

The Leader I Want To Be

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EAD 801 – Final Paper

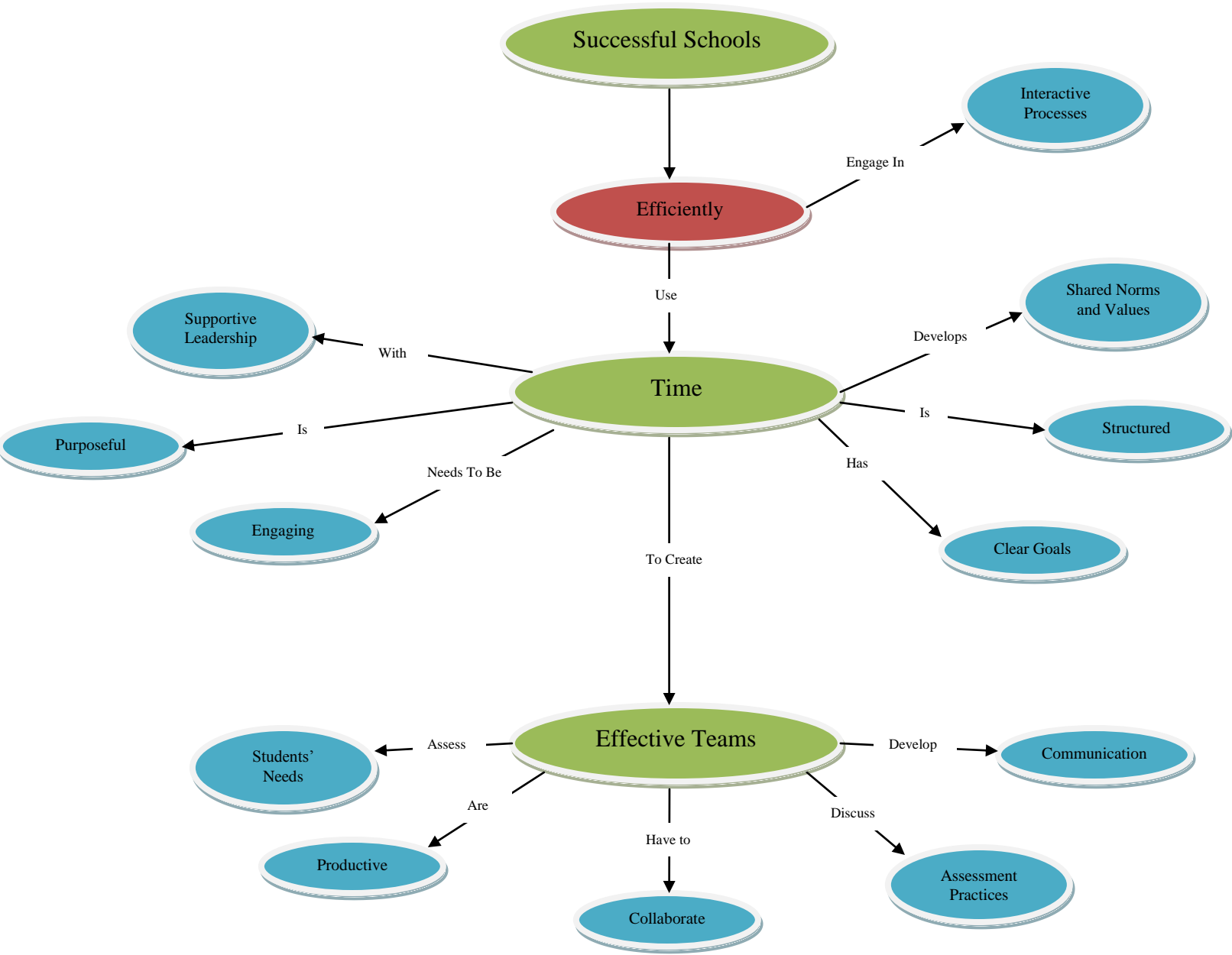
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Over the course of the last thirteen weeks, I have come to reflect upon the steps I take, not only as a teacher, but as a leader. Not often have I considered what it takes to be a leader or even what kind of leader I want to be. This course has opened my eyes and allowed me to truly consider who I hope to be in the leadership roles I will encounter throughout my teaching career. I have been a department chair, and I have facilitated a fair share of PLCs and ILTs, however, much of my time now, and in the next couple of years, is focused on leading the implementation of proficiency-based assessment in my school and department, and I also strive to be a strong leader in my classroom. As a current and future leader, I hope to maintain and build upon certain guiding principles, traits, values and behaviors in order to create an environment that is committed to student achievement.

Dispositions:

As a teacher leader, my two main guiding principles focus on students. When teachers and administrators lose sight of the student piece, they are not doing what education is meant to accomplish. To my core, I believe that all students can succeed, and not only can they succeed, but they can understand their role as contributors in a global society. Each student will likely succeed on a different level, and they will also contribute to society in different ways, but I want to get them to set goals in order to reach their success. If these students are to participate in a global society, then they need to understand the intricacies of a global world. As a teacher leader, I would hope to use staff development time to create teams that focus on curriculum and shared ideas surrounding this global initiative. The following concept map illustrates the importance of the relationship between the use of staff development time to create effective teams.



As is shown through the concept map, purposeful and engaging time helps to create a shared vision that is accepted by all staff members. This vision needs to be developed by all staff members, and the only way to create this vision is through the use of time. Using time effectively also leads to effective teams, which promotes student success. As a leader, I would hope to encourage staff members to collaborate and work in teams to develop common outcomes, targets, and assessments based on the shared vision and guiding principles.

Characteristics:

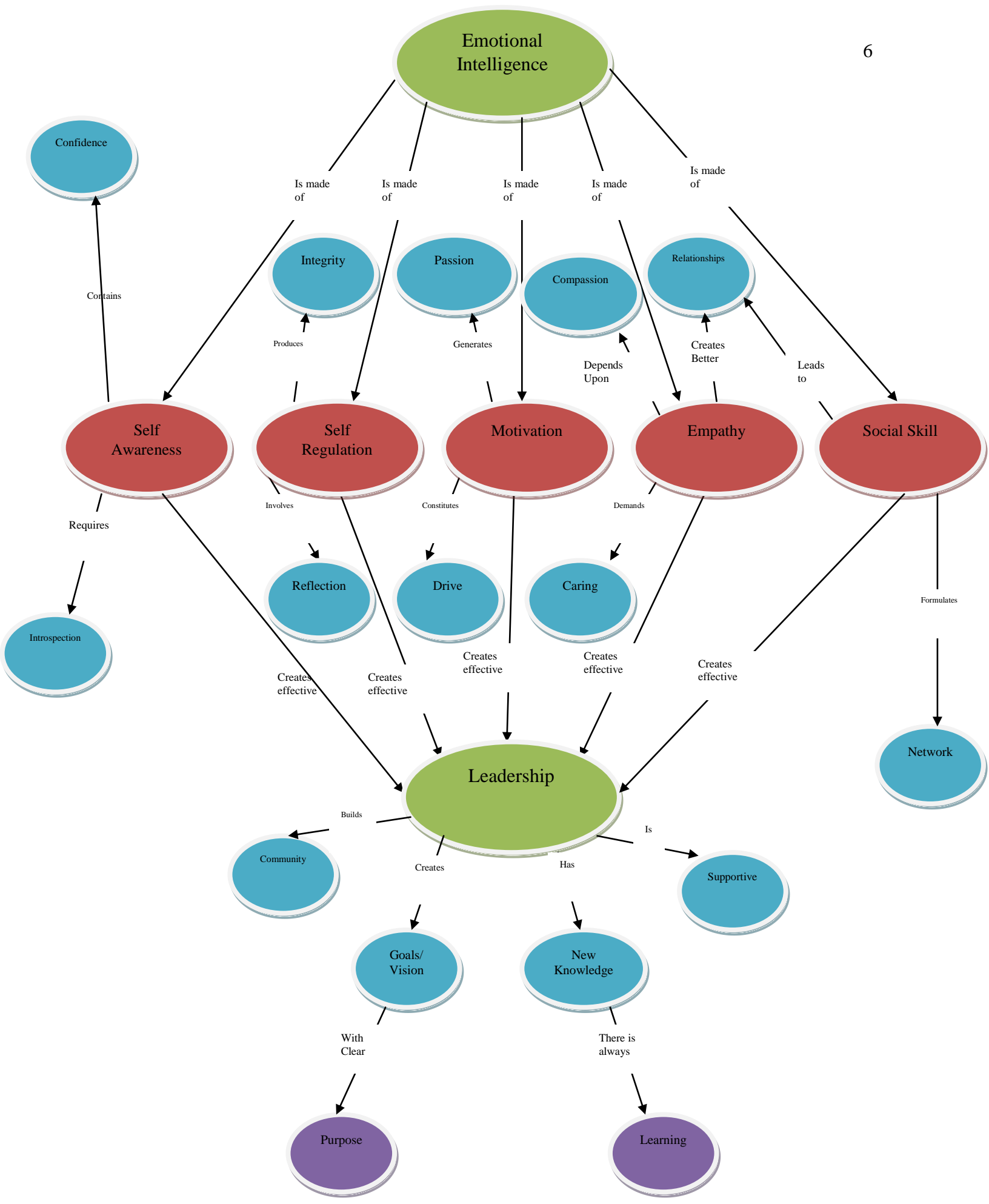
Because of my strong beliefs in student success and student contributions to a global society, I also hope to maintain certain character traits in order to lead staff members, students, and the community to reach these guiding principles. I want to be a leader that is motivated and passionate about my position. I am absolutely passionate about proficiency-based assessment as a structure to improve student learning. I get excited when I talk to other staff members about it, and I spend my own time doing research and data collection. I have had parents at the beginning of the year that were uneasy about a new grading system, but after a fifteen minute conversation, they could tell I was thoughtful in my approach, and I was implementing these new ideas because I knew it would increase their child's overall success in school. Motivation and passion are contagious, and when others see someone working hard to accomplish goals, they are more likely to develop a similar passion.

I also want to be a leader that practices and models the traits that Daniel Goleman discusses in his article, "What Makes a Leader?" Precisely, the traits of self-regulation, self-awareness, and empathy will allow me, and any other leader, to make the best decisions and reflect upon those decisions. When I first started as a proficiency coordinator, I had a difficult time understanding why some teachers were resistant to the change. The data was compelling

and there were so many great anecdotes from me and other teachers about how the practice was beneficial for students and teachers. It was hard for me to be empathetic because I felt as though these teachers were not progressive and just being stubborn. After many conversations with these teachers (most of them veteran educators), I realized that their resistance came from the fact that I was asking them to change their entire philosophy of education, some of whom had carried their same philosophies for thirty years. Simply changing the way I held conversations with these teachers allowed me to be more supportive of their current teaching practices, and I was able to finally empathize with their insecurities and uneasiness about these massive changes.

Proficiencies was an overwhelming concept to many in my department, and I also figured out that I had had much more time to work with and understand proficiency-based assessment. I was asking them to trust my judgment as an educator, and I wasn't taking the time to stop and explain my rationale. However, as I realized my mistakes, I had to confidence in myself and in my department that I could go back and explain the mistakes I thought I had made, and they were more than willing to listen openly to what I had to say. At that point, we were able to move forward to figure out the next steps in our implementation plan.

The following concept map shows the how the ideas of emotional intelligence all combine and interconnect through the five pillars to create effective leaders. All of the words and phrases in the blue circles show the outcome and what is possible when leaders use Goleman's ideas. Realistically, the arrows on the map could go either way because, for example, empathy can create stronger relationships, but the reverse is also true. If a leader has built strong relationships, then they may be more empathetic. In the future, I hope to build on all of the characteristics I already possess in order to become a better teacher leader.



Values and Behaviors:

If I am to succeed in improving student success, not only do I have to possess certain character traits, but I also need to be committed to practicing certain behaviors. Ultimately, I want to be a leader that is respected because of honesty, integrity, and my respect for others. I want stakeholders to never doubt or question that the decisions I make are thoughtful and focused on student achievement. In order to gain this respect, I have to reflect on my current practices, have productive and open communication, create strong relationships and collaborate with staff, students, and community members.

I want to be a leader that values reflection. I often ask my students to write reflections about assignments they have completed, whether it is an essay, a test, or a piece of homework. They sometimes roll their eyes when I ask them to reflect because some think it is a waste of time, however, when they begin to write and really think about their process and their final outcome, they can see not only the mistakes they made, but what they did well. I tell them the practice of reflection is essential in order for them to achieve better results on the next assignment. The same philosophy applies to educators and leaders – I must reflect on my practices in order to improve upon my skills. While it is important to internally reflect, I also believe it is essential to reflect with others through formal feedback or informal conversations.

I want to be a leader that embraces open communication. It is important that people feel comfortable discussing problems and issues without feeling as though they will not be taken seriously. An open dialogue can also lead to great ideas and collaboration, and collaboration, in turn, will create strong relationships between staff, students, and community members. The concept map on page nine shows what can come from building authentic relationships. All of the

traits of effective leaders help to build relationships, which, as a result, create successful schools and students.

Collaboration with community members may be the most important relationships that are established. I have often contacted community members and asked them to be involved in my classroom, and I have rarely been turned down. I have a class of at-risk students, and one of the focuses of my class is goal setting and future planning after high school. All of the students in the class are required to complete a job shadow experience in a career field of their choice. Students are to call or email a person they don't know from the community to ask if they can job shadow. I am always amazed at how willing and enthusiastic people in the community are to help high school students. Since Nike is headquartered close to our school, I have had many students job shadow in different Nike departments. They have always come back with new pairs of shoes or clothing or passes to the employee store because the person they job shadowed wanted them to have a positive experience for the day. There are so many resources for teachers and administrators out in the community, and they are just waiting to be utilized. It is up to us to ask.



Overall, I have learned from EAD 801 that the traits that make up an effective and successful leader in education are also the traits that make up successful individuals in any career. Through all of our discussion during the semester, I noticed that almost all of the members in this class held the same values and similar beliefs about leadership qualities and education. While all of us came into the course with different experiences, we were able to relate our experiences to find the relationships that exist in any leadership role. However, through all of the discussions and responses and reactions to all of the material we have come across in this course, nothing is as important as putting into practice what we have talked about. As a leader, I want to continually model the characteristics and behaviors I expect from myself and others. I can go through this entire paper to see what I believe to be important as a leader, and I can look at each of the concept maps I've created, but if I'm not willing to carry out these behaviors or live up to these character traits, then how can I expect others to do the same?

Reference:

Goleman, D. (1998, November 1). What Makes a Leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 76, 93.