



# Life in the Trenches

*A personal look at strategic  
planning and leadership in the K-12  
context*

- ▶ Julia Leiterman, February 2026
- ▶ BCASBO Leadership Program

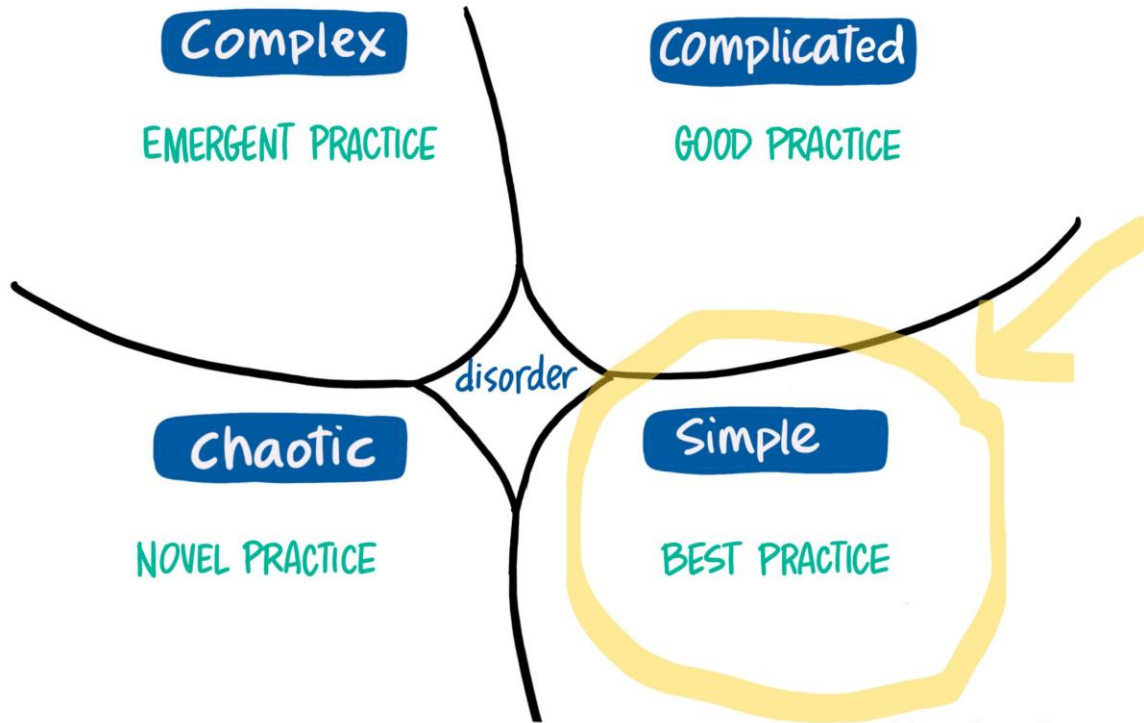
# 1. The Work

Does its nature shift as you move into a management role?

## What Subordinate work *feels* like



# Cynefin



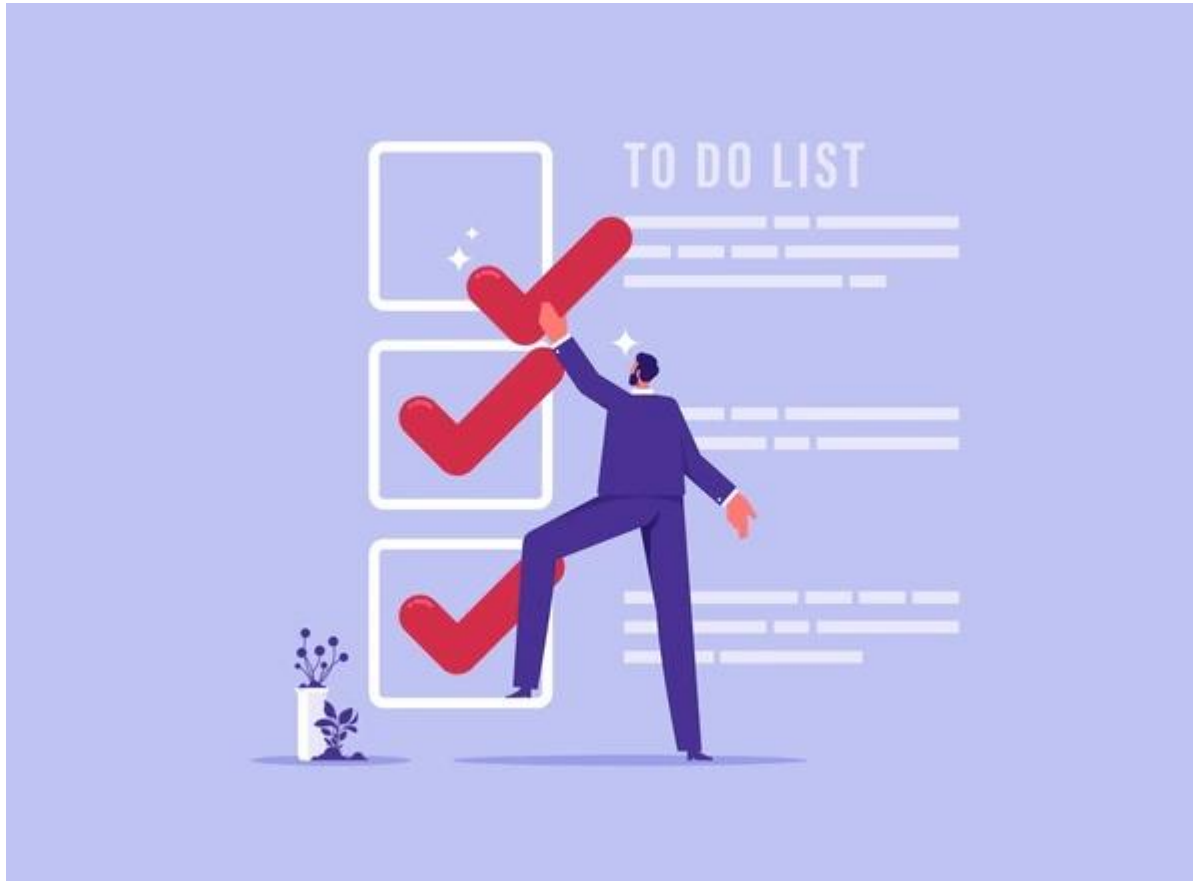
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Work falls into the **simple** quadrant:

- Tasks are **easy to identify**
- They are **assigned** by a manager
- Can be accomplished by an **individual**
- Usually **black and white**
- Completion point is **clear**
- Best practice is **well-established**

# How you finish up your day



# What leadership *feels* like



# What leadership *looks* like



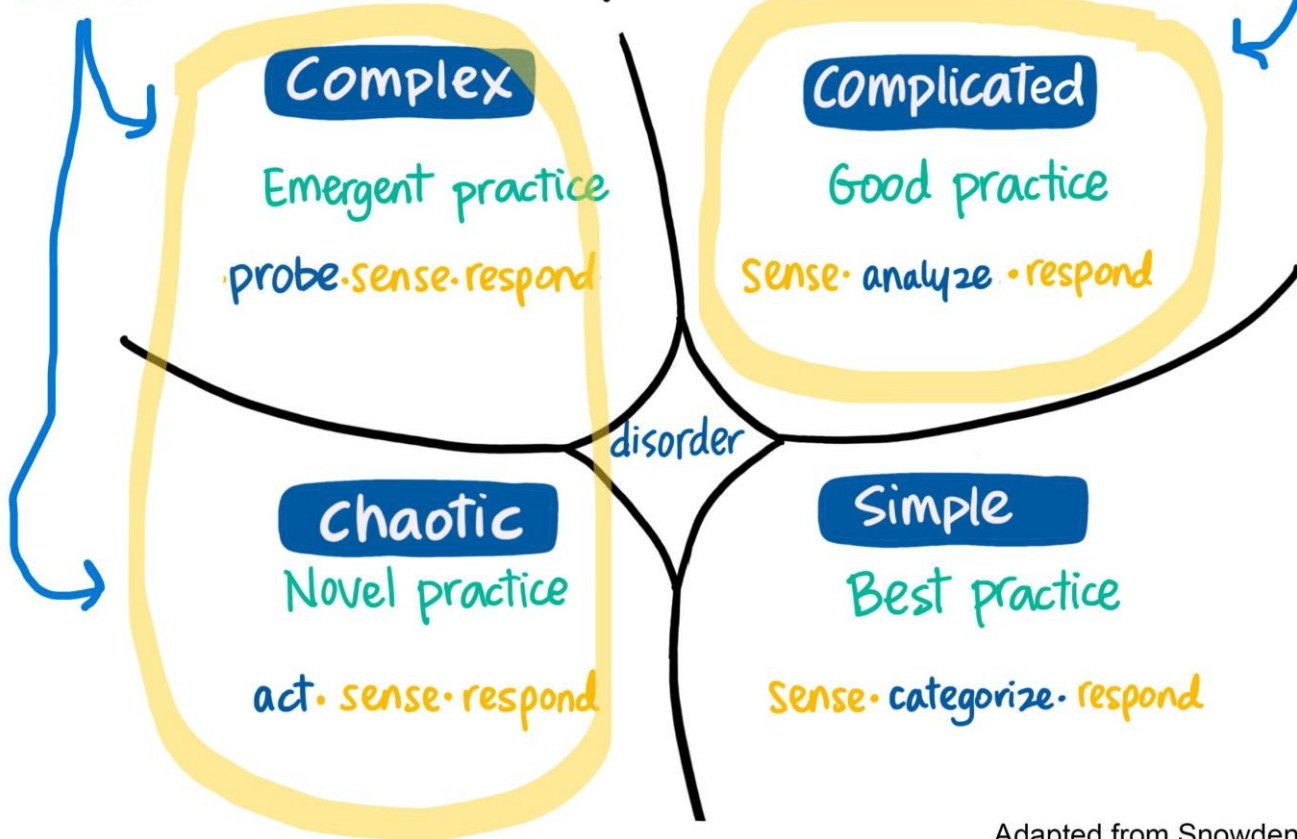
Shift from a **doer** to a **facilitator**



# Cynefin

Experienced Leader

New leader



**Complex**

Emergent practice

probe · sense · respond

**Complicated**

Good practice

Sense · analyze · respond

**Chaotic**

Novel practice

act · sense · respond

**Simple**

Best practice

Sense · categorize · respond

disorder

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Leadership work falls into the **complicated, complex and chaotic** quadrant:

- Typically work is **identified**, not assigned
- **Issue**, not task, based
- Completion point is **not always clear**
- The correct path is **not always clear**
- Many **grey areas**
- **Requires input** from multiple stakeholders

# How leaders sometimes finish the day



## 2. Relationships

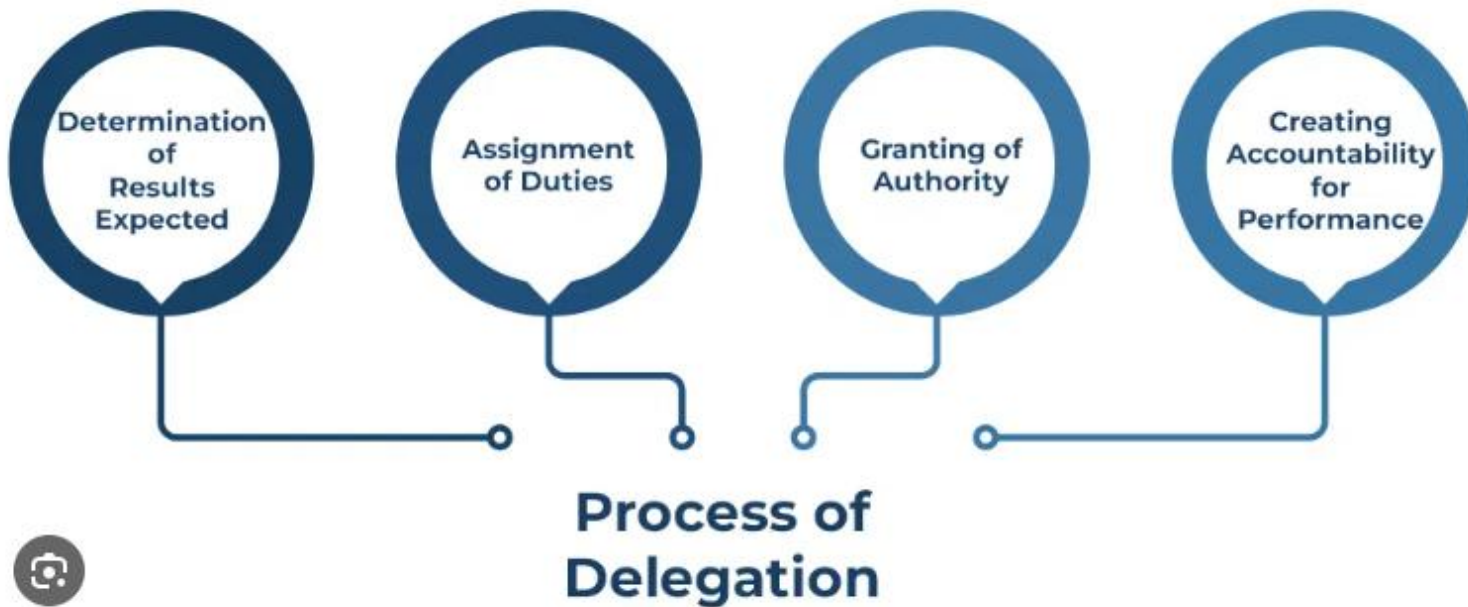
Leaders are vulnerable

You're dependent on other people



So build a great team!

# Learn to do this well



What's the impact of a dysfunctional relationship or poor delegation?





# Relationship #1:

- ▶ Brand-new Secretary-Treasurer



- ▶ Negative Director that resented authority, teachers, parents



## Positive:

- ▶ Budget surplus
- ▶ Facilities staff supported

## Negative:

- ▶ No communication - ST intimidated
- ▶ Principals **unhappy**
- ▶ PACs **unhappy**
- ▶ Senior staff **unhappy**
- ▶ Work orders out of control
- ▶ Facilities staff discouraged

## Relationship #2:

### ▶ Still-new Secretary-Treasurer



### ▶ People-pleasing Director who is overwhelmed



## Positive:

- ▶ Well-liked across district
- ▶ Work gets done

## Negative:

- ▶ Poor communication, direction
- ▶ High stress all the time - **It's a Disaster!**
- ▶ **Unclear mandate** for facilities
- ▶ Facilities staff severely overworked
- ▶ Serious over-spending
- ▶ Over-promised and under-delivered
- ▶ Work orders still out of control

## Relationship #3:

### ► Overwhelmed Secretary-Treasurer



### ► Under-qualified, people-pleasing Director



## Positive:

- ▶ Tons of communication
- ▶ Well-liked by district staff (at first)
- ▶ Lots of new, innovative ideas

## Negative:

- ▶ Multi-level dishonesty
- ▶ Over-promised, significantly under-delivered
- ▶ **Very** serious over-spending
- ▶ **Hated** by facilities staff
- ▶ Serious, ongoing **HR issues**
- ▶ Work orders still out of control

## Relationship #4:

- ▶ Experienced, wiser Secretary-Treasurer



- ▶ Experienced, HR-skilled Director



## Positive:

- ▶ Highly-skilled people manager
- ▶ Experienced systems manager
- ▶ Calm, professional, respectful
- ▶ Clear communication, clear direction
- ▶ Budget under control
- ▶ Work orders improving

## Negative:

- ▶ No hands-on experience
- ▶ Required direction

## Relationship #5:

- ▶ Experienced, confident Secretary-Treasurer
- ▶ Experienced, confident Director



## Positive:

- ▶ Budgets under control
- ▶ Large projects well-managed
- ▶ Work orders under control
- ▶ Facilities staff working effectively
- ▶ Shared understanding of facilities mandate
- ▶ Effective partnership with HR
- ▶ Calm, confident leadership

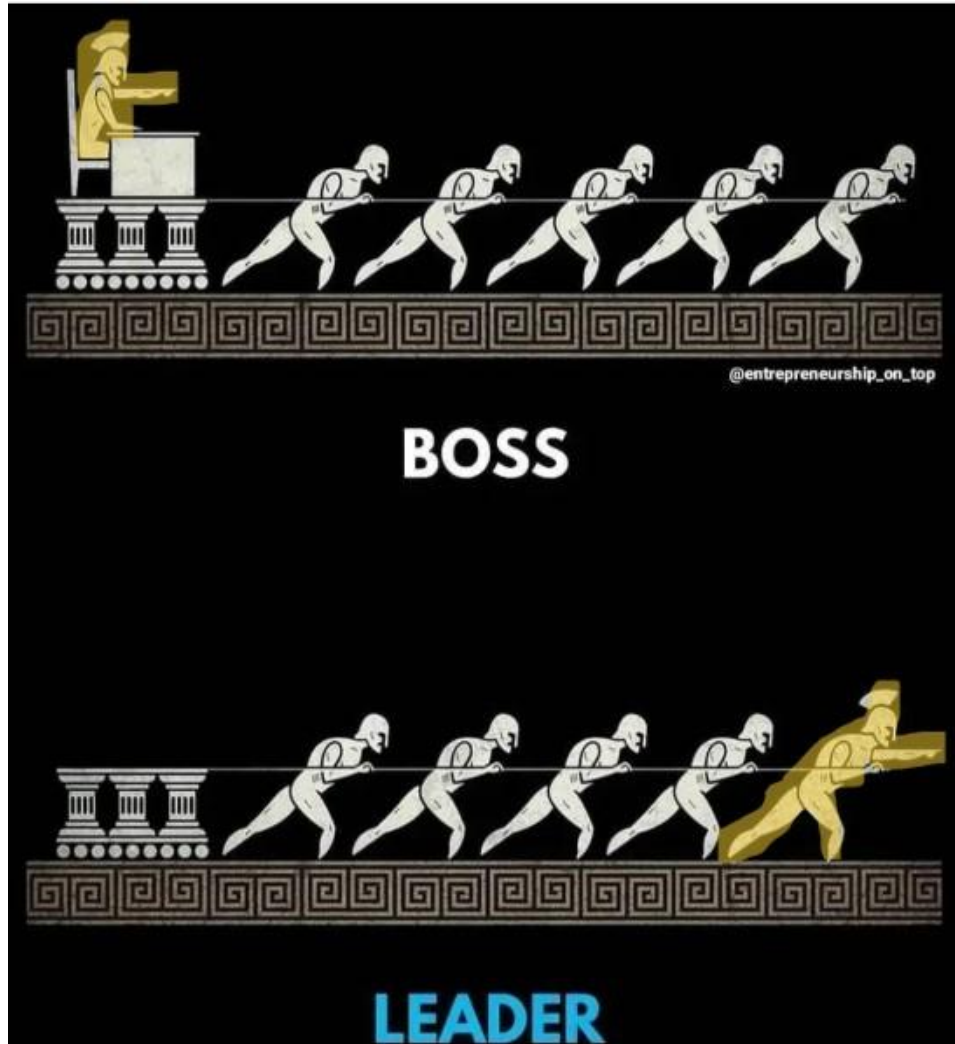
## Negative:

- ▶ Funding will always be an issue

Avoid at all costs



# Are you going to be a boss or a leader?



# 3. Communications

Your most important skill

# *Understand* who you're working with



Trustees, Senior Leadership Team, School  
Administrators, PACs, Unions

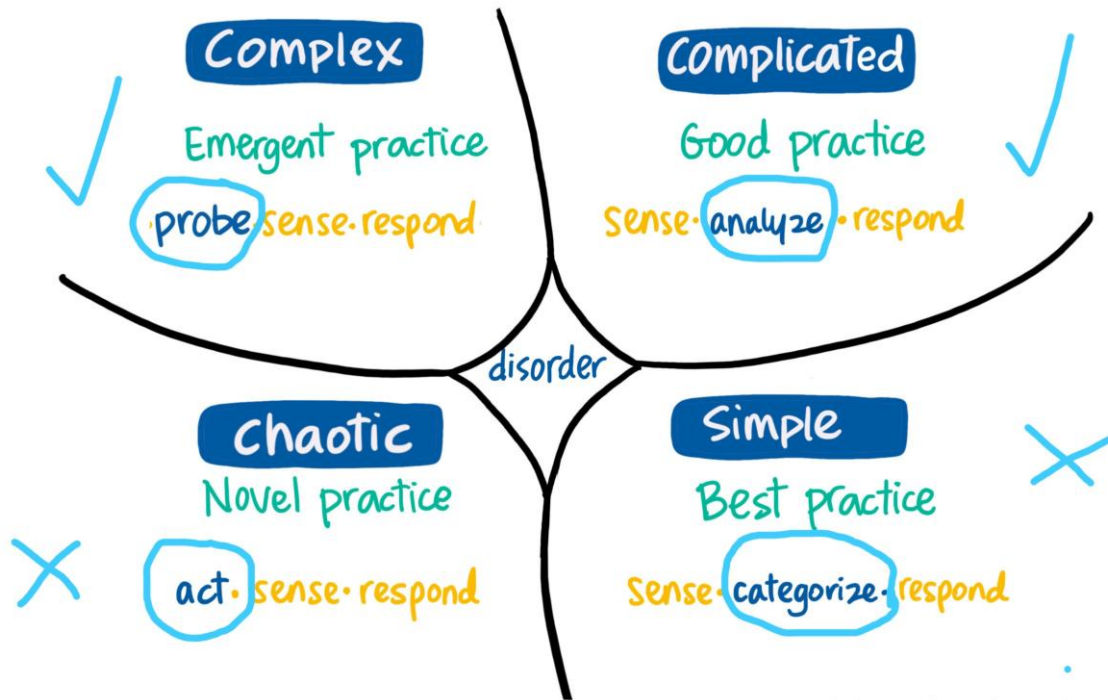
Before responding or presenting, ask yourself:  
Are they...

- ▶ New or experienced?
- ▶ Personal agenda?
- ▶ Internal pressures?
- ▶ External pressures?
- ▶ Level of understanding?

# *Trustee* Fishbowl



# Cynefin



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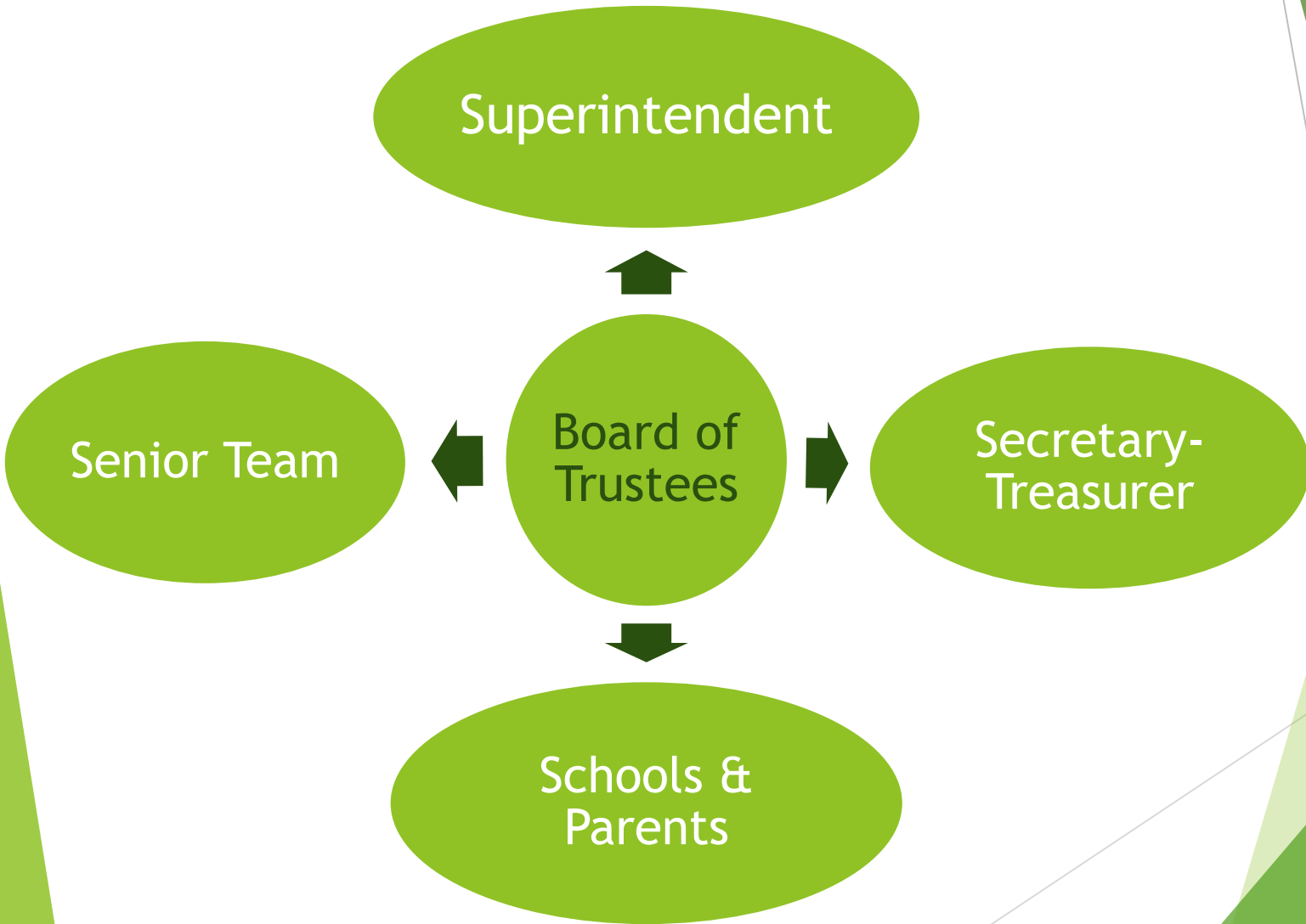
# Governance is driven by the data provided



## Trustees are friendly, but they are not your friend



# Multi Channel



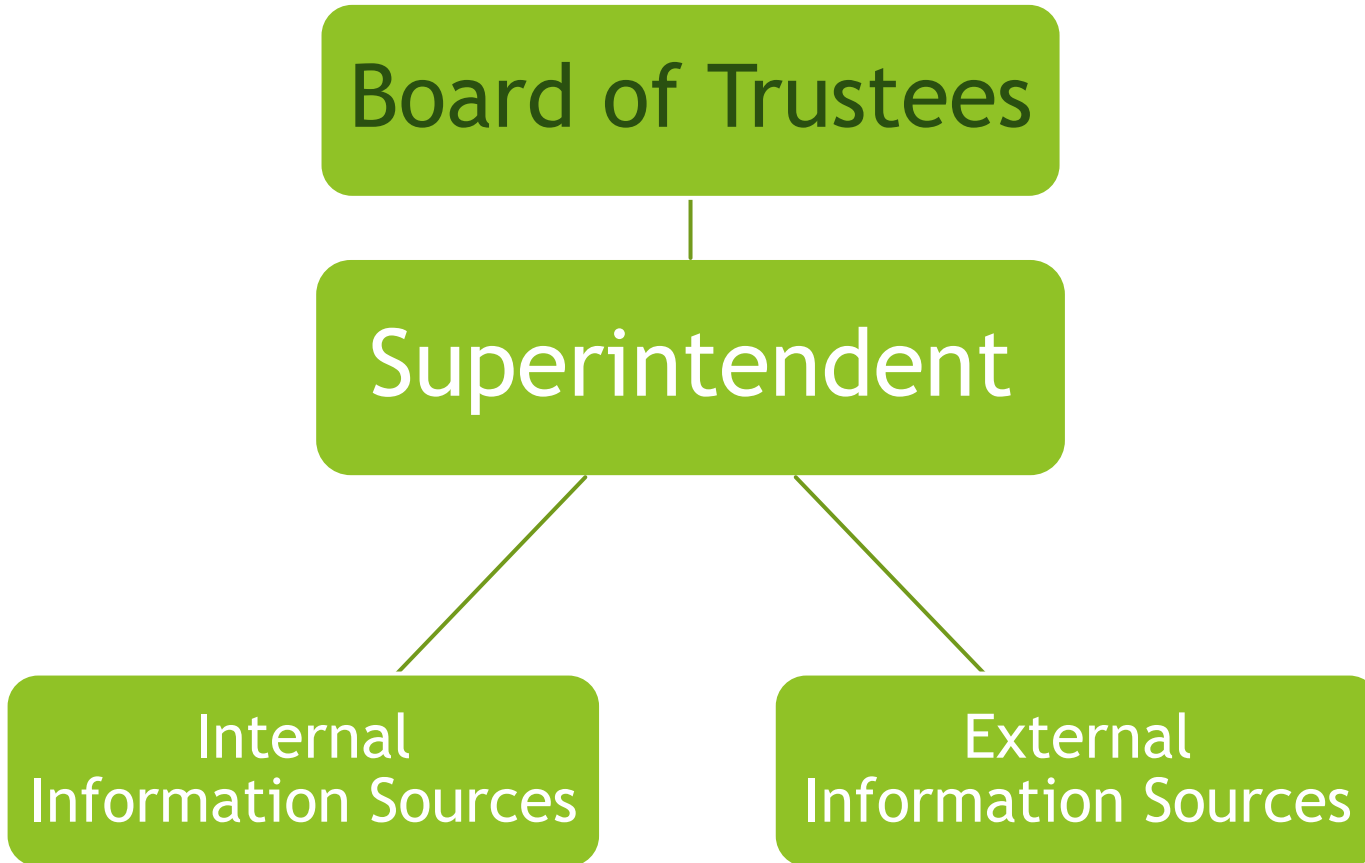
# Single Channel

Board of Trustees

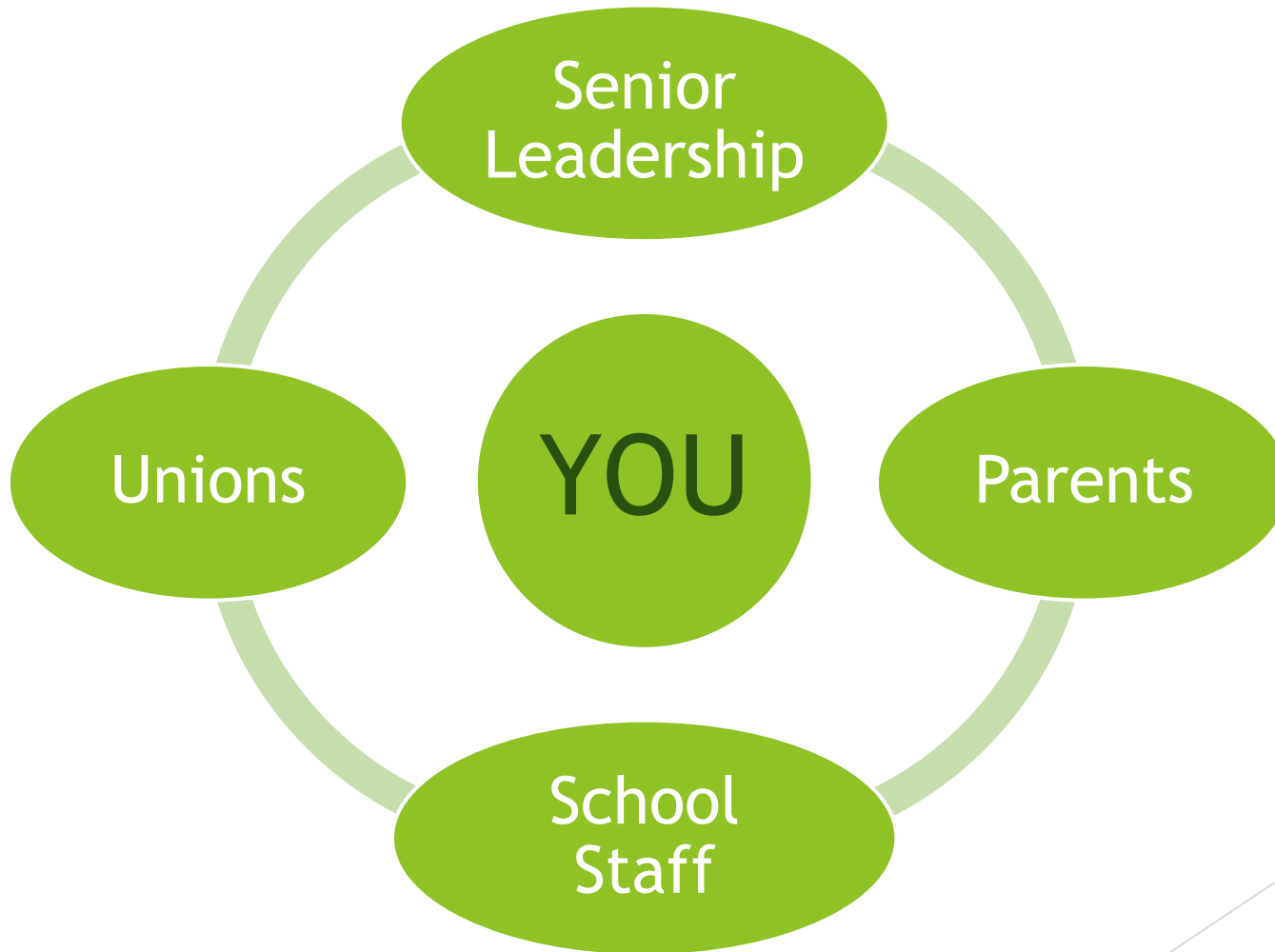
Superintendent

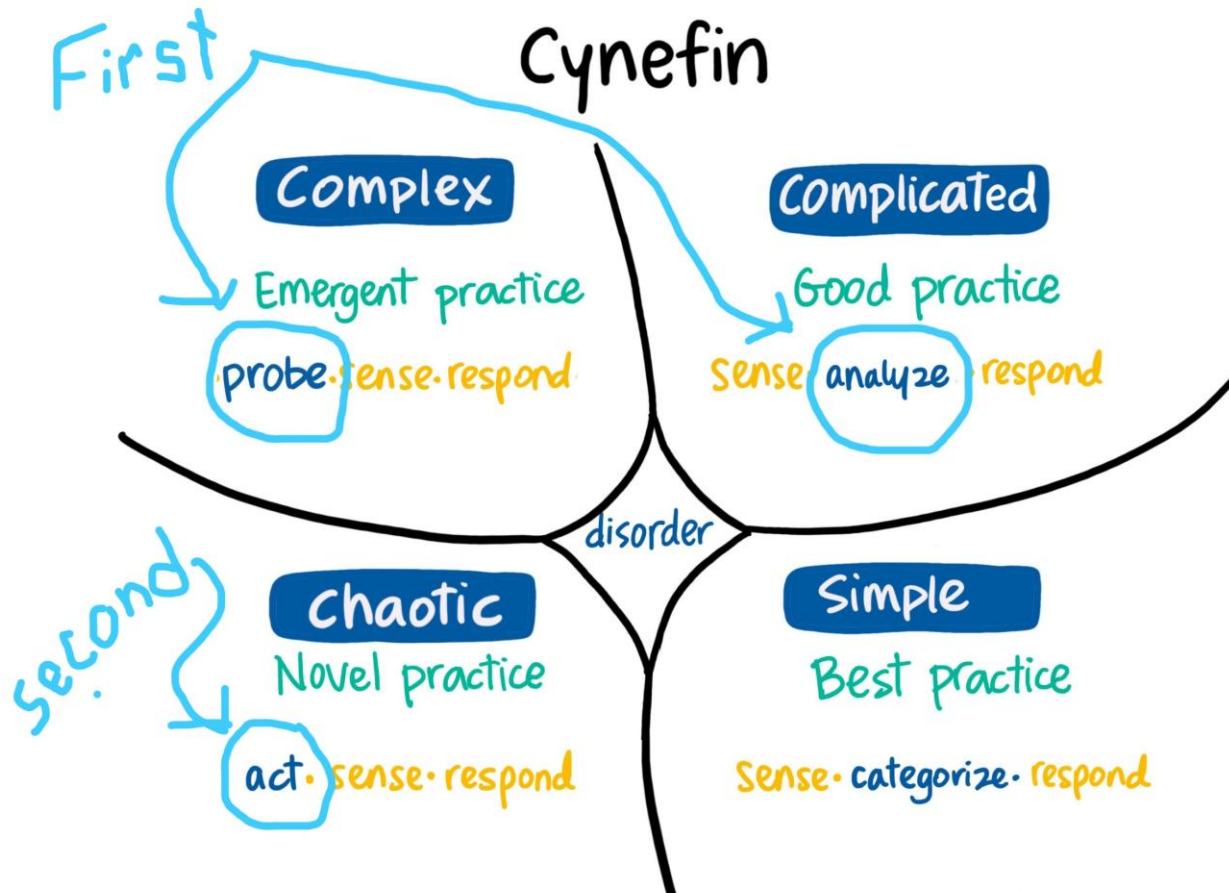
Internal  
Information Sources

External  
Information Sources



# *Your* Fishbowl





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## **OPERATIONAL HIERARCHY – *Government Level***

**Cabinet & Treasury Board**

Establishes Provincial budget & ministry allocations



**Ministry of Education & Childcare**

Allocates funding to districts; issues instructions & approves capital plans & budgets



**District Boards of Education**

Develop Strategic Plans

## **OPERATIONAL HIERARCHY – *Governance/Executive Level***

**Trustees**

**Develop Strategic Plan**



**Superintendent & Secretary Treasurer**

**Identify capital & operational actions needed to support the Strategic Plan & FESL**



**Secretary-Treasurer & Director of Facilities**

**Develop capital plans, AFG slates and operational budgets**

## **OPERATIONAL HIERARCHY - *School Level***

### **Principals**

Receive requests from staff & PACs; liaise with Manager & Director with respect to those requests



### **School staff**

Inform Principals regarding health, safety, instructional needs



### **PACs**

Work with Principals to identify school needs appropriate for PAC funding support

# What do your colleagues and stakeholders understand about the business of public education?

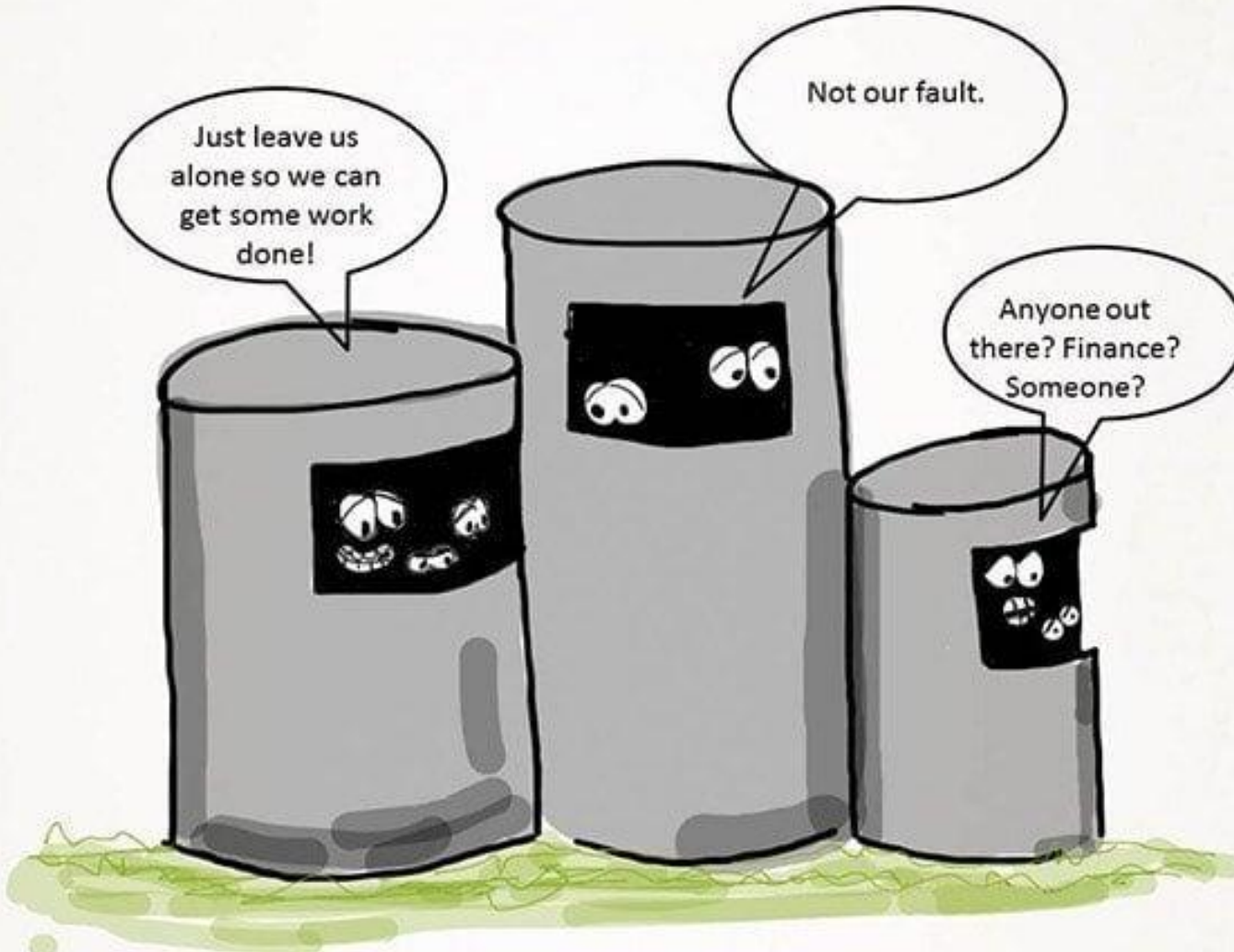


The most knowledgeable person in one domain may be the most ignorant in another.

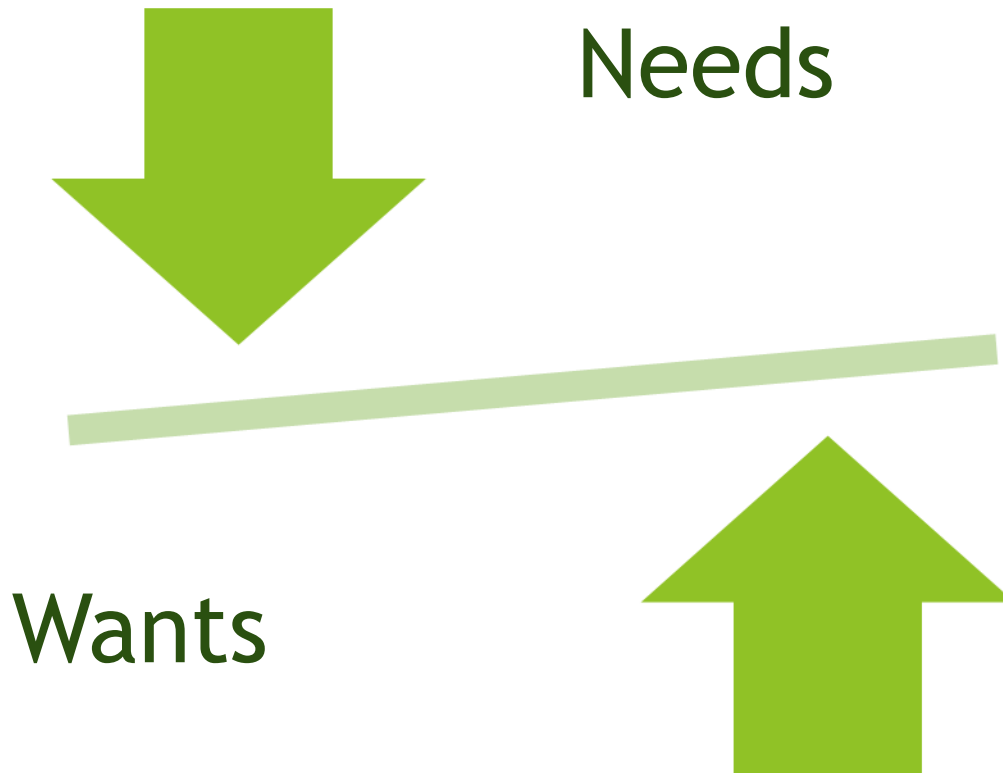
— *Albert Camus* —

AZ QUOTES

# Beware the finance silo



You have to balance





# *Own Your Work*

- Know your sandbox, and own it
- Inform, don't ask for permission
- When you make a decision, own it
- When the senior team makes a decision, own it
- When you make a mistake:
  - Own it
  - Fix it
  - Learn from it
  - Move on

# Leadership?



You'll never feel ready because ready isn't a feeling, it's a decision.