

## INTRODUCTION

# Leading Flourishing Schools: Cups, Torches & Lightbulbs!



*“The crux of the matter for Flourishing Schools is the extent to which their school culture increases the CAPACITY of staff and students.”*

## The Legacy of School: Helping or Hindering Our Adult Lives...

One of the greatest gifts we can receive from our time at school is the discovery of the skills, attitudes and beliefs that underpin lifelong learning. Yes, curriculum knowledge is important, but the impact on our lives from knowing that the capital of Peru is Lima is far and away surpassed by the love of learning and the knowledge of how to learn. Lifelong learning is about resilience, creativity and the ability to adapt to an ever changing world. Lifelong learning underpins all success in life.

*“A Teacher Affects Eternity” - H. Adams*

Developing a love of learning is a precious gift that is sparked and then cultivated by dedicated educators, who know and care for their students. These educators not only meet each and every student at their academic level, but they help them push far beyond what they imagined they were capable of. We call these very dedicated educators ‘unicorn teachers’ because they have such a magical and monumental impact on the students in their care. When you close your eyes and think of the teacher that had the biggest positive impact on your career and life, that’s your unicorn teacher.

BUT sadly for many of us, when we close our eyes to think of the teachers that have had a massive positive impact, we may not remember any, or if we're lucky we may remember one or two at best. This is not because our memories are failing us but rather because the way many schools operate inadvertently block the potential for magic moments and unicorn teachers. As you will see, if we make simple changes to the way we run our schools, changes that do not disrupt all the other essential activities and obligations, changes that can be easily applied across different countries and cultural contexts, we can increase the magic moments and unicorn teachers in the lives of current and future students.

## **Teaching & Learning Require Energy: You Cannot Pour From An Empty Cup!**

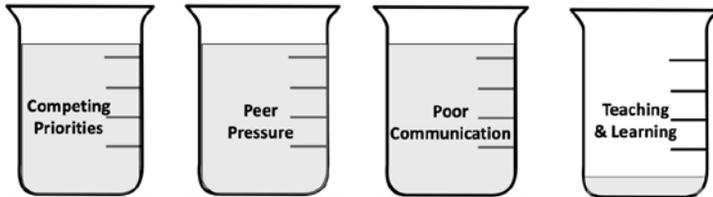
In every school, every student, every teacher, and every staff member who works behind the scenes arrives each day with a baseline level of capacity (energy, focus, and beliefs) that directly impacts the teaching and learning experiences that will occur. If you imagine capacity like water in a cup some students, teachers, and staff have cups that are full to overflowing, while others have barely a few drops. Obviously, to get the most out of teaching and learning more capacity is better and school culture plays a major role in the preservation or depletion of capacity.

*"You cannot pour from an empty cup"- Deborah King*

In schools with a low capacity culture (characterised by ill-defined, and inconsistent support systems for staff and students) tremendous amounts of energy are burned across the school on navigating competing priorities, uncertain relationships, and poor communication (see diagram below). This leaves little to no energy left over for quality teaching and learning. In short, schools with low capacity culture drain the cups of students, teachers and support staff alike, and you cannot pour from an empty cup.

## Low Capacity School Culture

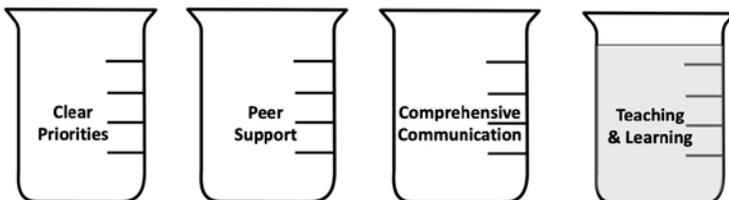
All my available energy is spent on managing competing priorities, peer pressure and poor communication - with nothing left for teaching and learning...



In stark contrast, schools with high capacity culture (characterised by clearly defined, and consistent support systems for staff and students) help staff and students to preserve tremendous amounts of energy to engage in quality teaching and learning because priorities are clear and known, relationships are supportive, and comprehensive communication enhances performance and support across the school (see diagram below). In short, schools with high capacity cultures help all staff and students to flourish by keeping their cups as full as possible.

## High Capacity School Culture

All my available energy is spent on quality teaching and learning because I have clear priorities, strong peer support and up-to-date communication...



## High Capacity School Culture: Systems Matter More Than Influence – The Lightbulb vs. The Torch

Creating a high capacity culture where all staff and students can flourish is THE MOST important thing that a school leader can do to ensure the success of their school. Throughout the world there are some extraordinarily dedicated school leaders who have taken it upon themselves to use their individual influence and personal effort to shine the light of improvement. But while admirable, individual influence and personal effort isn't sufficient for this most important of tasks.

Just like the narrow beam of light from a torch (see diagram), the impact of an leader's individual influence and personal effort is narrow. Thus, where the leader's focus is maintained, excellence is guaranteed. However, an individual leader cannot focus everywhere all the time. When leaders rely solely on their influence and personal effort not only will performance be skewed to reflect their own areas of focus but also the risk of burnout will be exponentially magnified as the size of the school increases.



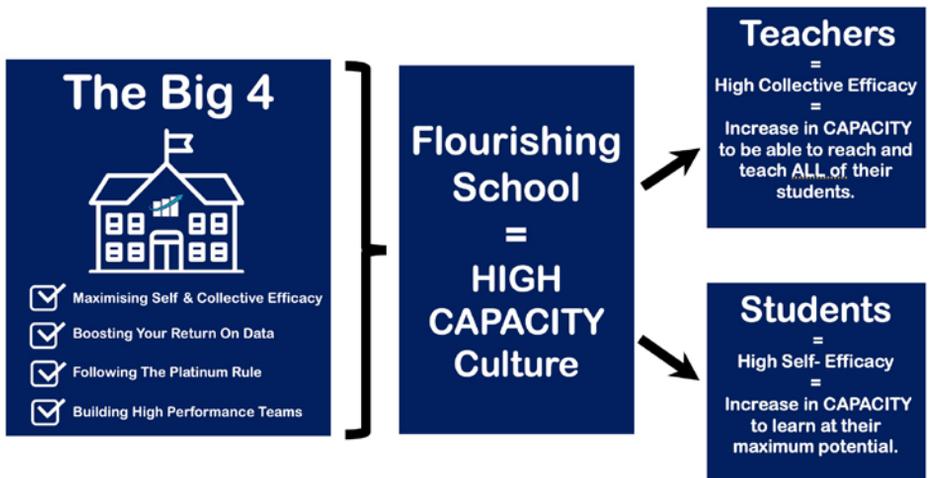
To achieve ultimate success in creating a high capacity culture, school leaders need to broaden the effects of their influence from the narrow beam of torchlight to the all encompassing glow of the lightbulb. For ultimate success, school leaders need schoolwide systems that are understood and practised by everyone.



## High Capacity School Cultures: The 'BIG 4' Support Systems

As you can see in the diagram below, there are 4 key support systems that need to be embedded in a school in order to facilitate a high capacity culture:

1. The system of Maximising Self & Collective Efficacy
2. The system of Boosting The Return On Data
3. The system of Communication Using The Platinum Rule
4. The system of Building High Performance Teams



In the chapters that follow we'll unpack each of these four support systems and show you how you can practically embed these across your school, to create a High Capacity School Culture where all your staff and students can flourish!

Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD

## **Introduction: - Chapter Summary -**

- School is important: It helps or hinders our adult lives!
- Teaching & learning require energy: You cannot pour from an empty cup!
- High capacity school culture: Systems matter more than influence – the Lightbulb vs the Torch.
- There are 4 key support systems which need to be embedded in a school in order to build a high capacity culture.