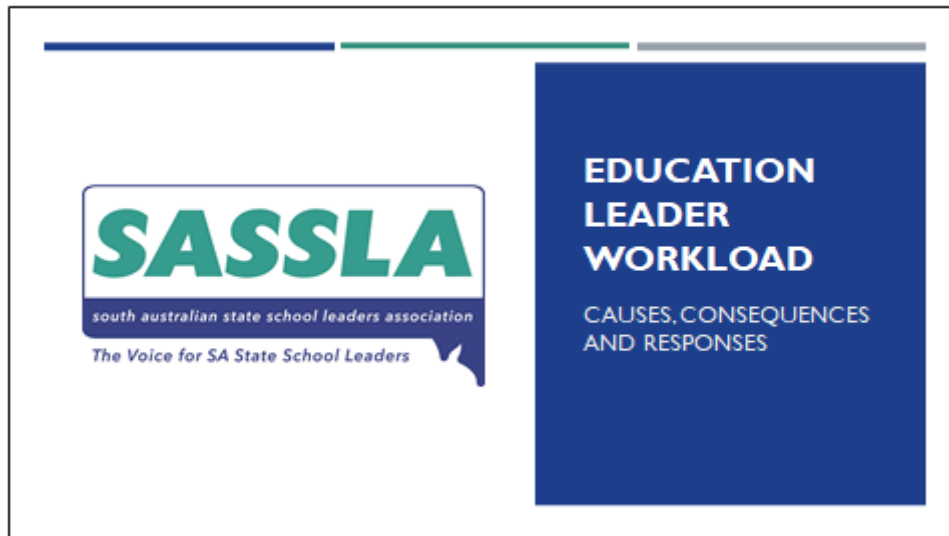


## SASSLA 2022 Conference Presentation - Phil O'Loughlin

### Site Based Education Leader Workload - Causes, Consequences and Responses



#### Slide 1

##### **Introduction**

Education leader workload is a subject that has been a passionate interest for me over ten years. Firstly, as a senior executive of the Department for Education in South Australia and more recently as the Chief Executive of SASSLA.

Working “on both sides of the fence” has provided me with a deep understanding and appreciation of the work of school leaders. I have also seen first-hand how excessive workload impacts people, and the performance of our public education system.

The key touchstones in forming the arguments for change I present today are my extensive involvement in industrial relations, HR policy development, and continuing engagement with representative associations and individual leaders over many years. My thinking is heavily influenced by reflection on my own experience, and the increasing research information on education leader workload now available.

I have come to see the problem of excessive workload as a chronic problem (or what’s often referred to a wicked problem) that does not lend itself to simple solutions. I believe it can only be understood as a systems-based problem that requires analysis of the underlying causes of excessive workload; this opens new possibilities for alternative thinking and experimentation.

In this presentation I proceed from a starting point that the problem is very real. Phil Riley’s work gives testament to this. There is no disconfirming evidence, or voices which counter the evidence presented by Phil Riley.

Today I am staying with a “big picture” view of understanding excessive leader workload. My aim is to develop a new narrative about understanding the causes of excessive workload that can support the development of long-term strategic approaches to improve workload conditions for leaders. I cover a lot of territory and the presentation is mostly restricted to key points rather than detail. I am

very happy to talk further in the discussion session or outside of this conference if people are interested.

This presentation, that incorporates my speaking notes, will be available on the SASSLA website next week.

The presentation has four parts:

- The costs and risks of excessive leader workload.
- Leader workload – a systems view.
- Evaluation of current responses to improving workload conditions.
- Future responses.

I will use the generic term “education leaders” to refer to Principals, Preschool Directors and Senior Band B Educators in schools. In the Victorian lexicon, this is referred to as the Principal Class. I will use the term “school” as a generic term to refer to schools and preschools.



## Slide 2

### **What the Evidence Tells us About the Problem of Excessive Workload**

- **People** - the effect of long hours doing emotionally demanding work has a detrimental effect on health and can negatively affect personal relationships and family life.
- **Productivity** - As a result of workload complexity and pressure, leaders are less able to prioritise critical elements that promote the growth of teaching, learning and practice.
- **Sustainability** - Where the demands of a job are judged to be excessive, relative to the extrinsic rewards (pay and conditions) and intrinsic rewards (job satisfaction and values alignment), people will make alternative career choices

## Slide 2 Notes:

We know from experience that there are costs and risks resulting from excessive workload. I have organised these under three key headings:

- People
- Productivity
- Sustainability

### People

- 53% of principals work upwards of 56 hours per week and this work extends into school holidays (Riley 2017).
- Principals experience high levels of job demands (1.5 times the general population), emotional demands (1.7 times), and emotional labour (1.7 times) (Riley 2017).

Long hours and high emotional demands mean the risk of burnout and exhaustion is very real. The findings of Phil Riley's longitudinal research provide compelling evidence of this. There is also emerging evidence of increased exit rates, disengagement, and workers compensation.

There is an inherent tension in HR management between a person as a "resource" - an abstract element of production and a "person" with their own intrinsic value (Gill 1999). The person as a "resource" is currently winning this tug of war. It leads to important questions about values and culture that underpin a healthy view of work in our society.

### Productivity

- Leaders undertake a high number of activities during the school day that are varied in nature and short in duration. The prioritisation of time tends to drive a bias of time spent on the urgent rather than important (Deloitte 2017).
- As a result of workload complexity and pressure, leaders are less able to prioritise critical elements that promote the growth of teaching learning and practice. This restricts time for creative activities (Deloitte 2017, Cobbold 2020, The Flourish Movement 2019).
- The research literature indicates that little productive work occurs after 50 hours has been worked in a week (Riley 2017).
- Research information points to:
  - Higher accountability and program management responsibilities crowding out discretionary effort (Deloitte 2017).
  - The limited emphasis on critical prioritisation and evaluation of initiatives means there is a crowded field of interests playing out at the school level that may have a limited value or are poorly designed (Deloitte 2017).
  - The negative psychological impact of long working hours can lead to overload which in turn affects capacity, performance, and decision making (Reilly 2017).

In the case of productivity, the key strategic question is - *how is the scarce resource of leadership time best directed to the activities that positively influence education outcomes and support positive wellbeing of students?* The evidence clearly points to time pressures being placed on leaders, this

diverts them away from the high value work that influences quality education over the medium to long term.

This question draws attention to putting a value on leadership time that can be used to prioritise initiatives and continually evaluate their effectiveness. The economic concept of opportunity cost that expresses the basic relationship between scarcity and choice can help better define long term costs and assists in redefining the value of leadership resources and time.

### **Sustainability**

- Research shows that 59% of interview respondents indicated that most of their teachers were discouraged from considering a role as a school leader by the nature and amount of work in which they observed their principals and vice principals engaged in (Cranston 2005).
- Department for Education SA data indicates high demand and thinning fields for leadership recruitment and point to very challenging conditions now and into the future.
- Australian research suggests four factors that are important in attracting potential applicants to principal roles (Cranston 2005):
  - Capacity to achieve work life balance.
  - School location acceptable to family.
  - Good work conditions.
  - Good remuneration.

Workload is a critical influence on qualitative conditions of employment.

Changing demographics are bringing a new urgency to this problem. SA figures which are broadly replicated across Australia indicate:

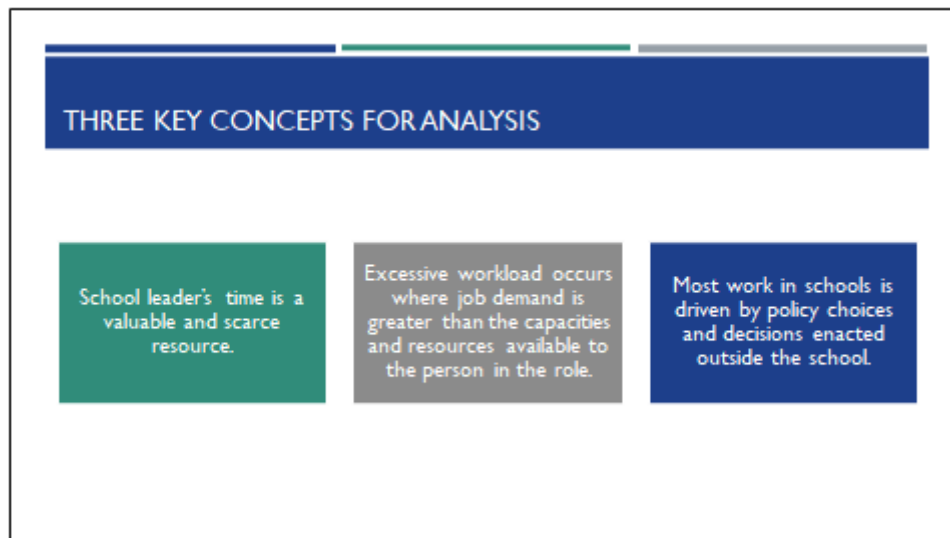
- A high percentage of leaders are in the retirement window.
- About 40% of the teaching workforce are part-time and less likely to express interest in a leadership role.
- A drop off in the number of teaching graduates and the general labour market is the strongest it's been in a generation.

These point in one direction- increased risk!

### **Summary**

Leaders are struggling on a day-to-day basis, there is a diversion of effort away from core educational roles and there is a struggle to fill roles with highly capable people.

The costs and risks associated with People, Productivity and Sustainability need to be brought into the foreground of thinking. We need tackle these problems now, tomorrow may be too late.



### Slide 3

#### **Three key concepts that underpin a critical analysis of school leader workload**

- School leaders' time is a valuable and scarce resource.
- Excessive workload occurs where job demand is greater than the capacities and resources available to the person in the role.
- Most work in schools is driven by policy choices and decisions enacted outside the school.

#### **Slide 3 Notes:**

An analysis of school leader workload must proceed from a clear understanding of:

- The value of work undertaken by leaders.
- The relationship between the defined duties of the position (job demand) and the person in the role.
- How work demand is being created.

#### **A Valuable and Scarce Resource**

- Case study literature highlights the key role of school leadership in school effectiveness and improvement. School leaders influence the motivations, capacities and working conditions of teachers who in turn shape classroom practice and school learning (OECD 2008).
- High performing school leaders add between two and seven-months growth in a single year (*Commonwealth of Australia, 2018*).
- The demonstrated effect of leadership is considerably greater in schools that experience more difficult circumstances. There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by powerful leadership (Leithwood et al. 2004).

A vital point to be made is that education leaders are the critical actors for delivering quality education and improving lives of young people. How leader roles are designed, how they are supported in their roles and how their time is utilised and prioritised are critical strategic questions.

## **The Job and the Person**

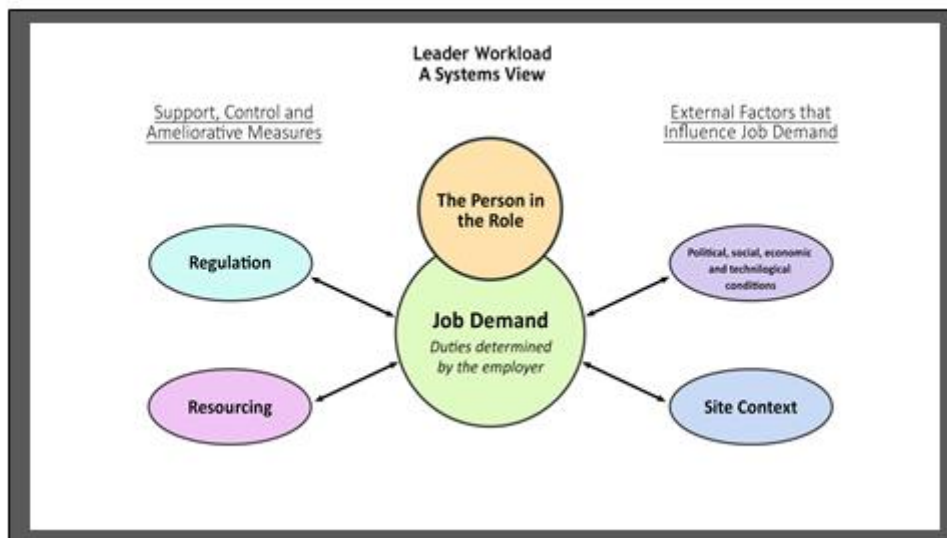
A study of workload is also a study about people doing the work - how leaders apply their skills and capabilities, organise, prioritise, and exercise their authority, and how they respond to demands and pressures. Workload is a construct of the relationship of a person to the work they do. It's the job and the person. Excessive workload, by definition, is the impact of work demand on a person's capacity to achieve the job requirements and maintain their own health and well-being. A successful strategy to improve workload conditions must focus on the job and the person in an integrative way.

Most of the policy choices that directly influence the work of the school are made outside the school. In Australia, most decisions relating to school policy is predominantly at the state level. OECD data shows 76% at state level and 24% at school level (OECD 2003).

This trend was described by the OECD in the early 2000s is now embedded in the business models in place across Australia:

- Schools making operational decisions that are defined by externally determined policy and accountability requirements. Local decision making is tightly bounded within these requirements.
- Departmental planning processes identify specific outcomes and direct work priorities at the school level (an example is the Department for Education SA Strategic Plan).

Work is policy in action. Most policy is determined outside the school at a government and Departmental level. Our critical view must focus on the creation and implementation of policy and how it directly influences workload conditions for leaders.



#### Slide 4

### Education Leader Workload - A Systems Map

#### Notes to Diagram:

I now want to explore the system of work and what we can learn about the current realities of leader workload. Workload is best understood as a system of intersecting and interacting elements. This architecture is described in the diagram.

There are three axes:

- In the centre, the interrelationship **job demand** and the **person in the Job** which defines workload.
- To the right, **external factors that influence job demand** - these are the key variables that shape job demand across a system and at a school level.
- To the left, **support, control and ameliorative measures** - these are the system stabilisers that serve to moderate workload on people in the role.

I will summarise each of the elements in the model, the current problems, and look at what is needed to improve leader workload.



### Slide 5

#### **Job Demand**

Job demand is the responsibilities defined by the employer:

- Duties defined in position descriptions.
- Statutory and policy requirements.
- Industrial instruments.
- Accountabilities defined for the role.
- Managerial directions.

Job demand is enacted through a business model which directs the structure and flow of work.

#### **Notes to Slide 5**

Job demand is work that is defined by your employer. It is a “non-negotiable” such as a Principal Job and Person Specification.

Job demand is enacted through a business model. Three primary features of business models now seen across Australia include:

- Direction from the centre on education and operational policy.
- Devolution to schools of authority for operational decisions within established policies.
- Accountability and measurement systems for management and compliance.

There has been growth in specific codified directions over the last 15 years. The formal has mostly replaced the informal. Quote from SA Primary School Principal:

*I had nine years in the Department then the next 30 in independent and international schools before returning to the Department for Education this year. I have certainly noticed some changes! Although I'm not new to the role of being a principal; working long hours, meeting legislated requirements etc., I am feeling a little overwhelmed by the amount of accountability and bureaucratic responsibilities that are*



*expected of us; a lot of time doing 'busy work'. This is not just in relation to the work of school principals but to other leadership staff, teachers and SSOs.*

*However well intended, some of the 'top down' approaches that any large system implements can unintentionally work against the very thing they are hoping for.*

*Authentic school improvement is a challenge in a climate of accountability against criteria which is externally imposed.*

*And busy teachers have less time to bring their passion and creativity to their work. Therefore, there is less buy in.*

*It is hard to find 'clear air' to get things done.*

### **SA Primary School Principal**

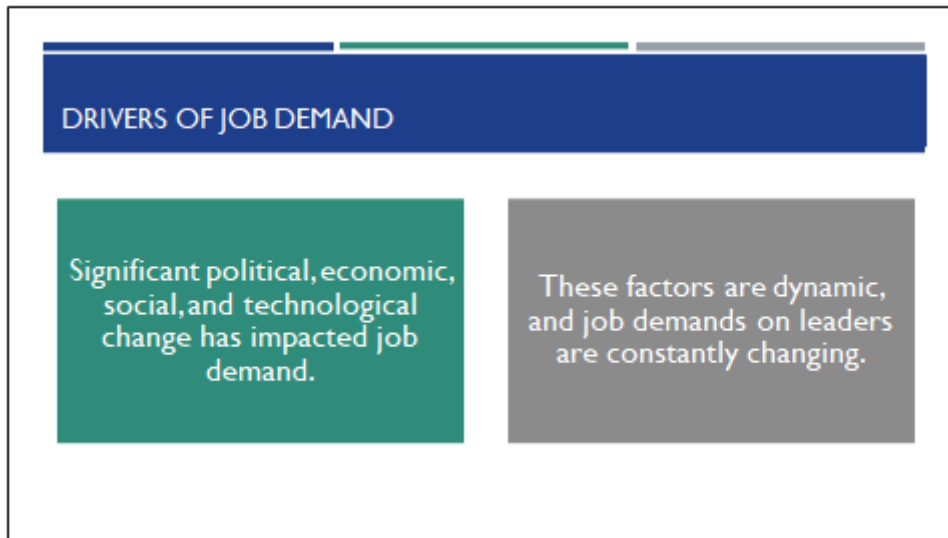
*Direct quote taken from South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA) chat line*

Accountability systems have been a big driver of work because they create work at two levels 1) new tasks associated with quality assurance and reporting systems and 2) data collection and professional knowledge requirements of leaders.

### **Summary**

Job Demand is work that must be done, it is not a choice. Research suggests that it is increasing both the hours and intensity of work and the mix of work undertaken, weighted to the urgent over the important. Leaders have less discretion over how they do their work and this shapes their experience of work.

It is important to explore the conditions as to why job demand has increased.



### Slide 6

#### **Social, Political, Technological, and Economic Work Demand Drivers**

- Significant political, economic, social, and technological change has and will continue to directly impact leader job demand.
- These factors are dynamic, and job demands on leaders are constantly changing.

#### **Notes to Slide 6:**

Schools are community-based service institutions on the front line of political, social, economic, and technological changes. What is happening in society inevitably plays out inside the school gate.

The strong currents of change that have influenced leader workload include:

- Change in government policy and community standards which has raised the bar in areas such as WHS, child protection, complaint processes, and social inclusion e.g., disability.
- Changing nature of public administration (blurring of lines between politics and public administration).
- Attitudes to risk which have led to complex, and time demanding risk management procedures being implemented.
- Education policy associated with individuation of student needs and student retention. The adoption of standardised testing as national policy and the concurrent rise in the new systems of measurement and accountability.
- Greater adoption of “evidence-based policy” which have introduced increased external direction and standardisation of practices.
- Economic and social conditions which shape changing community culture and behaviours.
- Technological change, notably social media and open access systems that blur the boundaries between work and home and create a “virtual school gate”.

The “Tsunami”:

- COVID 19 – real time and dramatic changes that transformed the role of leaders and placed the operation of the current business model in sharp focus.

These currents of change now define contemporary leader work and create new work demands.

### Summary

The key point is that changing external conditions have had a significant impact on work in schools and increased the demand on leaders. I am not making evaluative statements about policy, what I am saying is that new policies and systems enacted to respond to changing conditions are creating new job demands. Most of these new demands come through the school gate and fall on the lap of leaders.

In a complex and changing world these currents are not always predictable or planned. COVID-19 being a clear example.

If you illustrated this as a picture, it would be person with a bicycle pump. How long until the tire bursts!



### Slide 7

#### Site Context

The context in which work is performed impacts on leader workload:

- Location and socio-economic conditions.
- Catchment area and school enrolment.
- Performance and culture of school.
- Stability of enrolment, staffing etc.

#### Notes to Side 7

Context is a critical school variable that influences workload. It is mostly place based. It is generally stable but can change e.g., population trends driven by rapid changes in economic or social conditions.

Significant influences:

- Remoteness (restricted access to services).
- Transience of students.
- Increased demand associated with student cohort (individual education plans, different forms of support and intervention etc).
- An underperforming school that requires turnaround will place greater demands on a leader.

This is not a new problem. There is a strong history of budget adjustments to compensate for place based contextual variation in all Australian jurisdictions. There are two emergent risks:

- The capacity of systems to deliver services to some locations
- A tightening labour market that has made staffing more difficult at rural, remote, and hard to staff schools.


These trends are already impacting on leader workload. Noted in SASSLA's submission on the Department's Workforce Plan:

One principal stated, *"I spent a greater part of January making contacts and ensuring I could get good staff to come to my school"*. These approaches are becoming more of a necessity as established Departmental recruitment systems are not meeting needs.

### **Summary**

Site context is an important driver of job demand. Site context is catered for in budget allocations which provide additional funding to compensate for complexity; however, evidence suggests that the capacity to direct funding to build stable staffing structures or buy in wrap around services is becoming more difficult. Leaders are having to fill more gaps, and this is adding to work demand.

**RESOURCES**



Resources available to support leaders and ameliorate workload include:

- In-school business support
- In-school leadership support
- Central and district office support
- Line manager role and relationship
- Budget capacity and flexibility

### **Slide 8**

#### **Resources**

Resources available to leaders that support them in their role and ameliorate workload are:

- In school business support.
- In school leadership support.
- Central and District office support.
- Line manager role and relationship.
- Budget capacity and flexibility.

#### **Notes to Slide 8**

Resourcing is not just about money! It's about access to different services and supports that assist in the effective running of a school. It's about access, relevance, and quality of services. Money is only useful if you can purchase what you need which again brings risks associated with changes in the labour market.

Schools are highly complex businesses and increasingly need to draw on different resources to do the work to the standard expected. The quality and access to resources can be a "make or break" issue for some schools. The range, quality, and access of support available to people is a critical determinant of workload conditions.

In school resources:

- Business managers and support staff are critical actors in the smooth running of the school and can moderate demand on a leader's time. Attracting and retaining quality staff is an issue.
- Leadership density is the capacity to share duties and delegate with confidence. This is a particular problem in small schools and preschools.

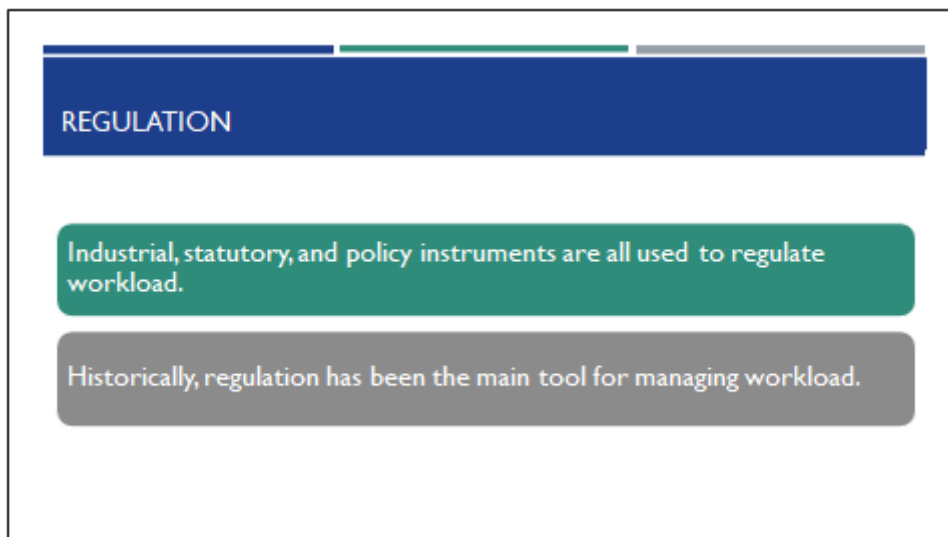
Central and district support are critical for high priority demands and non-routine tasks. Head offices have now retreated more to a governance role with service offerings concentrated in areas of agency level strategic risk such as IR, WHS, staffing, and payroll. My experience is that three major trends are evident:

- Models of business support that emphasise regulation and compliance rather than problem solving and understanding issues from a school perspective.
- Limited support for non-routine tasks. Lack of access, lack of expertise and the move away from personal contact to online based systems.
- Transformation of line manager relationships. These are now less relational, and more performance and accountability based.

### **Summary**

How resources are allocated and deployed to respond to changing conditions is crucial to balance the system.

Where a leader has limited internal capacity in the school, services are not easily accessible and additional pressure is placed on leaders to get things done. This is a particular problem in small and remote schools and begs a policy question about whether changes to the business model needs to be made to cater for these schools.



### **Slide 9**

#### **Regulation**

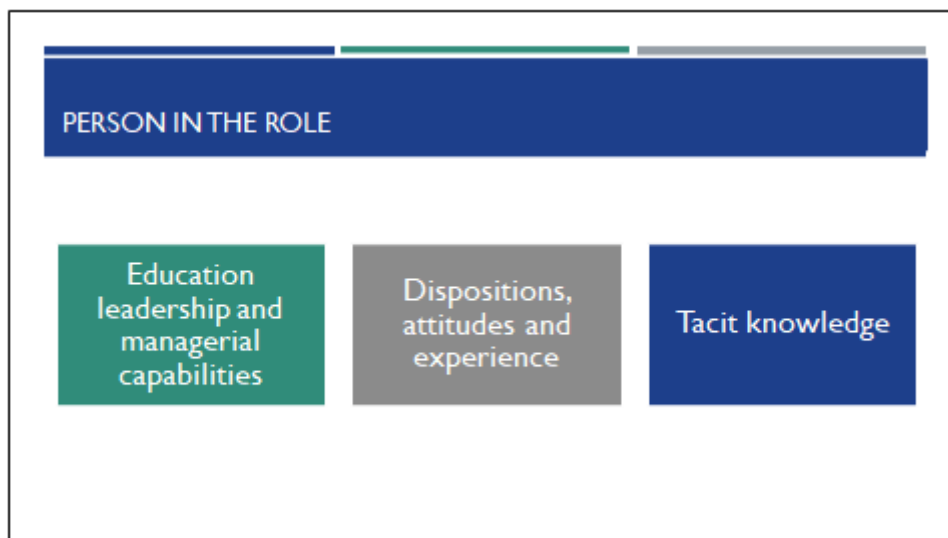
- Industrial, statutory and policy instruments are all used to regulate workload
- Historically regulation has been the main tool for managing workload

### Notes to Slide 9

- A specific feature of work in a school is that there are no fixed hours of work and industrial protections tend to focus on face-to-face teaching time, class sizes, release time etc.
- Leaders now tend to be treated like “executive employees” with consequential high expectations. They must manage their time to get the work done. Tension between job demand and regulation is an issue for leaders (SASSLA Preschool Director Workload Evaluations 2020 and 2021).
- Regulation of the teaching workforce can have spill over effects for the work of leaders. A contemporary issue that will be interesting to watch with respect to regulation is afterhours work for teaching and ancillary staff.

### Summary

The current models of regulation are not working for leaders. We know regulation has failed when some school leaders are working up to 70 hours a week and no questions are asked. New thinking is required on models of workload management and regulation that caters for the new realities of work.



### Slide 10

#### Person in the Role

- Education leadership and managerial capabilities are needed for success in the role.
- Individuals bring different dispositions, attitudes, and experience to the role and this is reflected in hours worked, emotional demand, and emotional labour in the role.
- Development of tacit knowledge over time can play a significant role in ameliorating workload.

#### Notes to Slide 10

- Very high levels of leadership and managerial capabilities are required to be a successful education leader.

- Peoples have different levels of skills, capabilities, and dispositions. People in similar positions will have different experiences, both the hours worked, and emotional measures can vary. Support to a person in the role must be tailored to the person if it is to be successful. This concept appears to have gained traction in most jurisdictions through mentoring programs.
- The Canadian Research (Leithwood and Azah, 2014) highlights the importance of automaticity (tacit knowledge) in moderating workload. Increased exit of leaders due to age and increased demand for corporate based education roles means that tacit knowledge is being stripped from the system. This has significant implications for positioning the type and range of services provided to leaders.

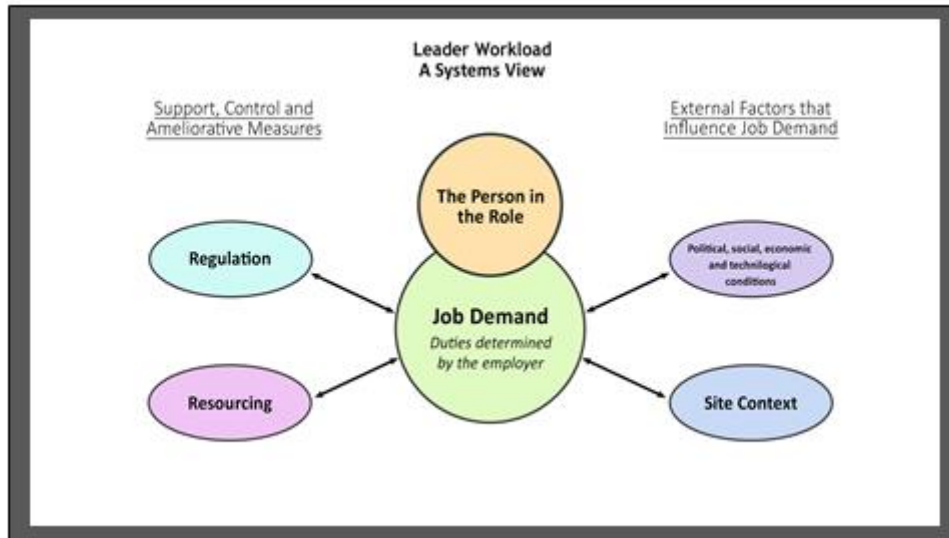
The following is important to manage workload:

- The quality of preparation, selection and ongoing support for aspirant and beginning leaders. Preparation needs to be focussed on developing educational and managerial capabilities to be successful in leadership roles (Leithwood and Azah 2014).
- The quality of line management can shape a person's experience in the role and the capacity of a line manager to work alongside a person and build productive working relationships. The new accountability-based models require deft handling to balance the sometimes conflicting demands of performance improvement and individual development and support. In my experience, some do it well and some do it poorly.
- Access and support when needed. Getting a number and standing in line doesn't work for urgent and high impact matters.

### **Summary**

We cannot rely on the tacit knowledge of leaders to keep the system afloat. New people are coming into leadership roles at a time when demands on leaders are at an historical high. People need the confidence to step forward. This points to redesigning the system to build development and support from a leader's perspective. This will require recalibration of the balance of corporate and school based needs.





### Slide 11

#### **Return to Slide 4 for Summary Points**

Leader workload is embedded in a system of work. The system of work is dynamic and constantly responding to new conditions and challenges. It is not defined by a simple linear cause and effect model.

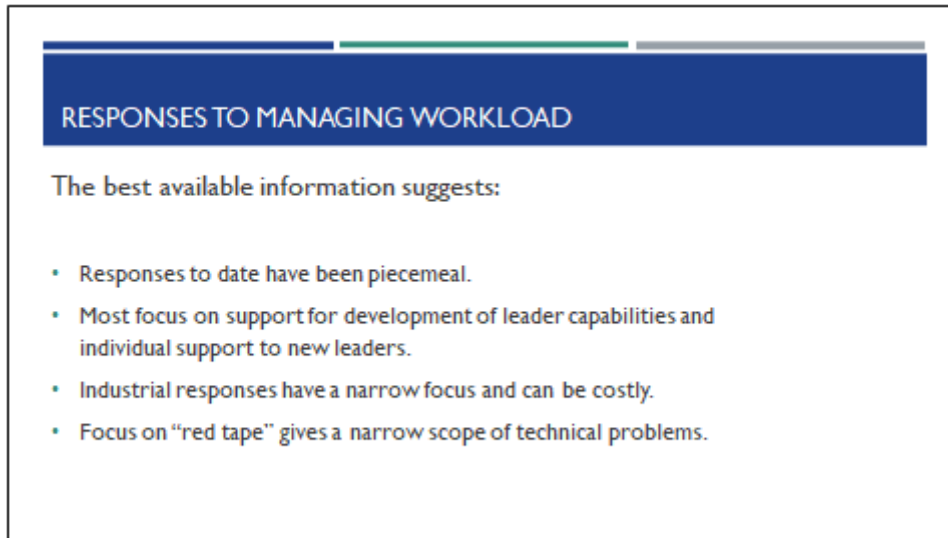
On any measure the job demand of leaders has increased and there is no remediation in sight:

- **Job demand:** Work is more structured and directed from the centre. Accountability systems are a major driver of work and discretionary effort is being crowded out.
- **External factors:** Ongoing and significant work demands. Schools are first responders to social, economic, technological, and political changes. The recent COVID 19 outbreak has stretched the system to breaking point.
- **Site context:** Labour market conditions have the potential to have significant workload impact on leaders. This will be most evident in rural, remote, and hard to staff schools.
- **Regulation and resourcing:** The stabilising systems of resourcing and regulation are less effective in managing and controlling leader workload. The quality and accessibility of resources have not kept pace with rising demands. Regulation does not provide an effective buffer against increased job demand.
- **The person in the role:** Work intensification and associated costs and risks on leaders must be brought back into balance.

#### **Risks and Cost**

- **People:** stress and psychological risk.
- **Productivity:** less value add from leaders where it counts – on the education of students.
- **Sustainability:** leadership roles are less attractive to aspirant leaders.

These problems are deeply embedded in a system of work. Sustainable improvements to leader workload require a strategic response.



**RESPONSES TO MANAGING WORKLOAD**

The best available information suggests:

- Responses to date have been piecemeal.
- Most focus on support for development of leader capabilities and individual support to new leaders.
- Industrial responses have a narrow focus and can be costly.
- Focus on “red tape” gives a narrow scope of technical problems.

### Slide 12

#### **Responses to Managing Workload**

The best available information suggests:

- Responses to date have been piecemeal.
- Most focus on support for development of leader capabilities and individual support to new leaders.
- Industrial responses have a narrow focus and can be costly.
- Focus on “red tape” gives a narrow scope of technical problems.

#### **Notes to Slide 12**

**SA:** Ernst and Young Red Tape Review (2009); Review of Teachers and Leaders Work 2011 (under the direction of the Industrial Relations Commission of South Australia); Departmental Internal Review of Principal Workload in preparation for the 2015 enterprise bargaining negotiations; Evaluation of Preschool Directors Work Evaluation 1 (2020) Evaluation 2 (2021).

**NSW:** Deloitte Principal Workload and Time Use Study for the NSW Department for Education (2017); The Flourish Movement, Helping School Principals Flourish not Just Cope (2019 Report presented to the New South Wales Department of Education).

**ACT:** Understanding Workload – What we have learnt and how we might achieve a sustainable teacher workload (2017).

**Victoria:** Bevington Group Review of Principal Workload; Ernst and Young, Organisation Design Guide for Victorian School Leaders (2016); Victorian Principal Health and Well Being Strategy 2018-2021; Australian Principals Federation enterprise bargaining claim 2020.

List does not include leader preparation and development strategies evident in most jurisdictions.

## General Observation

There is potential for valuable learning, but it is not sufficient to make sustainable long-term improvement to workload conditions.

- Primary focus is on school-based responses and wellbeing, not the underlying conditions that give rise to the problem - job demand.
- About the person more so than the job.
- Short run and sometimes shallow interventions rather than structural change.
- Tend towards “set and forget” style of policy with limited evidence of any critical evaluation.

“Tends to dance with the issues but when the band stops playing the hall empties”

### **Quote from David Burroughs, Westpac’s First Chief Mental Health Officer, Australian Newspaper March 2022:**

*The investment in mental health programs has not actually led to a reduction in mental health, while the cost and severity and frequency of psychological injuries has gone up. And the reason for that has primarily been on fixing people and an over reliance on things like employee assistance programs. They’re very popular but they don’t address the workplace barriers to mental health. So a psychosocial approach is one that doesn’t look at fixing people, it looks at supporting people when they need it, but it looks at the workplace factors that influence people’s experience of work and therefore performance, productivity and mental health outcomes.*

### **Summary**

Work has been undertaken to improve the workload conditions of leaders. However, it appears to lack evaluation and has not made substantial progress. If we stay with this approach, the problem of excessive workload will remain embedded in our systems of work. The likelihood is that the problem will get worse, and the consequential risks and costs increase.

## WORKLOAD A “SYSTEMS” PROBLEM

Assumptions and patterns of behaviour that give rise to excessive workload must be challenged:

- Problems need to be brought into the mainstream of managerial interest and decision making.
- Must be seen through the lens of risks and costs to give strategic value.
- Workload as an “adaptive” problem.
- The experience of work can shape the perception of workload.

### Slide 13

#### **Workload a “Systems” Problem**

For effective change to be realised the underlying assumptions and patterns of behaviour that give rise to excessive workload must be challenged.

- Problems need to be brought into the mainstream of managerial interest and decision making.
- Must be seen through the lens of “risks” and “costs” to give it a strategic value.
- Workload as an “adaptive” problem.
- The experience of work can shape the perception of workload.

#### **Notes to Slide 13**

Experience suggests that the current managerialist and industrial relations approaches will not solve the problem.

Excessive workload must be seen as a systems problem which often requires multiple interventions to address a problem. There is no playbook and therefore there must be a willingness to experiment and take risks.

In thinking about leader workload as a “systems problem” there are four principles that are important.

1. The problem of excessive workload needs to be brought into the mainstream of managerial interest and decision making. If it is not acknowledged, not talked about, not critiqued, and not prioritised it will not be dealt with. While it remains an issue on the fringe, little will be done about it.
2. Putting a cost on excessive workload gives it a strategic value. The economic concept of opportunity cost that expresses the basic relationship between scarcity (leaders time) and choice (best use of this time) can be used to better define long term opportunities and risks. The evidence clearly shows two important risks:

- Leaders are under intense pressure to keep their head above water leaving very little time for discretionary effort.
  - Recruitment data shows the market for principals is close to collapse.
3. Models requiring collaborative learning and different forms of engagement need participation by those experiencing the problem. Problems of this nature are more complex and require sophisticated leadership and longer timeframes. They are not amenable to quick fixes. The work of Heifetz and Laurie (2001) on technical and adaptive change provides an important framework for understanding and working with problems of leader workload.

Adaptive problems (long term system changes):

- Difficult to identify (easy to deny).
- Requires changes in values, beliefs roles relationships and approaches to work.
- People with the problem do the work of solving the problem.
- Requires change in numerous places usually cross organization boundaries.

Technical (the red tape review):

- Easy to identify.
- Often lend themselves to quick and relatively easy solutions.
- Require change in just one or a few places. Often contained within organisational boundaries.

A successful strategy must have the “what” and the “how” joined at the hip.

4. The cultural models that have sustained public education are based on a professional model of genuine engagement with the underlying purpose of education. In the education context the term “moral purpose” has been used to describe this set of values (Fullen 2005).

People view workload through their experience of their work. In an environment where there is a strong and collegiate professional culture evidenced by the values held by staff in relation to student learning, a strong commitment to professional development, and where staff are happy to “chip in” to help each other, the experience of workload is likely to be different from that experienced in a tightly structured and controlled environment. The reality is that professionalism requires standards and accountability systems but thrives on trust and autonomy (O’Neill 2002). Integral to this view is the need to maintain high levels of trust in the system and not over rely on prescriptive rules (*Leithwood and Azah 2014, Riley 2017*).

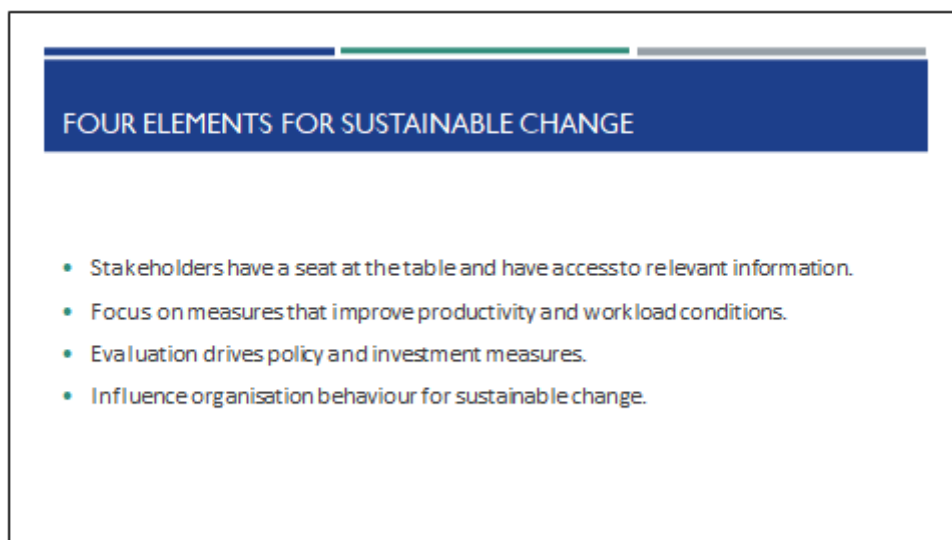
Understanding and actively managing the inherent tension between trust and accountability is needed to sustain a professional, creative, and passionate culture. The experience of work will be positive when work has meaning and purpose. The challenge presented by new systems of accountability is that they have the potential to create new cultural norms driven by the need for conformity to an expanding array of procedures, data management, record keeping, and the endless focus on targets. The ultimate result may be the reframing of work away from a strong personal mission to a contractual requirement. Such a shift has the

potential to diminish the underlying moral purpose of what it means to be an educator. This is a major risk that needs increased visibility.

## Summary

Four important points:

- Openness and transparency.
- Putting a cost on excessive workload gives it a strategic value. It is a problem requiring attention.
- Collaborative processes are needed to solve complex problems.
- The experience of work shapes the perception of workload - how we design work and jobs to create meaning and job satisfaction is important.



## Slide 14

### Four elements for sustainable change

- Stakeholders have a seat at the table and have access to relevant information.
- Focus on measures that improve productivity and workload conditions.
- Evaluation drives policy and investment measures.
- Influence organisation behaviour for sustainable change.

### Notes to Slide 14

This model challenges conventional thinking about the role of management and stakeholders:

- Management must be open to exploration and experimentation. This means giving up some control of process but not decision-making powers. Middle level leaders responsible for school operations are critical actors in the process.
- Stakeholders (both institutional and non-institutional) need critical capabilities of inquiry/research, a realist view of what possible and a preparedness to see managements

perspective. Stakeholders must build their capacity to participate in and undertake evaluation work if they are to influence decisions.

- Focus on improving systems of work that balance productivity improvement with workload conditions.

### **Importance of Evaluation**

Evaluation is crucial to exploring and understanding the effectiveness of work and the impact on people:

- Evaluation should occur on a continuum starting with the development of the policy where the critical question is “what is the impact” of the policy decision on the operation of a school and the workload of the leader.
- Don’t underestimate the value of observation, stories and alternative evaluation strategies.
- Policy change and investment – critically assessing options for review and change and implementing positive change include:
  - Small scale changes are important.
  - Short medium and long-term changes will be necessary.
  - Focus on the underlying conditions that shape systems behaviour.

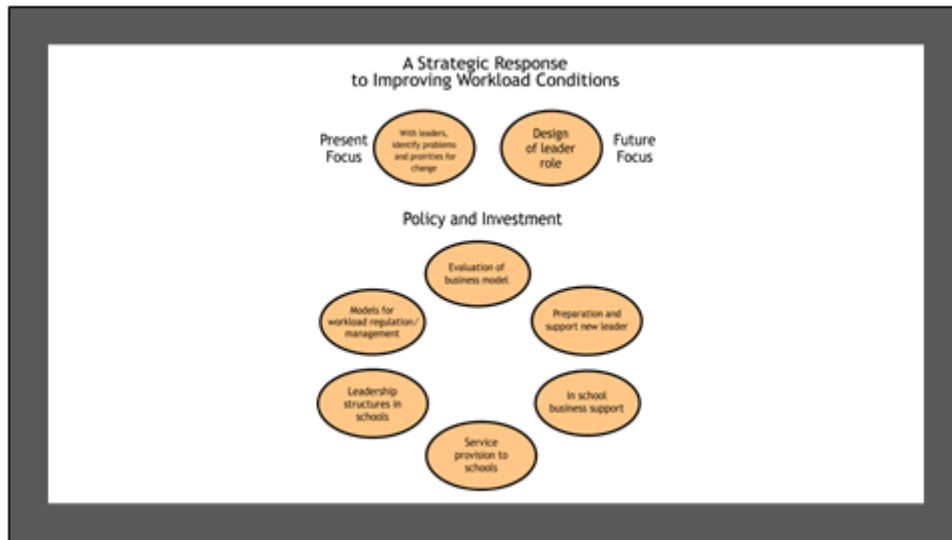
### **Organisation Behaviour**

Current responses are not directed at changing the behaviour of the organisation in relation to understanding and responding to workload outside of narrowly defined projects. Three areas of focus to achieve behavioural change include:

- **Interests:** understanding and working with different interests.
- **Incentives:** designing incentives to recognise and reward preferred behaviour e.g., recognising and confronting individual workload issues.
- **Information:** identifying and making transparent information that is relevant to the management of workload including evaluation reports.

### **Summary**

Simply put “set and forget” policy responses do not work because they offer a solution before understanding the problem and they do little to change organisation behaviour.



**Slide 15**

**Overview of a Change Program**

**Project Structure**

- Defined project timeline (suggest two years).
- Establish a reference group consisting of senior Departmental staff, stakeholder, and staff representatives. Have key resources available to work with the group - operational staff, finance, data, HR, IR, and communications staff.
- Lead executive appointed with direct reporting line to the Chief Executive (preference for school-based experience or at a minimum sound knowledge of school operations).
- Clear communication to staff on understanding of the problem and the aims and objectives of the project.
- Reference group to provide advice and support to project leads, review progress and sign off on final proposals for executive decision making.
- Final report to be written on key project learnings, ongoing process support and evaluation of outcomes.

**Values and Behaviours**

- Executives to walk in the shoes of stakeholders, stakeholders to walk in the shoes of executives.
- Value and support creative thinking and problem solving.
- Thinking grounded in benefits delivered in the short, medium, and long term.

**Phase 1 - first six months of project**

Present Focus – What’s driving excessive workload and what can we do about it?

Education Directors to conduct collaborative evaluation of workload issues within their area of responsibility. Identify issues into two areas:

1. Issues we can take responsibility for at a school or partnership level.



2. Issues that require system changes. Not a wish list but identification of important problems and priorities underpinned by clear rationale.

Invite open submissions from interested parties (including corporate units of the Department and stakeholder groups) using a common format approach.

### **Future Focus – Stakeholder Group**

Small group to be formed to develop school leader role designs. Key areas of focus:

- Maximising the value of leaders time to lead education improvement and effective governance of schools.
- Making the jobs attractive to a new generation of leaders.

### **Phase 2 - Develop Change and Investment Proposals (to be undertaken over 18 months)**

Reference Group to review material from initial engagement phase and identify a small number of strategic projects that are critical to maximising productivity and positively supporting leaders in their role.

Strategic priorities (suggest five or six only) can include:

- Preparation and support of new principals.
  - Critical evaluation and prioritisation of new initiatives.
  - In school business support.
  - Leadership models in schools.
  - Business model for service provision to schools.
- Identify project leads, resourcing, and timelines.
- Identify matters that may be dealt with through processes of communication, advice, or direction to relevant areas of the Department.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The argument I have presented is that if we do not actively and intelligently confront the problem of excessive leader workload, we pose unacceptably high risks to people in the role, and to Public Education as a whole.

Positive change can only be achieved if the problem of excessive workload is brought from the background into the foreground of organisational thinking and action. We need to confront the uncomfortable truths. We must avoid the tendency towards benign acceptance of the problem “it’s just how the world is”, “everyone is working longer and harder”, “it goes with the role”, or just rely on initiatives that paper over the problem. This thinking must be challenged.

A shift in process thinking is needed if progress is to be made:

- Name and own the problem.
- Identify strategic risks and costs.
- Develop processes for collaborative engagement.
- Experiment and learn as you go.

- Be prepared to take a medium to long term view to get changes that are needed.
- Build system wide capacity.

Stakeholder groups should play a vital role in building awareness of the problem and developing new thinking and strategic approaches. After all, the leaders we represent understand the problems through their daily experience and their insight and wisdom is critical to enact change.