to fully deliver the change. The anxieties of the context need to be addressed more than the change itself. Each aspect – transience, a multinational staff, corporate and government inspections – adds layers of complexity to management. Quite possibly, the entirety of the system needs to be evaluated and reorganized to allow managers to make decisions in-keeping with the culture and needs of their schools. Too often, school improvement focuses on teachers and the classroom, as we have done here, and ignore systemic affective containment. Even the top leaders of schools also have higher level bosses to report to. Consequently, the affective capabilities of managers are severely hampered by limits of the corporate system. Those limits pressurize all of members of a school and increase the difficulty of effectively addressing school specific challenges, ultimately undermining innovation.

### **6.1. Scope of Future Research**

As a teacher who participated in the attempted implementation of a PLC, my perspectives are necessarily limited. Understanding of this topic and impacts could be furthered

through involvement of managerial staff to better understand the affective strategies utilized in this process. Such research could better delineate the goals of more stakeholders and illuminate areas of overlap and avenues for success.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Questionnaire Regarding PLC Implementation.

1. What was the goal(s) of the implementation of PLC? Was there a model on which the School X PLC was based?

- a. As a teacher, I had never heard of the term before. I repeatedly had to ask what does PLC stand for. I did not know what it was or meant to be. I could only assume that it was a situation where some of the admin went on a course and came back with an idea. During meetings, the information was confused and to be honest at the end of the working week, the last two hours spent in an auditorium did not allow for much headspace to pay attention to whomever was at the front of the room.
2. How were the attainment of the goals to be measured?
  - a. I am not sure that there were hard goals. I was a bit confused, but we had to do something on the corporate website that included looking up stuff and adding to a forum. We were also expected not only post our own 'insights' or questions, but also respond to others. We were supposed to go in a forum that represented some educational interest. That way we would be in a group together with people who had the shared goal.
3. What processes were implemented to develop the PLC within School X?
  - a. There was the forum and we were supposed to do something with it in our department meetings and there were the so-called professional learning meetings at the end of the week, after the students left. Additionally, there were these teacher led sessions that were short introductions to ideas or resources. But we were required to attend some, so sometimes they were a burden. The elementary school was much more proactive in creating these sessions though.
4. What were the successes of the implementation? Why did these result?
  - a. I don't recall any. I did get some exposure to some different teaching materials and technology through attending the teacher led innovation sessions.
5. What were the failures? Why did these result?
  - a. I'm not quite sure what the overall goals were. I posted once in a forum and my department used it to pass along jokes during end of week meetings for a bit. I'm pretty sure that very few other people posted.
6. Do you think were the challenges with implementing a PLC at a school like School X? How did management attempt to overcome those challenges?
  - a. I think there were lots of challenges and very little was done to overcome it. For the most part, whatever we were supposed to be doing seemed to have little to do with my teaching. The instructional coach who was supposed to help people was based in the primary school. The campus and staff was so large that one

could go weeks without seeing colleagues in the primary section. There was never enough time to get everything done and the expectation seemed to be that we should use personal time to do everything which I resented. All of my classes were exam year and had an 80% timetable plus duties and meetings so there wasn't enough time to do anything in more than a cursory manner.

7. Do you think was there room for improvement in managing the implementation of the PLC? In what way(s)?
  - a. Most definitely! More time..that was what we all complained about. Admin seemed to be working at cross purposes at times and we were given conflicting information and there was lots of confusion. Or deadlines would be really short and in order to meet them something else had to be dropped. Clearer instructions and something that was relevant to me and my teaching would be good. We seemed to have been given a vaguely defined thing and expected to flesh it out. It was almost as if they didn't quite know what they wanted but would know if they saw it. The computer interface was confusing and not simple to navigate...lots of confusion where things went. After a certain point, it seemed as though SLT wasn't checking to see if we had met the minimum participation requirements so I stopped even pretending to do anything with it.
8. Where do you think the responsibility for PLC development lay?
  - a. I think it was the job is that of SLT, they wanted to implement this and therefore it's up to them to figure out how to roll it out.
9. How inclusive was the idea of the PLC in terms of teaching assistants (TAs)? That is, were the TAs involved in meetings, documentation and professional learning?
  - a. I feel like the TAs were in some of the initial meetings but I don't think they were required to contribute to the forum. But basically, I have no idea what was going in the primary. I never explored the primary forum.
10. During the first year of implementation, was the PLC extended to organizations/people outside of the school?
  - a. Not that I know of.
11. Did these of processes PLC development differ between the primary and secondary schools?
  - a. I don't know.
12. Was the time allocated for teacher collaboration sufficient in to helping create a PLC?

- a. Absolutely not! Especially since this was implemented later in the year..myself I had humanities department meetings, meetings with MYP coordinator, DP coordinator, TOK department plus the needed planning and grading time. All of the things that related directly to what I did in my classroom took precedence.

**Appendix B – Characteristics that constitute a PLC**

<b>Characteristics that constitute a PLC</b> ( <i>Harris, Distributed Leadership Matters: Perspectives, Practicalities, and Potential, 2013</i> )	
<b>A PLC</b>	<b>Not a PLC</b>
Group of professionals working as a cohesive team to address specific learner needs arising from an analysis of data and evidence.	Formally established or existing sub or working group with a remit for an existing theme, subject, or topic.
Chooses the focus of inquiry and the membership of the group.	Prescribed focus and membership (e.g., a working party is given its task or brief).
Imperative to generate new ideas a new practice.	Expectation of sharing existing knowledge, information or practice.
Leadership is widely distributed, and the group chooses its own facilitator.	There is a designated or preexisting leader of the group.
Each member is accountable for the outcomes of the PLC – there is reciprocal accountability.	One person is responsible for producing minutes, sharing the outcomes, reporting and so on.
Disbands and reforms with a new focus on inquiry and changed membership.	Continued membership and work of established group is ongoing.
Assesses its impact directly on learner outcomes and has a responsibility to share these outcomes with others.	Engages in reporting and written dissemination.
Independent and interdependent learning.	Dependent learning
Reflection upon individual and collective learning based on evidence.	Reports on group progress.
Collective capacity building.	Consensual group working.

*(Source: Author's Own Illustration)*

## **Appendix C – School Documents from PLC**

**Document A:** Email introducing PLC from beginning of the school year

From:

Subject: Professional Learning Thursdays :) 1.45 - 3.45 p.m.

Date: September 7, 2016 at 11:46:16 AM GMT+3

To:

Dear All,

Tomorrow will be the launch of professional learning Thursdays for 2016 -17.

This week everyone should assemble in the auditorium at 1.45, with your **Macbooks and a pen.**

The second session, from 2.45 will run as follows:

1. Elementary School as directed by Jeff.
2. DP staff only – 2.45 – 3.15 E314 with Brian. Followed by 30 minutes self-directed time as outlined below.
3. MYP staff only – 3.15 – 3.45 E314 with Rhonda. Followed by 30 minutes self-directed time as outlined below.
4. If none of the sessions above apply to you please complete one of the following tasks:
  - a. Complete and submit your goal setting document to Giles.
  - b. Complete any tasks that will help you complete your professional learning goals for 2016-17 e.g. research articles, materials or resources.
  - c. Conduct any group discussions that may be relevant to your professional learning for this year.

Please ensure that you are at the relevant venues on time so that we can finish promptly at 3.45.

I look forward to working with you all in the year ahead to achieve meaningful and positive professional growth across the whole team.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

Kind regards,

Assistant Principal – Professional Learning

**Document B:** Email from Primary Instructional Coach on the process for the end of the week PL time.

From:

Subject: Thursday PL Time

Date: October 5, 2016 at 8:19:28 AM GMT+3

To:

Hello Everyone,

This Thursday during your PL time from 1:45-2:35pm, we'd like you to introduce your goal on your MyLearning forum.

If you haven't yet created a forum, please start by doing that. (Select a category, then 'Add Topic' and write your goal as the title.) Remember to make your title specific about your goal so colleagues can easily understand what your forum will be about. For MYP and DP teachers and TAs, there have been new topic headings created since that first Thursday intro in the auditorium that may be more suitable for your learning goal.

- Science, Technology & Innovation
- Critical Thinking / Inquiry
- Advisory
- Classroom Management
- Leadership Development

If you have created your goal already in one of the previously set categories but think it fits better in one of these new categories, just create it again in the appropriate spot and send me an email with the title and category of the one that needs to be deleted. In two weeks, any empty categories will be deleted to clean up the forum index.

Some of you may be planning to attend Matthew's "Learn to Love Your Mac" or Rhonda's "Assessment in the MYP" or Claire's "TAs Show & Tell" sessions this Thursday at that time (sign up today through the Internal Professional Learning link on MyLearning!) so please note

that: Everyone needs to have their forum created and at least one entry describing their goal plan by Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>.

So, what to write? Go back and review your goal sheet along with the “LAUNCH” and “ASK” sections of the attached PL Journey document. Perhaps write about how you have made your goal a “SMART” one. Consider describing it through the Inquiry cycle. In the next week or two, sessions will be offered during PL time for you to learn how to upload pictures and links. I will be in the Teacher Training room from 1:45-2:30pm on Thursday for ES & SS teachers and TAs if you want to pop in for some help navigating your forum or advice on what/how to write up your goal. Please don’t hesitate to come if you’d like some guidance. This is new for many and we want to make PL Thursdays a positive part of our week and year!

Thanks,  
Instructional Coach

**Document C:** Diagram of PL journey which was presented at a whole school meeting near the beginning of the process but never referred to again as far as I can remember. This was in an email attachment of Document B. However, no discussion was associated with it and no information on its source was provided.



# The PLC Journey

## Launch

### Guiding Questions

- What is important (and therefore worth spending time on)?
- What's not working well? What do I want to change?
- What is the evidence – achievement data, student learning dispositions, student behavior, teacher

## Now What?

### Action Steps

- What are the next steps moving forward?
- How will I modify my practice as a

## Ask

### Guiding Questions

- What is this inquiry all about?
- Why is this worth investigating?
- What might this inquiry be towards?
- What do you think your student needs?
- Where are you headed?
- What experiences and information bring to this inquiry?
- What do we already think/feel about this?

### Resources:

- Looking at student work
- Macsun Database
- Online Curriculum

## Investigate

### Guiding Questions

- How can we gather information about this?
- How will we organize to gather information?
- How will we contact people/places we need?
- What do other people/texts say about this?
- What does this information make us wonder more about?
- How will we record what we are finding out?
- How does information about this compare

### Resources

- Learning Walks
- Peer Observation
- Feedback Forms
- ICT/Library Online Curriculum Centre (Occ)

## Reflect

### Guiding Questions

- What has happened as a result of the changes in teaching and what are the implications for future teaching?
- What evidence do I have that these strategies have been effective – achievement data, student learning dispositions, student engagement and behavior, teacher practice?
- If the strategies have been effective, what are my next steps?
- How will I sustain the effective practices?
- What's my new inquiry focus?
- What new goals do I want to set?
- What can I do if things don't work?
- What different approach to the problem could I try?
- Should I ask the students?
- What other teachers can I talk to?

## Discuss/Dialogue

### Guiding Questions

- What does all this mean?
- What themes or patterns are emerging across the data?
- What are we learning?
- How can we show what we understand?
- How can we express our thoughts and feelings about this?
- What are the best ways to show what we know and understand?
- How does this help answer our questions?
- What new questions arise?
- What texts can we create?
- How have we come to learn this?
- What has been useful information?
- What do we still need to do/find out?

### Resources:

- Review 1<sup>st</sup> section of this binder
- Review PL summary and self-awareness logs
- Visible thinking routines
- Share

## Create

### Guiding Questions

- What does this all mean?
- What themes or pattern are emerging across data?
- What are we learning?
- How can we show what we understand?
- How can we express our thoughts/feelings?
- What are the best ways to show what we know and understand?
- How does this help answer our questions?
- What new questions arise?
- What texts can we create?
- How have we come to learn this?
- What has been useful information?
- What do we still need to do/find out?

### Resources

- Creative Process & Verb Wheel
- PL Model (more examples), IGNTTE presentations
- Professional Goals (may outline ideas)
- Doc

**Document D.** Email sent at the end of the school year as a wrap up. From the Primary Instructional Coach rather than the assistant principal whose whole title was professional learning.

From:

Subject: Thursday Plans

Date: May 2, 2017 at 8:21:33 AM GMT+3

To:

Hello Everyone,

Here is some important information for you in preparation for Thursday afternoon.

**1:35-2:15pm – Whole School, Teachers & TAs in auditorium**

Important Stuff from Stuart

ASA Stuff from Sergio

**2:15- 2:30pm – Professional Learning Survey**

**Teachers** in auditorium given time to complete PL Survey (please bring laptops)

You are welcome to complete beforehand (takes about 15 min)

but all surveys must be done before leaving school on Thursday.

2:30pm – Collect a Coffee/Tea & Biscuits to take with you to Goal Reflection Group (BYO Mug.) Available from 1:15pm

**2:45-3:40pm – Goal Reflection Groups**

**Mixed groups of Elementary & Secondary teachers**

Here are the Reflection Groups , includes where you are going and who will be facilitating

Read and prepare your PL Reflection prior to Thursday.

You can either print off and write a few notes by hand or make a digital copy and type.

**TAs** to do classwork in corridors if rooms are being used

Whether it was a formal goal or not, everyone has learned something new this year. With your Reflection group, please focus on something you have learned professionally this year. It may have been from a PL session at school or an external course; it may have been something from an article you read, or a focus your team has been developing. **What have you learned?**

**Please complete the PL Reflection questions prior to Thursday** and be prepared to share with your colleagues. This exercise will be useful when it comes time to complete your End of Year Summary. (That means, save it!)

It's not often we get the opportunity to enjoy professional conversation together, so please be open-minded and risk-takers and enjoy!

If anyone has not been placed in a group or has any questions, please contact either Frances or me.

Thanks,  
Instructional Coach