

# Taking A Distributed Perspective to School Leadership & Management: Diagnosis and Design for Instructional Improvement

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*Funded by National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Institute for Education Sciences, & Carnegie Foundation*

# The Argument

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- Engaging with the *practice* of leading and managing instruction is what matters.
- Beyond an ‘implementation mindset,’ engaging the twin processes of *diagnosis* and *design*.
- To do diagnosis and design well a framework is necessary; such as a distributed framework.
- **Diagnosis and Design in Practice: Examining the formal and informal organization.**

**“We have one hunter and one gatherer ...  
everyone else is a consultant”**



# Diagnosis and Design

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**Diagnosis** = identify nature or cause of something

**Design** = Shaping the organization and system infrastructure to purposes

# Overview

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- a) Exploring the Entailments of Taking *A Distributed Perspective*.
- b) Diagnose and Design from a Distributed Perspective.
  - Formal Organization: Positions & Organizational Routines
  - Informal Organization: Getting to Practice
- c) Challenges in taking a Distributed Perspective for Novice Principals.

# **A Distributed Perspective: Elements and Entailments**

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# A Distributed Perspective

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- A diagnostic framework that draws attention to particular dimensions of leadership & management work
- A design framework for guiding leadership and management improvement efforts.



# Task One

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- What does 'distributed leadership' mean to you?
- Write a one sentence definition that captures your understanding of distributed leadership.



# The Leader-Plus Aspect

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The **Leader-Plus** aspect:

- The principal often works with others when performing leadership and management tasks.
- At times other formally designated leaders take responsibility for leadership and management tasks.
- And, individuals with no formal leadership designations often have a hand in leading and managing instruction.



# Embracing the Realities

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“Initially I tried to do it all. I was trying to do it all and that was impossible. You cannot be all things to all people... I don't know everything about everything.”

Adriana

Dr. Johnson

“Being a good principal is like dancing that wonderful tango, blindfolded, yet serving lunch, breakfast and dinner on skates to 500 people,” [each of whom has] ordered something different” [and each of whom] “brings...their own set of dynamics, personalities, that you have to be acutely aware of in order to serve them.”

# The Practice Aspect

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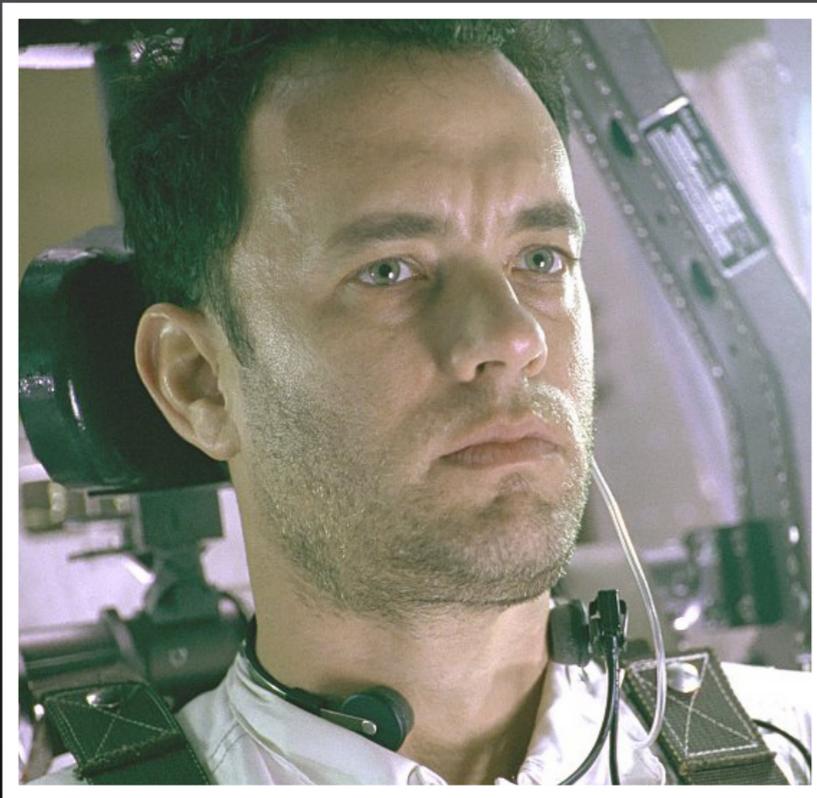


## Task Two: Examining Leadership in Practice

# Mission Control and Beyond

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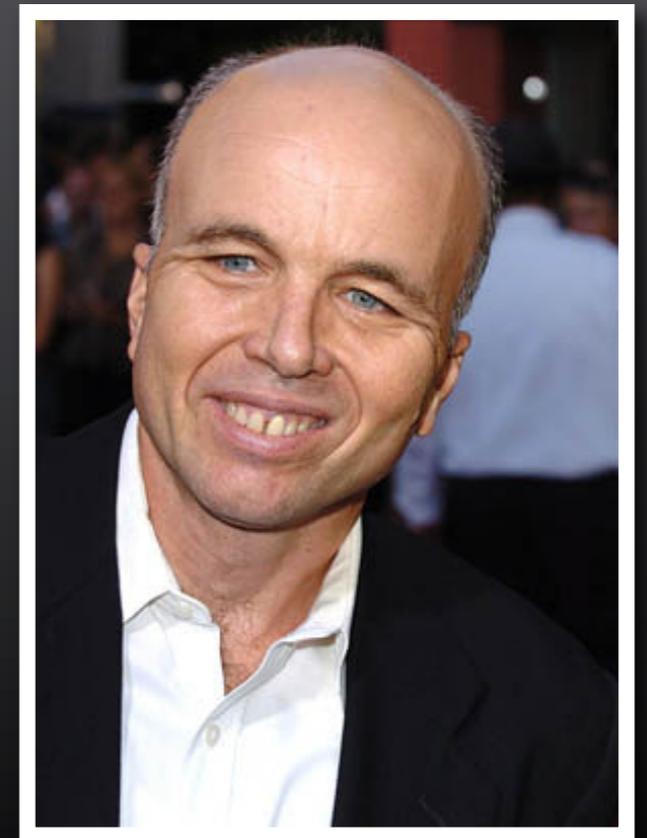
- Watch the scene keeping in mind the distributed perspective. Take notes about who is leading and in what capacity. Where is leadership practice?
- While noting what happens in the scene, keep in mind the characters below.



Jim Lovell



Gene Kranz



EECom (Cy)

# A Distributed Perspective

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- A diagnostic framework that draws attention to particular dimensions of leadership & management
- A design frame for guiding leadership and management improvement efforts



# The “Heroics of Leadership” Genre

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- The lure of leaders and their gallant acts
- The leader is center stage, while others play supporting roles
- This is a leader-centric model



# Dispelling Some Myths

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- CEO and other formal leaders are somehow less relevant
- Everyone is a Leader
- The More Leaders, the Better

# Doing Diagnosis and Design from a Distributed Perspective

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Formal positions, organizational routines as represented in formal documents and accounts

## Designed vs. Lived Organization

Organization as experienced in day-to-day life of organizational members

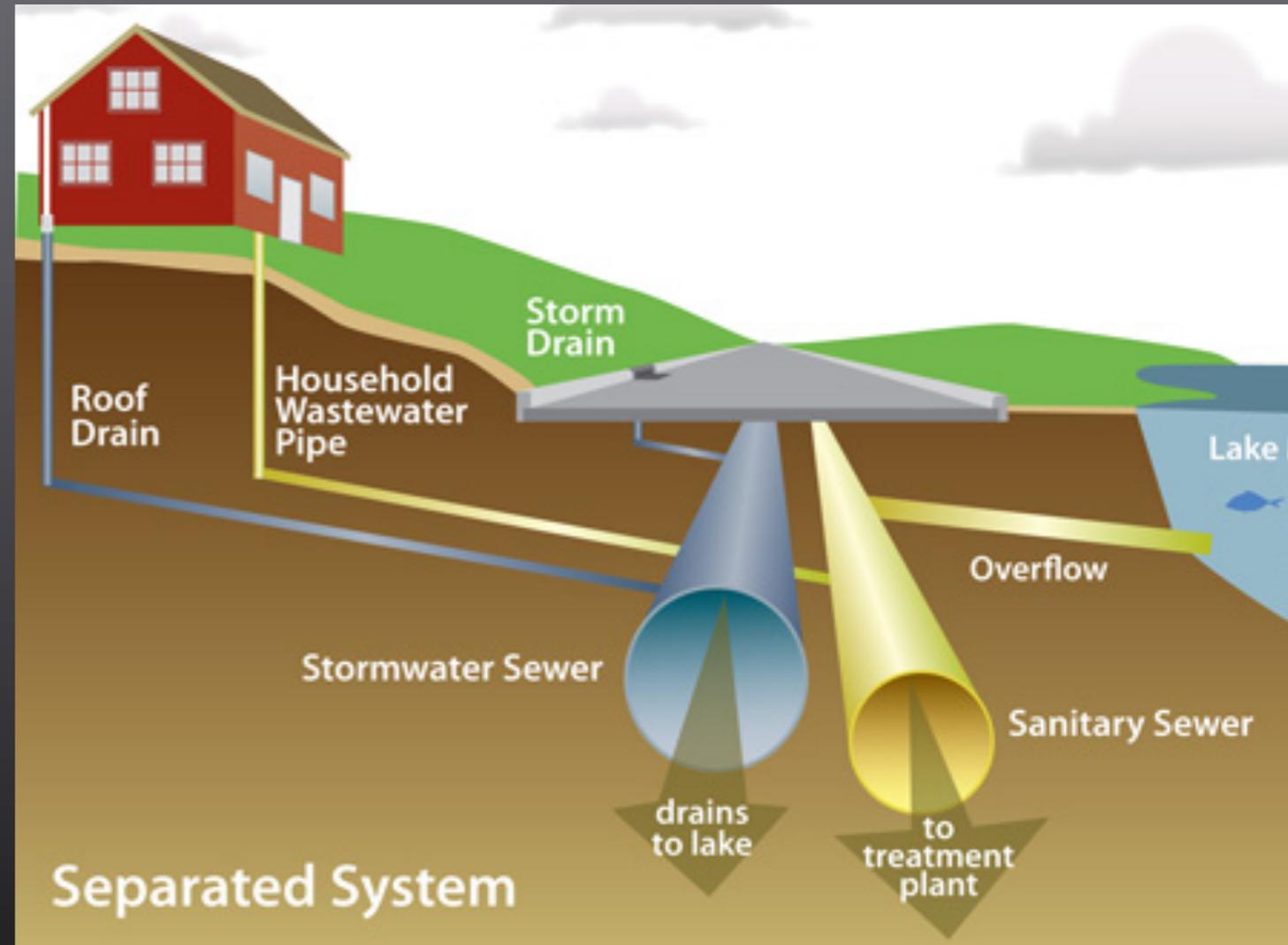
# The Formal (Designed) Organization: Organizational Routines

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Diagnosis and Design Work



# Infrastructure



CONCEPTS  
NORMS  
SCRIPTS  
POLICIES  
SCRIPTS  
TOOLS  
PROCEDURES  
STRUCTURE  
WORK  
FRAMES  
CONCEPTS  
POSITIONS  
ORGANIZATIONAL  
ROUTINES  
REGULATIONS  
FRAMES  
POSITIONS  
ORGANIZATIONAL  
ROUTINES  
RULES  
POSITIONS

# Organizational Routines

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**Organizational Routines** are “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors.” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003)



# Organizational Routines

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## Advantages

Allow efficient coordinated action

Provide source of stability

Reduce conflict about how to do work

## Disadvantages

Result in inappropriate responses

Inertia, mindlessness, and de-motivation

# Two Aspects of Infrastructure

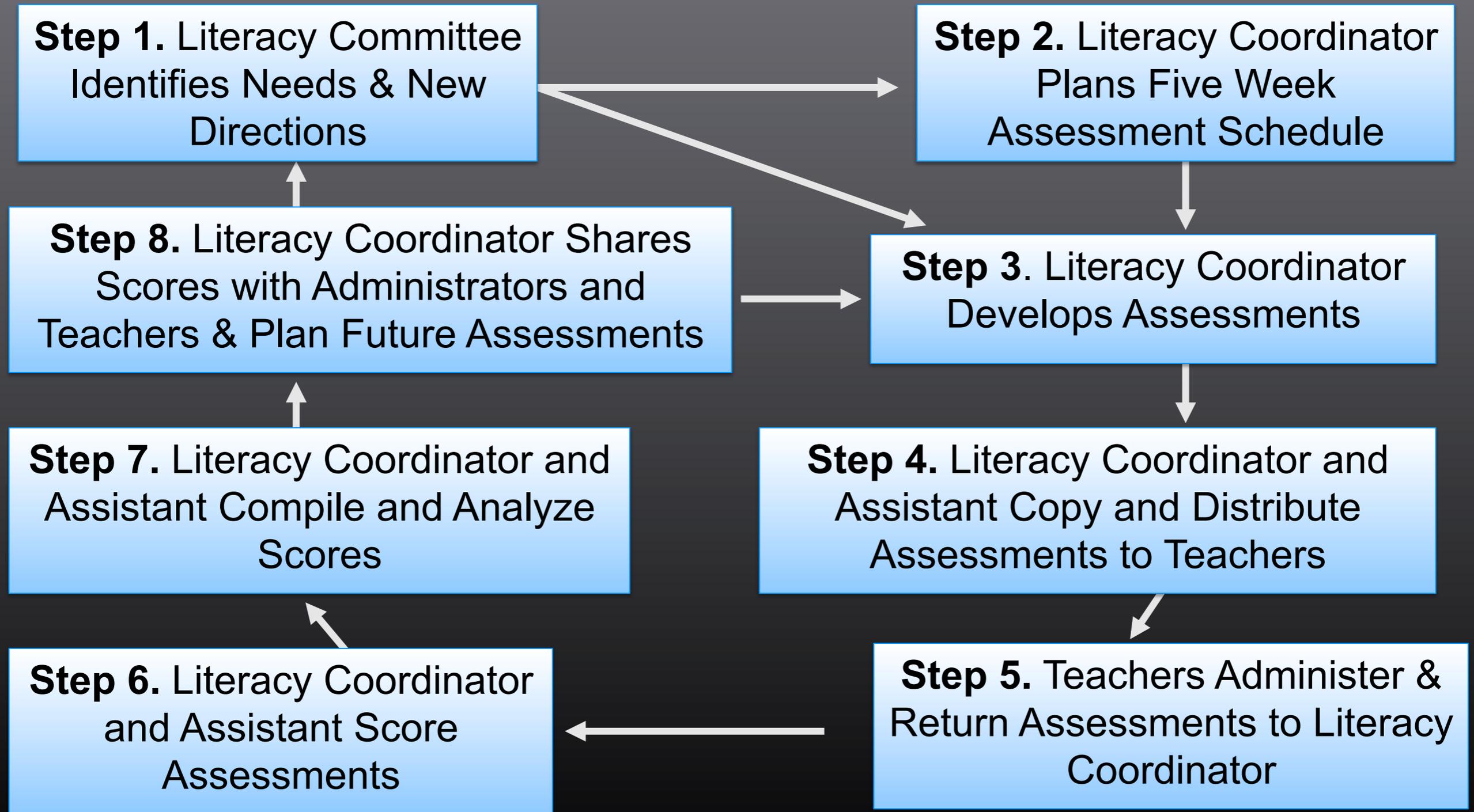
- Ostensive or idealized aspect
  - Broad scripts about how work gets done
- Performative aspect
  - The lived or informal organization

(Latour, 1987; Feldman & Pentland, 2003)

# Organizational Routines at Adams School

Routine	Functions	Tools	People
Five Week Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Formative evaluation</li> <li>-Teacher Accountability</li> <li>-Monitor Instruction</li> <li>-Teacher Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Standardized Tests</li> <li>-Standards</li> <li>-Student Assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Language Arts Coordinator</li> <li>-Assistant Principal</li> <li>-Principal</li> <li>-Teachers</li> </ul>
Breakfast Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Teacher Development</li> <li>-Build Professional Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Research Articles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Teachers</li> <li>-Language Arts Coordinator</li> <li>-Principal</li> </ul>
School Improvement Planning (SIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identify Instructional Priorities &amp; Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Previous Year SIP</li> <li>-District Guidelines</li> <li>-Test Score Data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Principal</li> <li>-Administration</li> <li>-Teachers (approved LSC)</li> </ul>
Classroom Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Teacher Development</li> <li>-Monitor Instruction</li> <li>-Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-School Protocol,</li> <li>-District Protocol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Principal</li> <li>-Assistant Principal</li> </ul>
Real Men Read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Student Motivation and Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Language Arts Co-ord.</li> <li>-Assistant Principal</li> <li>-Principal</li> <li>-Community Members</li> </ul>

# Five Week Assessment: Ostensive Aspect



# Asking the Difficult Questions about Organizational Routines

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What is the theory of action behind the routine?

What arguments explain and evaluate the routine?

Why should it work?

Why might it not work?

What are the advantages of this routine?

What are the disadvantages of this routine?

How does it connect with classroom teaching and learning?



# Task Four: Organizational Routines

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Identify one organizational routine in your school or organization that is essential in efforts to improve classroom teaching.

- Jot down the components of the routine.
- What is the theory of action for this routine?
- How might it work? How might it not work?
- Is it working as intended? How do you know?
- Share your routine with the person next to you.

# Getting to Practice: Advice & Information Interactions in School

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Diagnosis and Design Work

# Why Focus on Advice and Information Interactions?

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- Interactions among teachers matter for their instructional productivity
- On-the-job interactions associated with the transfer of advice and information – essential to knowledge development:
  - Socialization: Tacit Knowledge—Tacit Knowledge
  - Externalization: Tacit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge
  - Combination: Explicit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge
  - Internalization: Explicit Knowledge – Tacit Knowledge

# Social Network Instrument

## Screen Shot from SSQ – Math Advice Questions Page 1



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY

**During THIS SCHOOL YEAR, to whom have you turned for advice and/or information about *CURRICULUM, TEACHING, and STUDENT LEARNING*? Please write full first and last names. You do not need to fill all the spaces.**

Please consider all forms of communication including face-to-face, via e-mail or telephone, etc., and include individuals across content and school/district/outside roles. You may list people you named as your close colleagues as well.

I have not sought advice from anyone. *Do not check this box if you provide a name(s) below.*

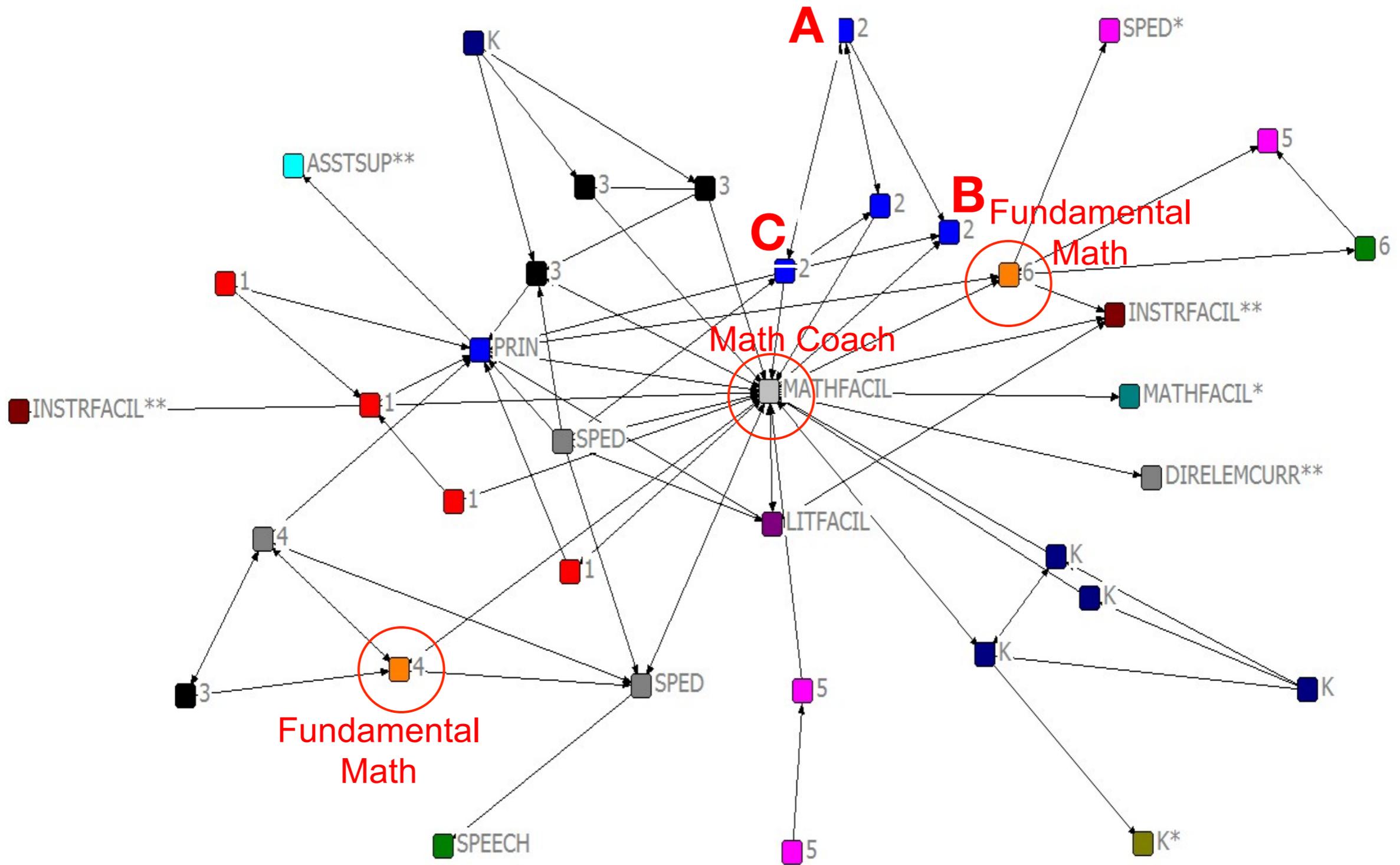
- 1) James Spillane
- 2) Megan Hopkins
- 3) Katie Mertz
- 4) |
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)
- 11)
- 12)

**Please Note:** No names or identifying information will ever be revealed in reports produced from these data.

Progress 



# Advice and Information Interactions





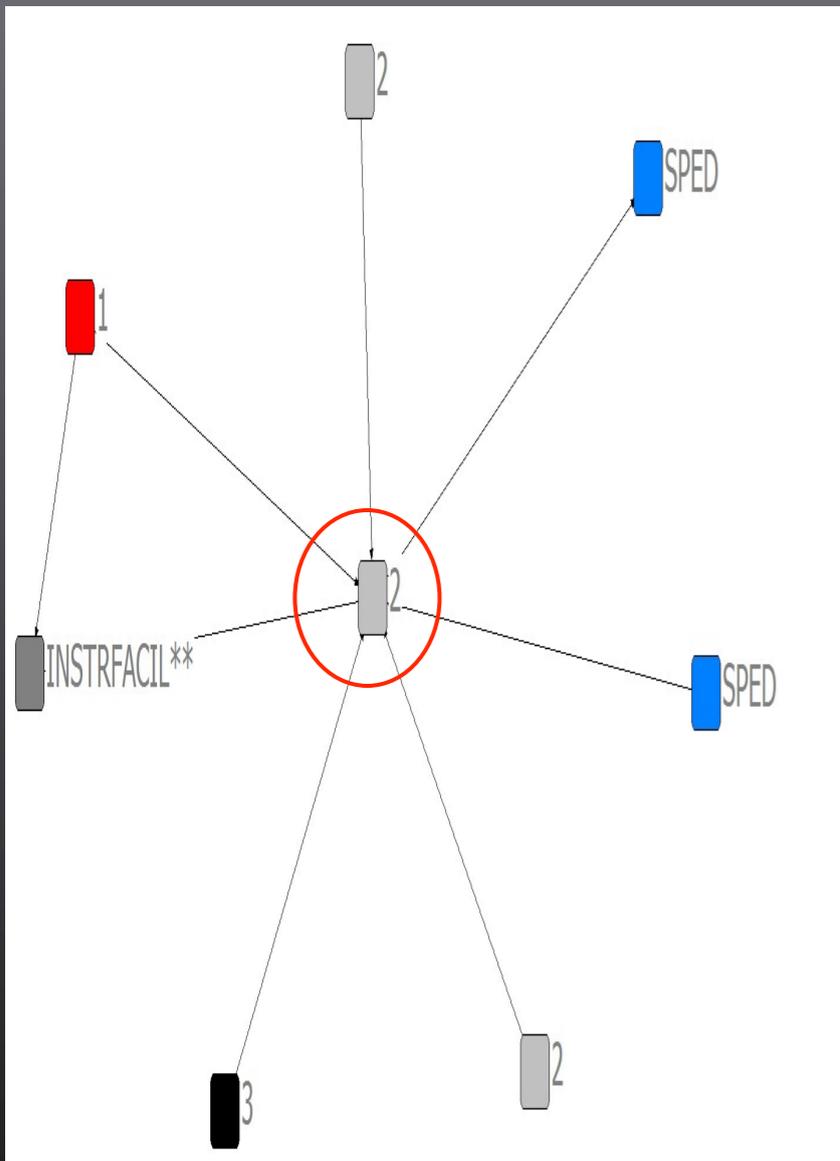
# Formal Position Promotes Advice Seeking

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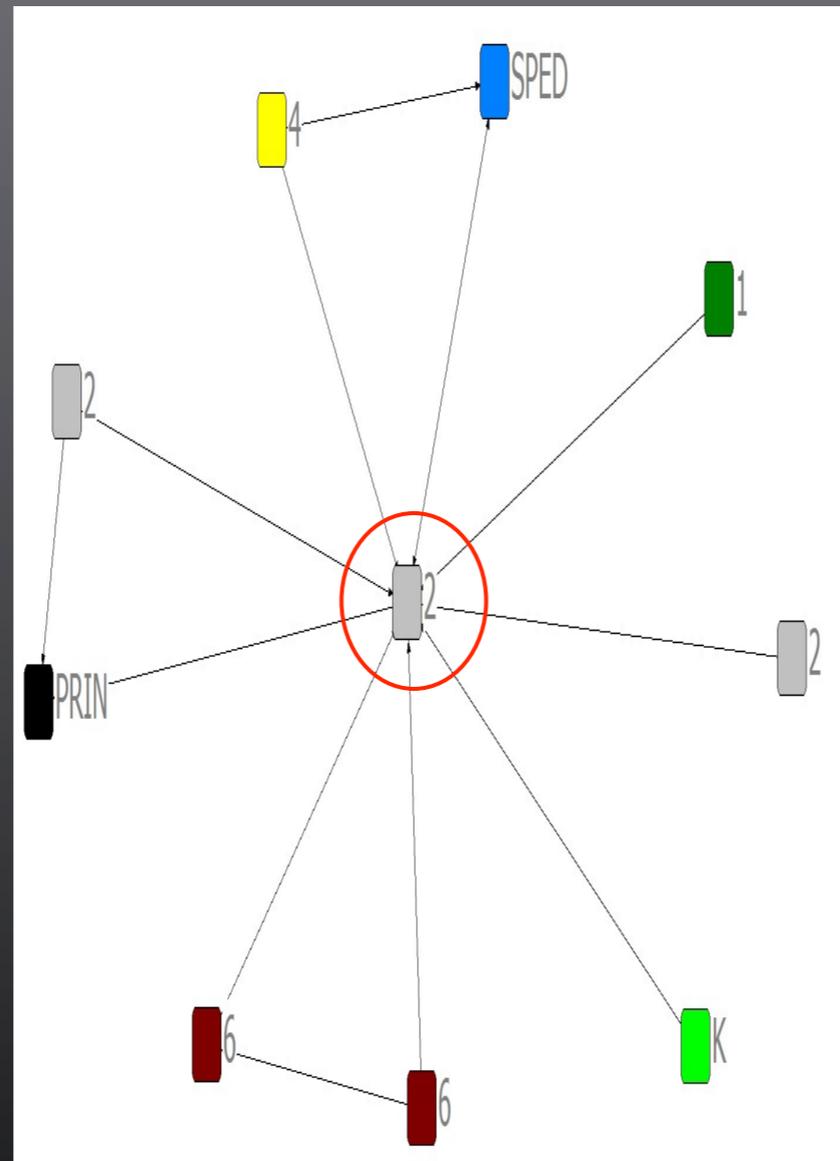
“[Emily] really wasn’t our facilitator [last year], though she was my co-worker, just a third grade teacher. I knew she had a wealth of knowledge, I just wasn’t in [her classroom] when she was teaching math. But, now that she’s moved into this math facilitator position, that’s different... She’s been trained in it. And, she’s gone to school for it and she’s a great coach. She knows a lot about math and I trust her that she has a lot of, a wealth of knowledge... She’s the go-to person.”

Angie, Special Education

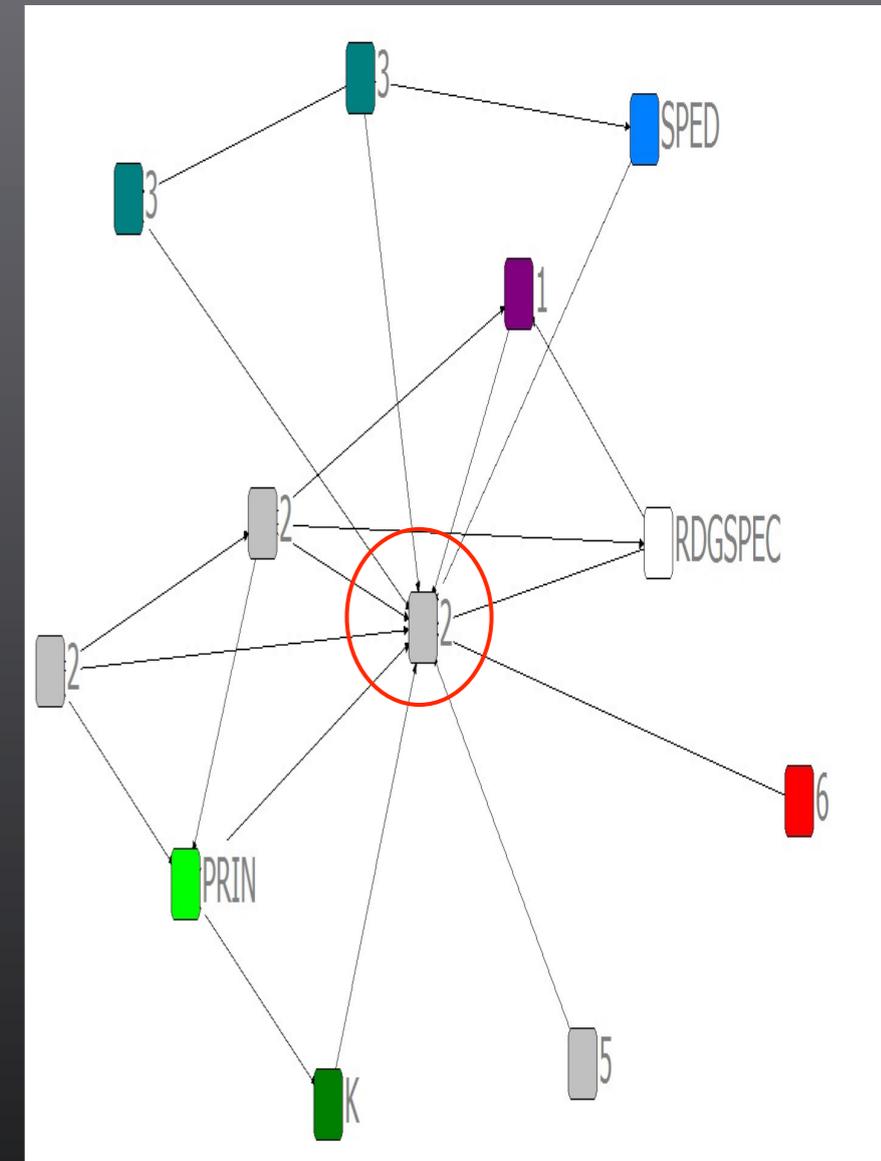
# Professional Development Case (John)



2009-10



2010-11



2011-12

# Training Also Serves as a Marker of Expertise

Karen (1<sup>st</sup> grade)

“Because he’s a second grade teacher....He’s kind of become the math person to see because he’s taken this extra training that nobody else in the building has done, and I know that he’s interested in math so, he’s just one that I’ve gone to that I know focuses very heavily on, I like his beliefs and the way that he has his room set up and the way that he carries himself.”

# Infrastructure Redesign Promoted Advice and Information Seeking in Mathematics

Average In-Degree for Teachers Leaders and Other Teachers,  
Auburn Park School District

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
<b>Toolbox Members (6)</b>	1.60	2.80	2.67
<b>Fundamental Math Participants (9)</b>	4.33	6.00*	6.00
<b>Math Coaches (3)</b>	6.33	16.33**	18.00
<b>Other Teachers (256)</b>	1.54	1.60	1.36

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

# Infrastructure Redesign Promoted Brokering in Mathematics

Average Betweenness for Teacher Leaders and Other Teachers,  
Auburn Park School District

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
<b>Toolbox Members (6)</b>	5.00	75.80*	48.86
<b>Fundamental Math Participants (9)</b>	32.44	144.33*	115.42
<b>Math Coaches (3)</b>	38.67	248.67**	222.97
<b>Other Teachers (256)</b>	10.85	24.81*	11.90

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

# Formal Organizational Structure & Advice & Information Interactions

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- Teachers more likely to seek advice from others of **same gender and race**
- **Prior tie** strongly associated with having a current tie
- **Formal** leaders more likely to provide advice or information
- Teachers in the **same grade** more likely to receive or provide advice or information
- Teachers more likely to seek advice about a subject from teachers who reported **more PD** in that subject

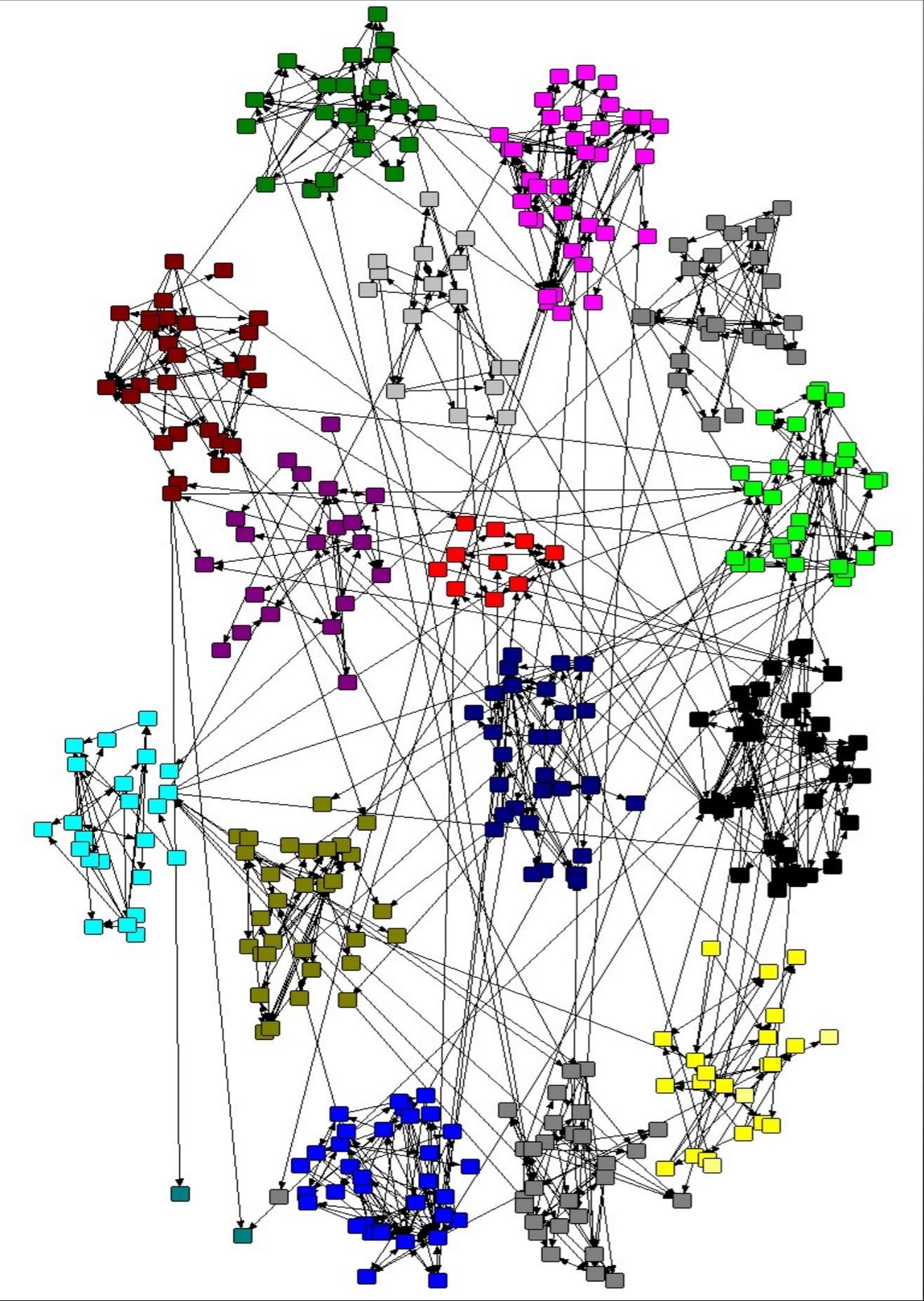
Spillane, J. P., Kim, C. M., & Frank, K. A. (2012). Instructional advice and information seeking behavior in elementary schools: Exploring tie formation as a building block in social capital development. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(6), 1112-1145.

# Some Lessons about Social Interactions

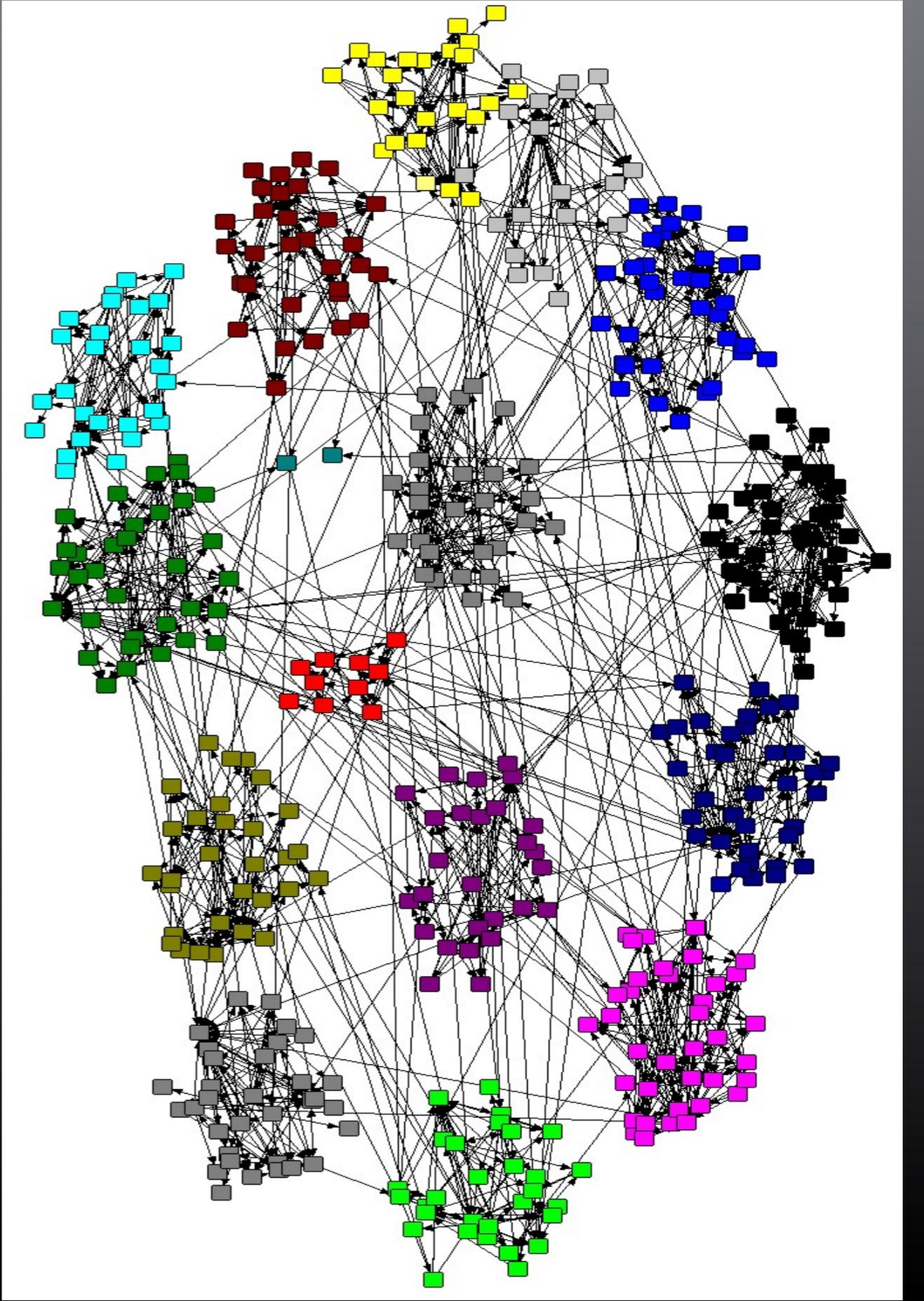
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- Strong ties - enable the transfer of tacit, complex knowledge and facilitate joint problem solving.
- Weak ties - enable the transfer of explicit knowledge.
- Ties that span organizational boundaries allow for new information and minimize 'group think'.
- Boundary spanners, individuals that connect different subgroups, facilitate the implementation of new approaches.
- Trust enable learning in social interactions.

Pleasantville District Math Network



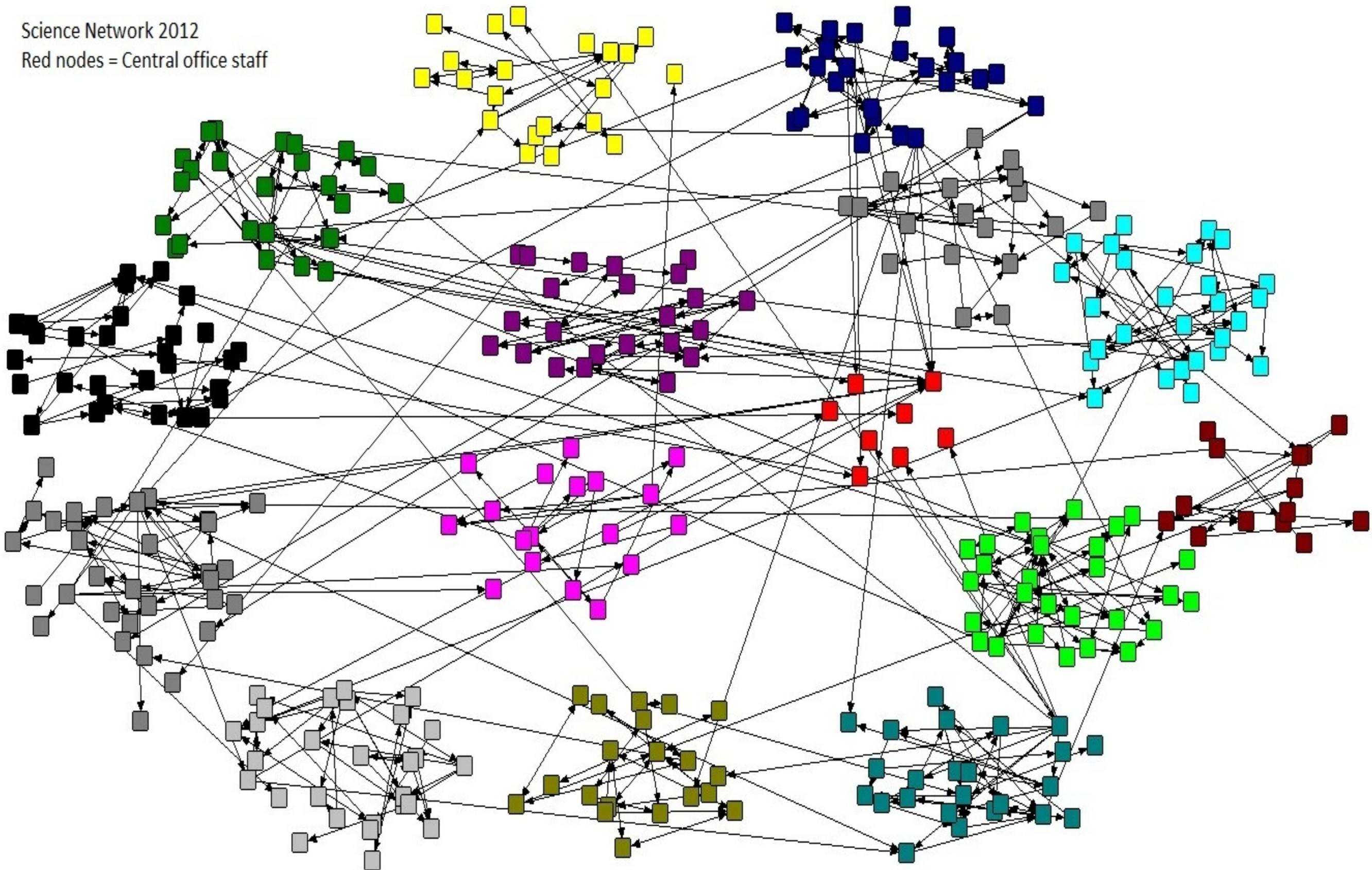
Pleasantville District ELA Network



# Schools and School Systems: Science

Science Network 2012

Red nodes = Central office staff

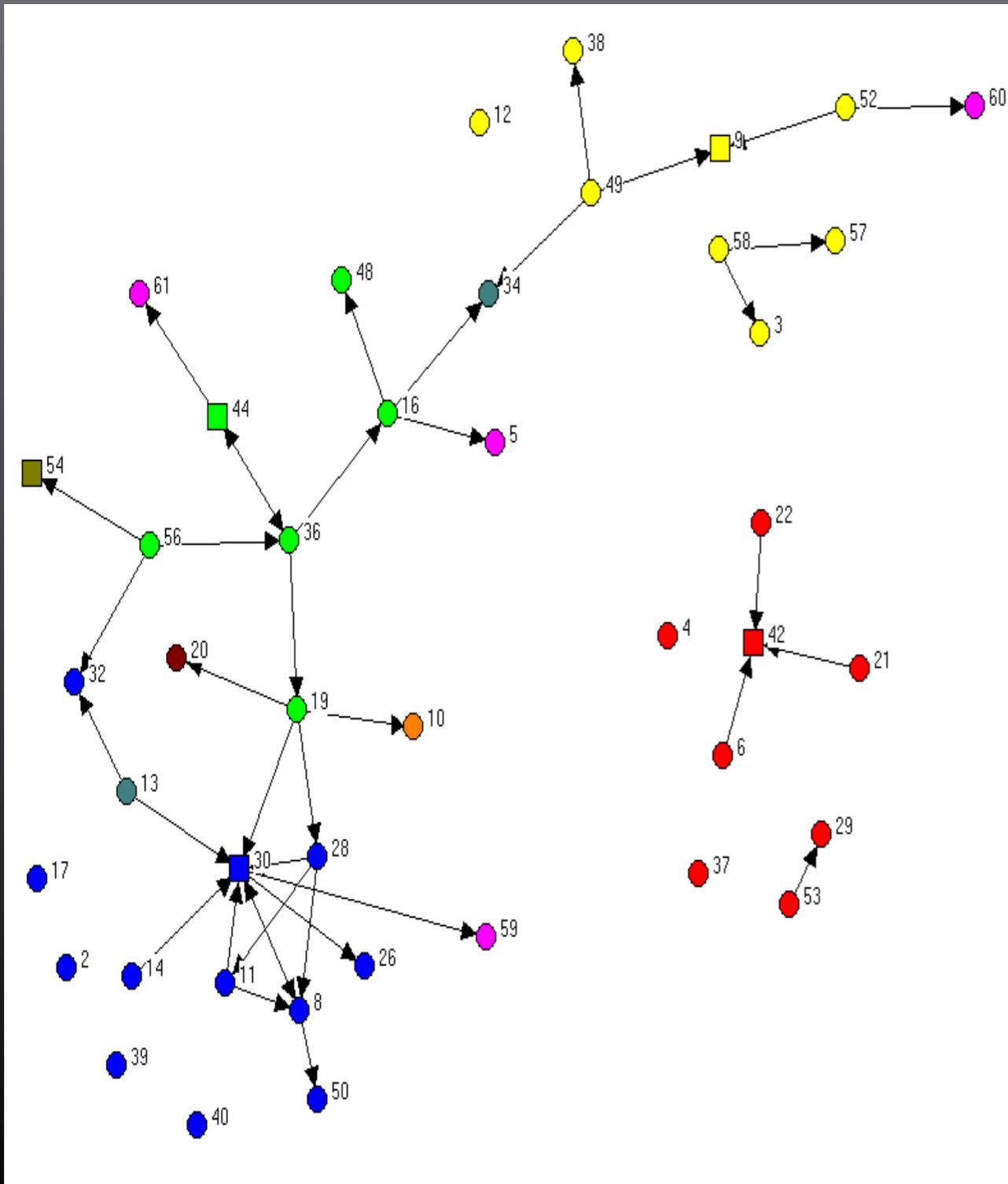


# Diagnostic Work

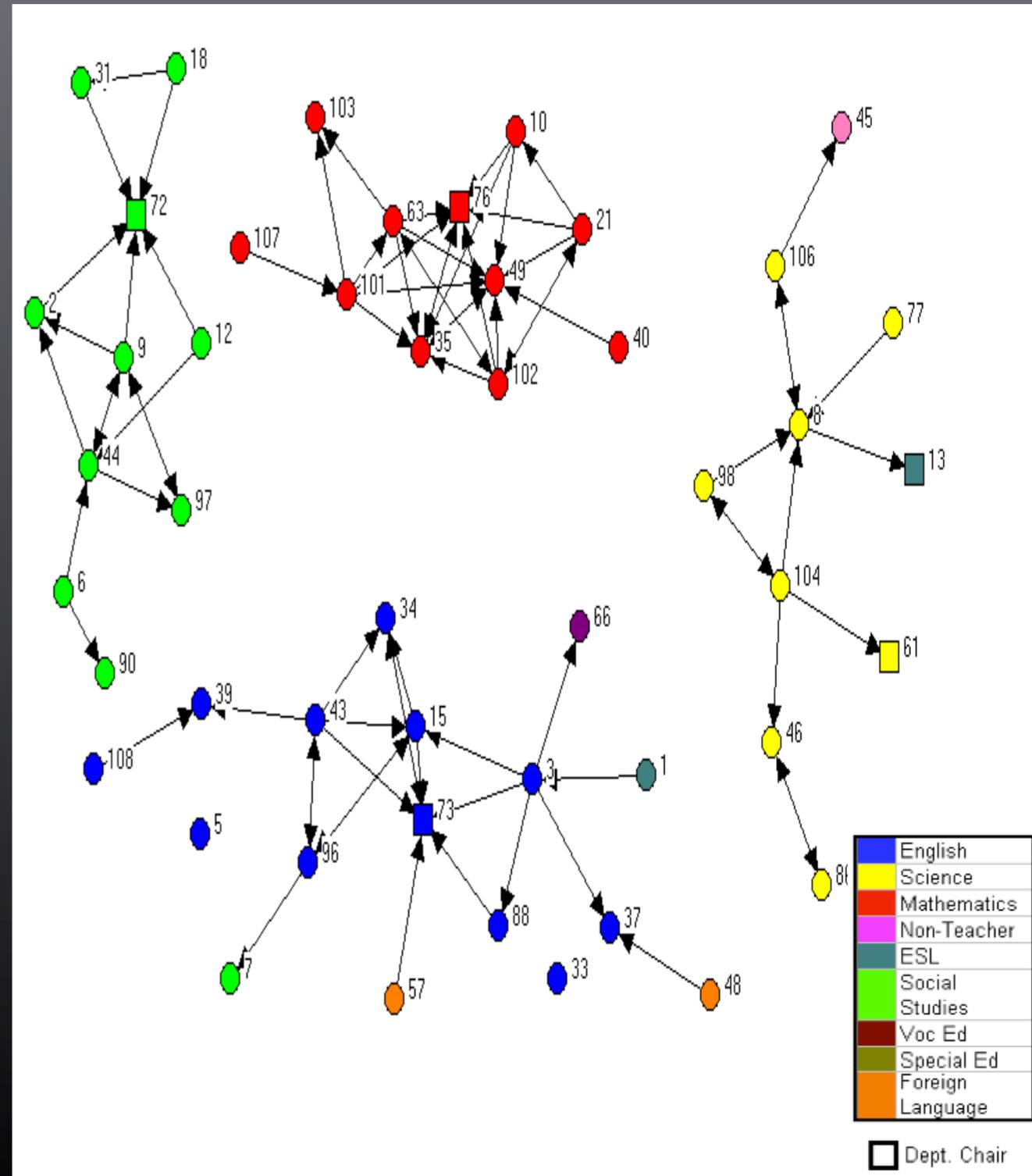
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- Imagine you are introducing a new program to teach reading across the curriculum/disciplines in Pink Hamlet and Fern Hill High Schools. Examine the curriculum advice networks in the two high schools. What patterns do you notice that might be relevant to your program implementation efforts?

# Fern Center High School Curriculum Network



# Pink Hamlet High School Curriculum Network



Blue	English
Yellow	Science
Red	Mathematics
Pink	Non-Teacher
Grey	ESL
Green	Social Studies
Brown	Voc Ed
Olive	Special Ed
Orange	Foreign Language
White square	Dept. Chair

# Challenges in taking A Distributed Perspective

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# Ultimate Responsibility

- “I’m responsible for the whole building of students and I’m **ultimately**—for most purposes—the end all, be all accountability person. **Everything falls on me** ... no matter what .... One thing that really was smacking me in the gut Sunday night was **the responsibility part**. It’s like **the ultimate responsibility** ...”

George

Nelson

- **“the buck stops at your desk. ... everything stops at my desk so I’m ultimately accountable** for everything in this building. ... Everything is your responsibility.”

- “Captain of a ship ... things sometimes are smooth sailing and then in a moment, the winds can turn, and you’re not sure you’re gonna stay afloat ... **I’m the last one out.**”

Kathy

# ‘Jack of All Trades’

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• “Jack of all trades and master of none I would say. It’s a **little bit of every profession rolled up in one**. It’s being a CEO of a company but having to do everything in that company from janitorial all the way to dealing with the CEO of Chicago Public Schools ... We’re mom, we’re a teacher, we’re a guidance counselor, we’re a friend, we’re a mentor, a coach.”

Emily

• “Your hands are in all the **cookie jars**. So like you need to know a little bit about everything and a lot about everything to some degree ... you need to be able to juggle the big balls of running a school. And be ok with the dropping a little ball once in awhile.”

Nancy

# 'Janus-Faced' Nature of the Work

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Nelson

- And every, everyone's need is different ... Because it's like you work to feed and nurture those ... I'm still Glenda; you know Glenda's good, she's also a witch.

Angela

- "It varies. A lot of it depends on the team. Sometimes you have to be a chameleon. ... some days- some years you have to crack the whip, other times you can you know reflect or kind of relax and say 'well that worked and let's keep doing what we're doing'."

# Unpredictability/Volatility

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- “Being a captain of a sailboat. You’re kind of in control, but you’re at the mercy of the wind too. You kind of set the course, direct it, sometimes the wind is your friend, sometimes it’s your enemy...”

Nelson

- “It’s like surfing without a surfboard on any given day. I mean one minute you’re on the board and the next minute you’re drowning ... the next thing you know, a wave comes and smacks you and you’re like ‘what happened?’ How do I get back above water? I mean things can just come out of nowhere.”

Lori

# Leaders' Work and Distributed Leadership

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- Nature of the leader's job both enables and constrains taking a distributed perspective on leadership.
- Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility appears to discourage and constrain a distributed perspective.
- But, the diversity, unpredictability, and janus-faced nature of the leader's work encourage and enable a distributed perspective.

# The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

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“that tendency to ... micromanage, I just felt like I had to keep that in check. ... that was never my style before, but I think just because I would kinda get overwhelmed with the idea of the responsibility that I felt like I had to have my hand in, you know, all the different things going on. So I just had to challenge myself to let go of gender differences ...”

Kathy

“it was hard to release that, because I like to be in [involve], and some of it is trusting that it will get done, but with this [person] I know it will get done effectively and right. It's also just wanting to be a part of the process whole heartedly, but I can't whole heartedly be a part of everything”

Kara

# The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

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- “If it’s a bilingual, I’ll send them to Evelyn. If it’s a testing question ... I’ll send them to Helen. ... And not to pass the buck, but they already know cause I gave them a sheet on who’s responsible, but sometimes they just want me to hear.

Carol

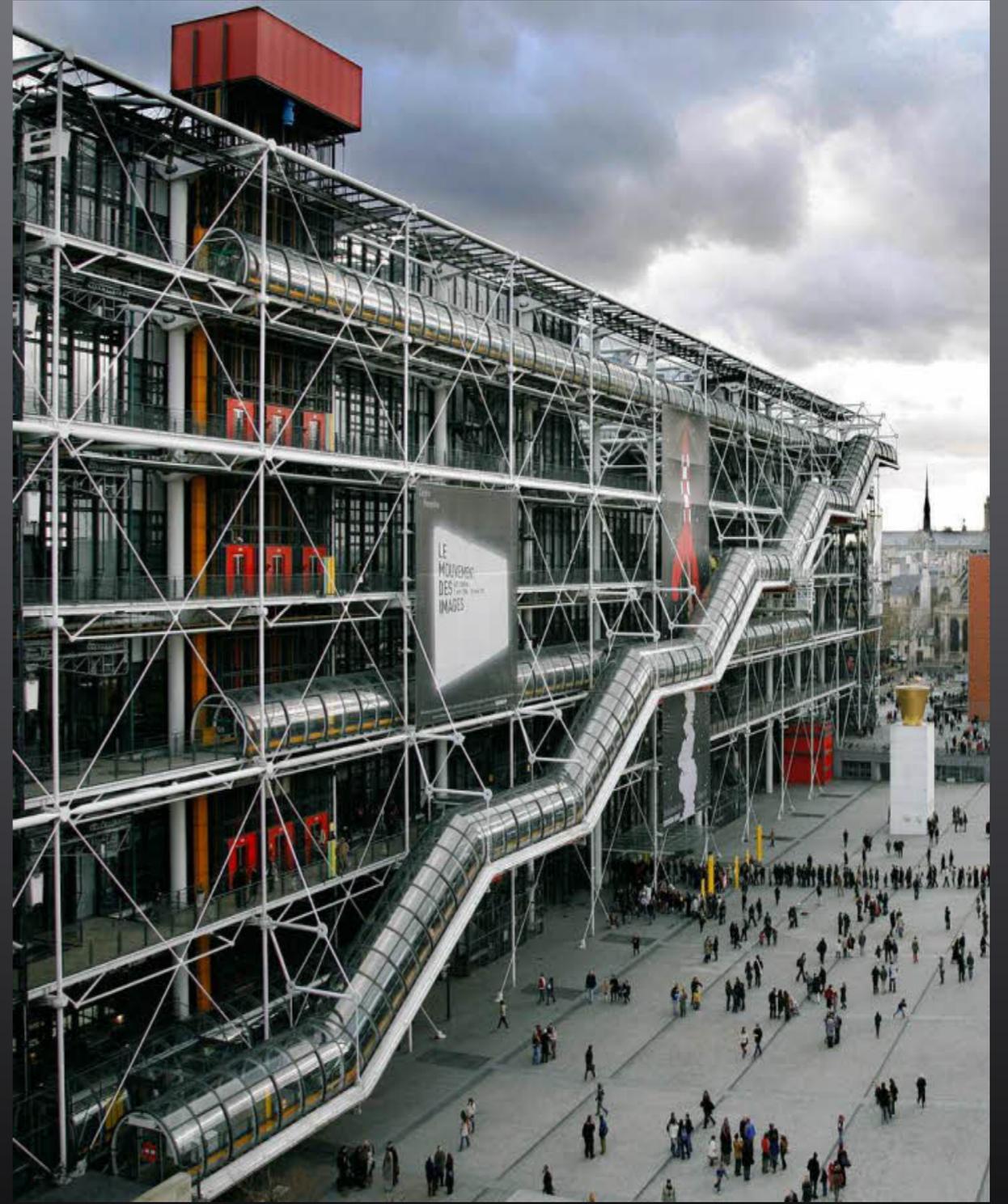
“the art to really being a good leader I is just making sure you hire the right people because most of this work you do is delegated anyway. ... But you go through and you make sure that these people have the capacity to do what it is you need them to do before you delegate that work to them. And then you manage along the way—build capacity, support, coach. That's your role .”

Joyce

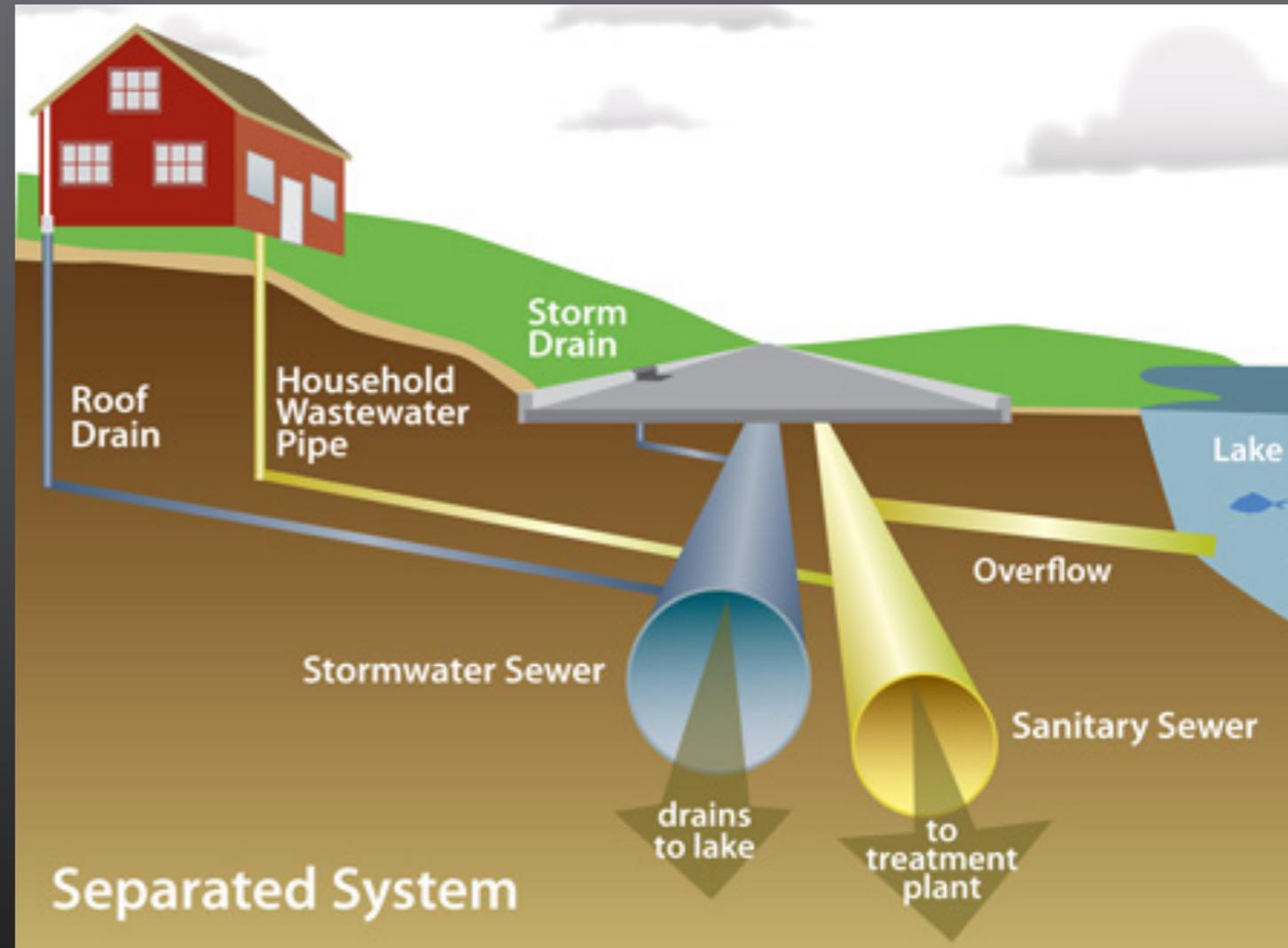
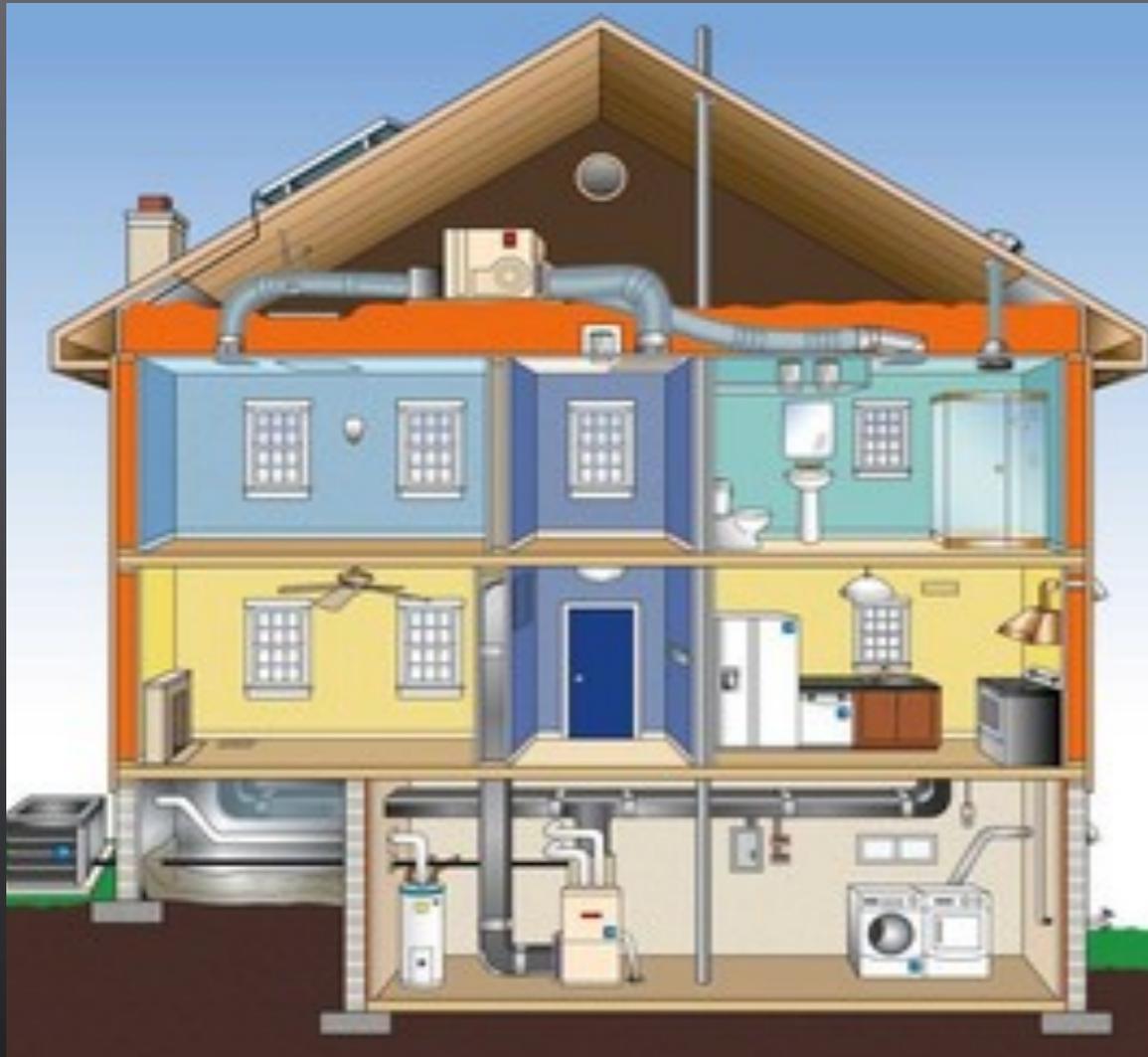
# Conclusion: Moving Forward

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- Putting diagnostic and design work central in leading and managing instruction and efforts to improve it.
- Diagnosis and design necessitates a framework – one possibility is a distributed framework.
- A distributed framework urges attention to both the formal (designed) and informal (lived) organization *in tandem*.



# System and Organizational Infrastructure





# MORE AT:

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<http://www.distributedleadership.org>

[http://distributedleadership.org/DLS/  
Presentations.html](http://distributedleadership.org/DLS/Presentations.html)