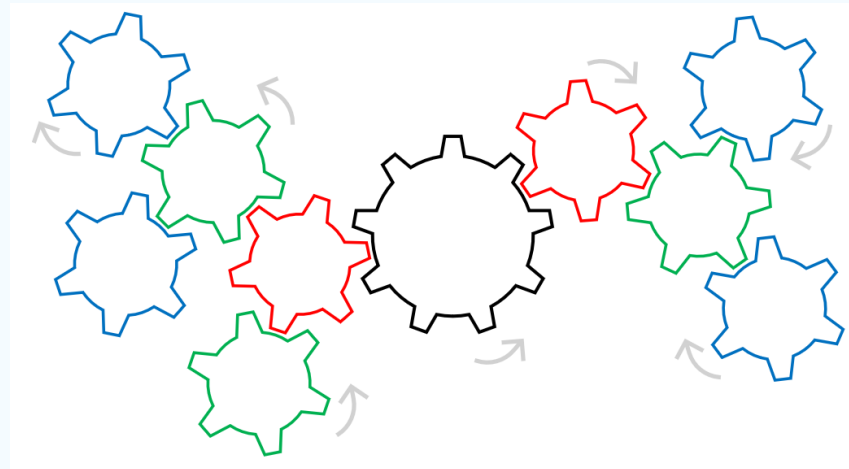


# The Principal as a PLC Leader

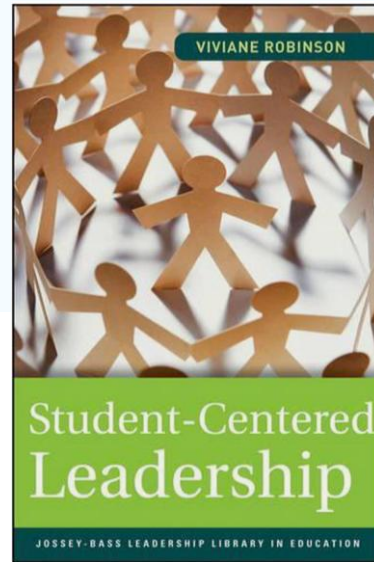
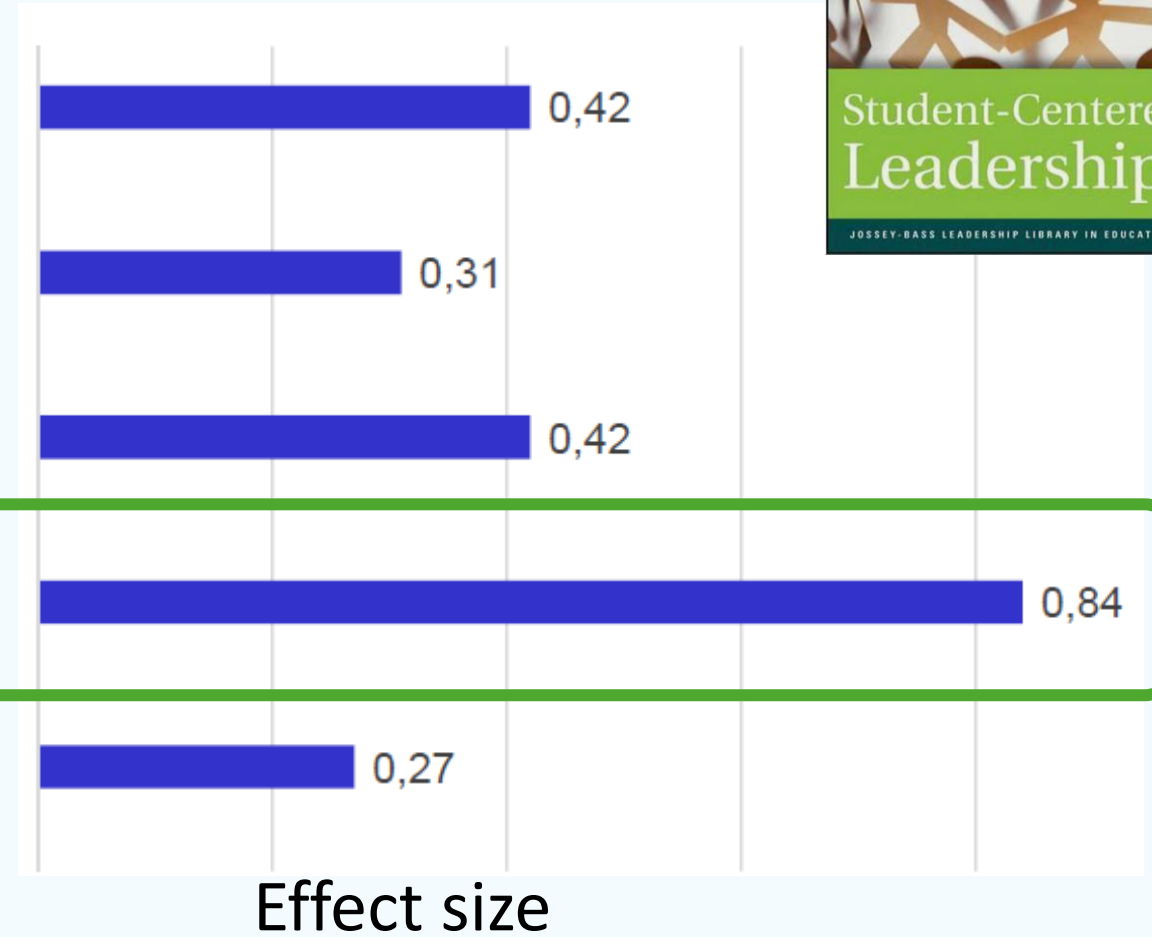
- an Activity-theoretical Perspective



Feldkirch, April 2026

# Leadership effect size (Robinson)

1. Establishing goals and expectations
2. Resourcing strategically
3. Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment



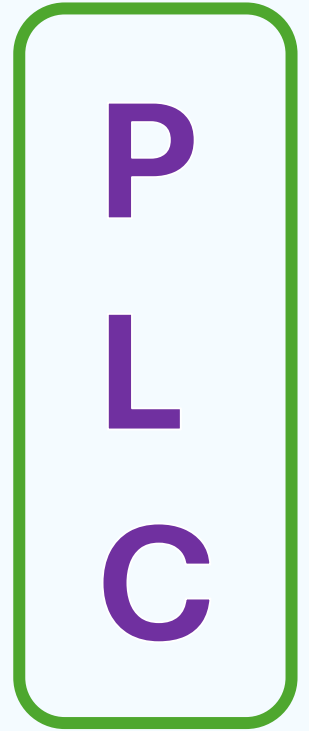
# Teachers' professional learning & development

(Desimone/Darling-Hammond)

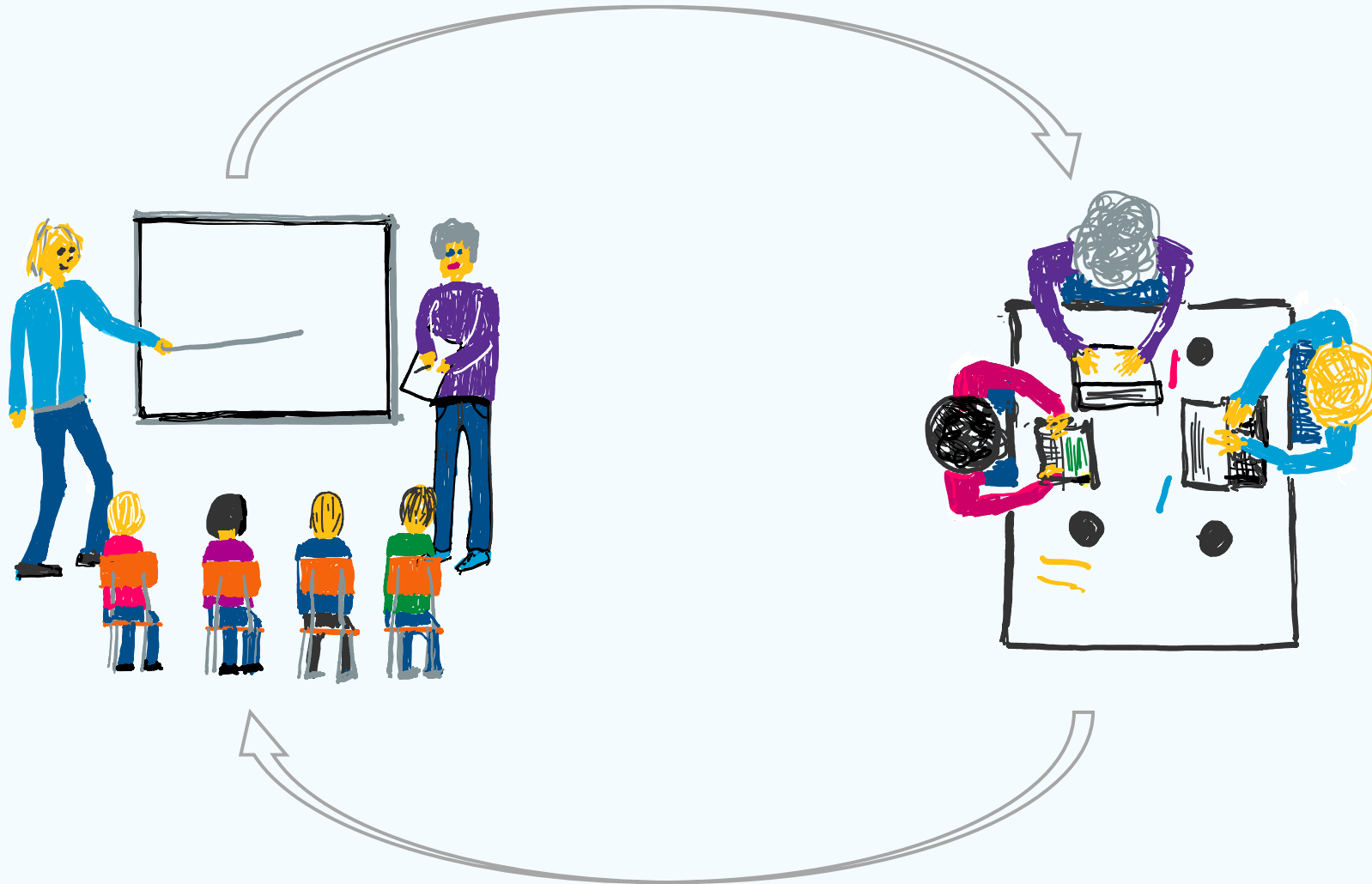
- Active, inquiry-based, and reflective
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Sustained and ongoing over time
- Focus on improving student learning
- Closely connected to classroom practice
- External support and models

# Teachers' professional learning & development (Desimone/Darling-Hammond)

- ✓ Active, inquiry-based, and reflective
- ✓ Collaboration with colleagues
- ✓ Sustained and ongoing over time
- ✓ Focus on improving student learning
- ✓ Closely connected to classroom practice
- ✓ External support and models

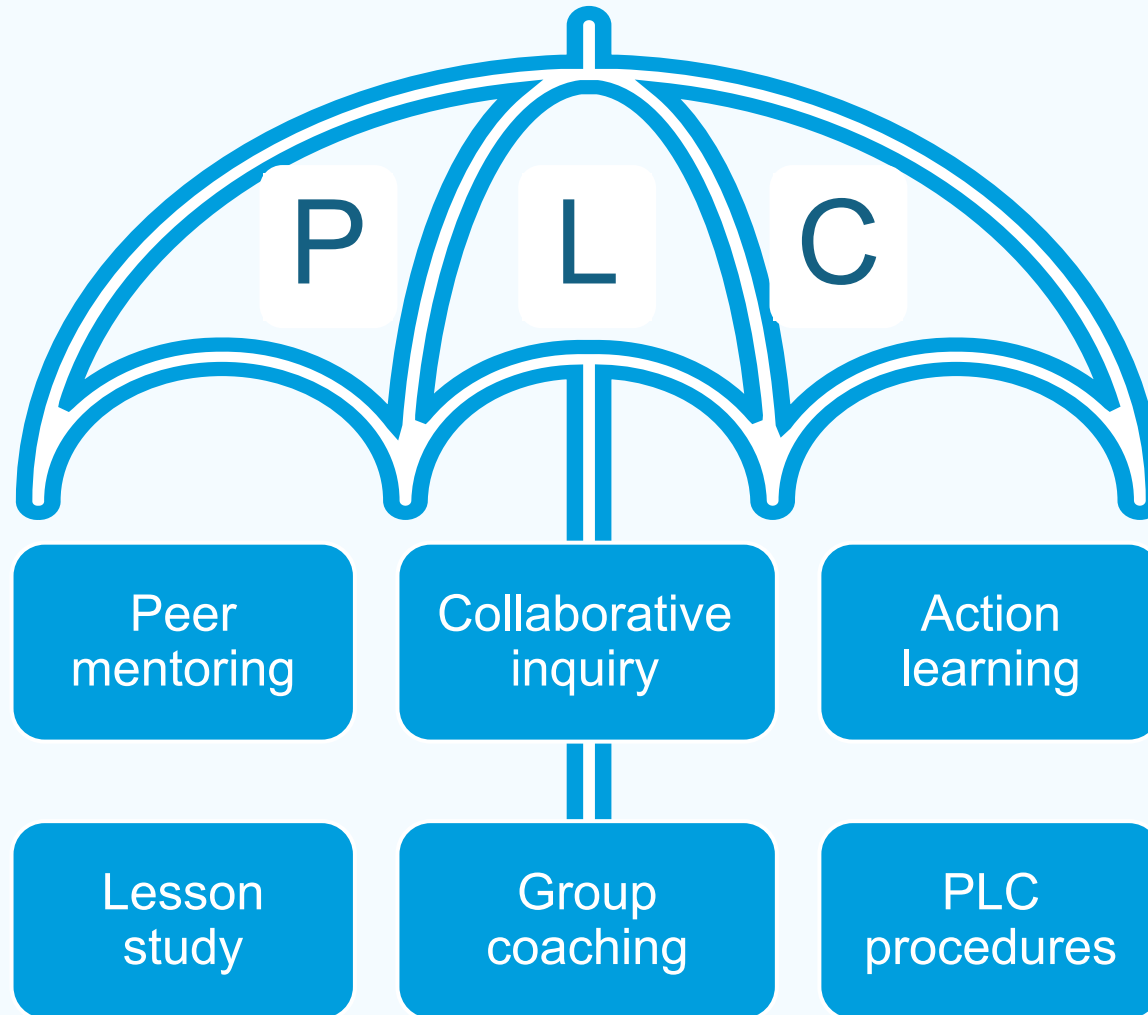


# Basics of a PLC



**WE ARE**  
(culture)

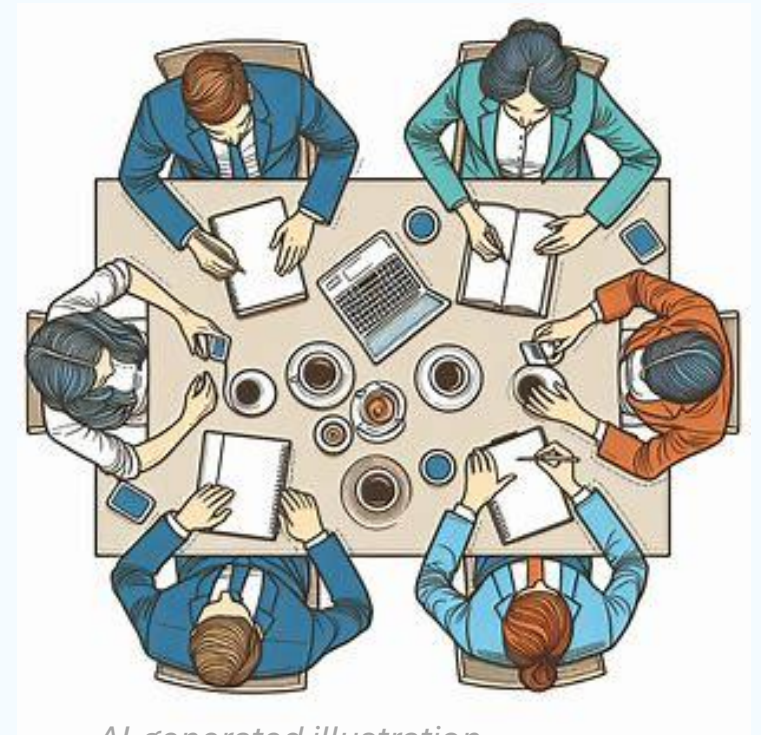
**WE DO**  
(action)



**CULTURE BUILDING**

# Facilitated PLC meetings – also for leaders

- Review of action plans
- Progress and status of cases
- Round of clarifying questions
- Group's input – one at a time
- Facilitator summarizes
- Focus person clarifies next step



*AI-generated illustration*

*Source: Anne Berit Emstad, NTNU*

# The study

# Research problem and questions

**What do principals experience as significant when leading PLCs?**

- How do principals learn how to lead and facilitate PLC processes?
- How do they experience support in leading PLCs?

# Data collection

- Qualitative, interview-based study (phenomenological-hermeneutic)
- One focus group interviews and three individual interviews
- Informants: Seven experienced principals from public schools
- Both members (PPLC) and facilitators of PLCs
- Geographical distribution – school owners in three different Norwegian counties
- Varying degree of PLC experience, but shared theoretical pedigree
- All interviews were digitally mediated (MS Teams)

# Data analysis

## 1. Descriptive analysis

- Summarizing and organizing data
- Abductive approach (inductive and deductive)

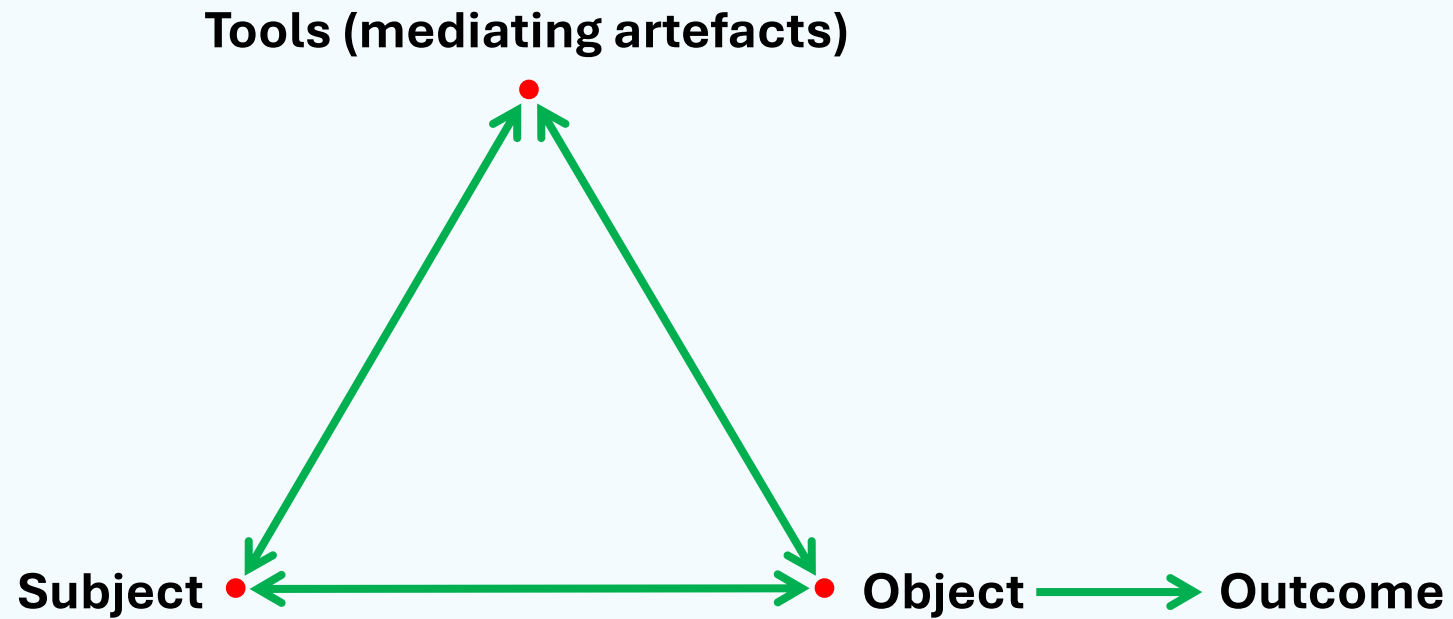
## 2. Theoretical analysis by activity system analysis (ASA)

- Interpretation
- Theory-building

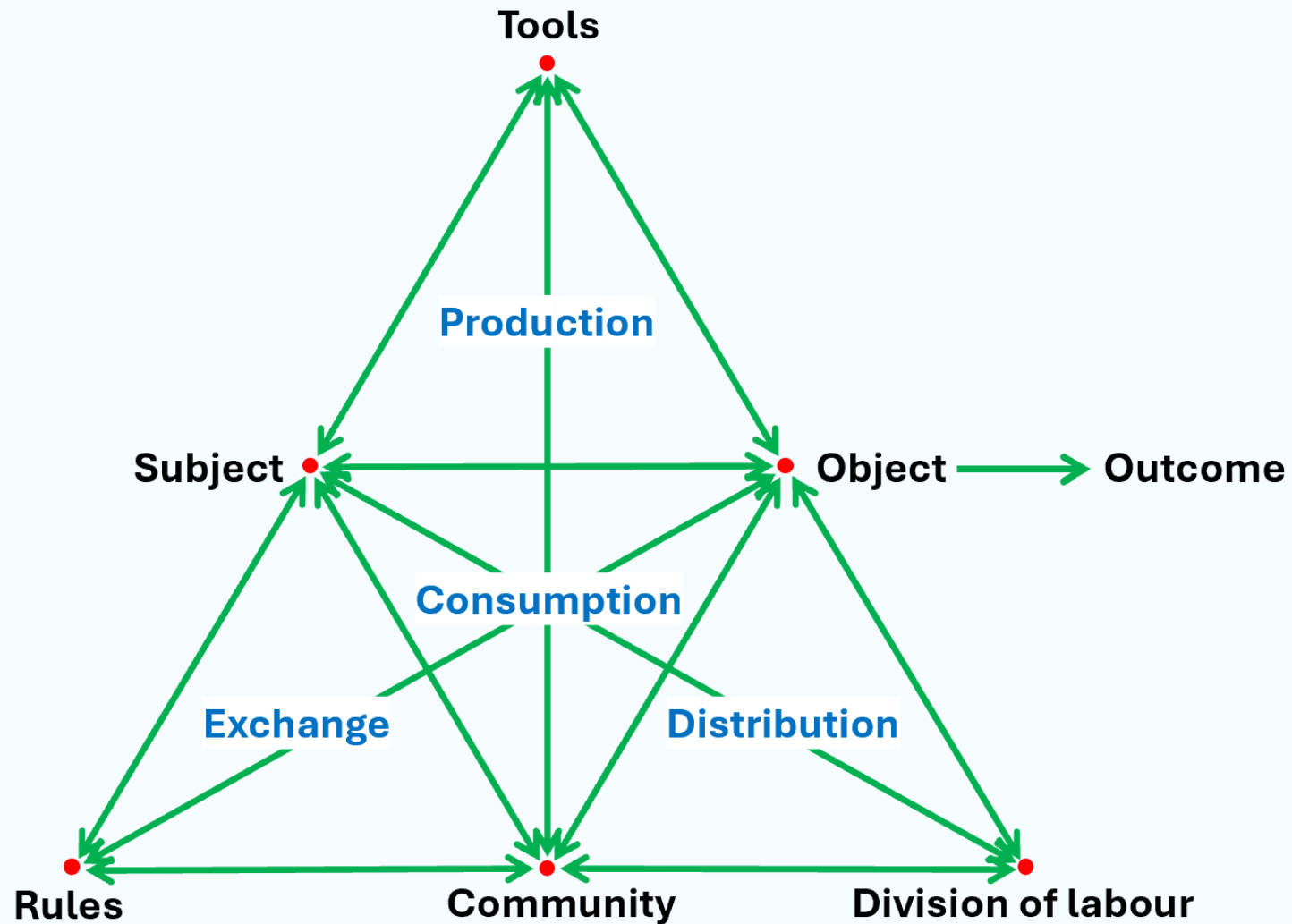
# Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

- Focuses on human activity as the unit of analysis, shaped by cultural and historical context
- Activity consists of actions, which consists operations
- Views activity as dynamic, collective, and goal-oriented
- Highlights contradictions as drivers of learning and development
- Used to analyze complex practices through activity system analysis (ASA)

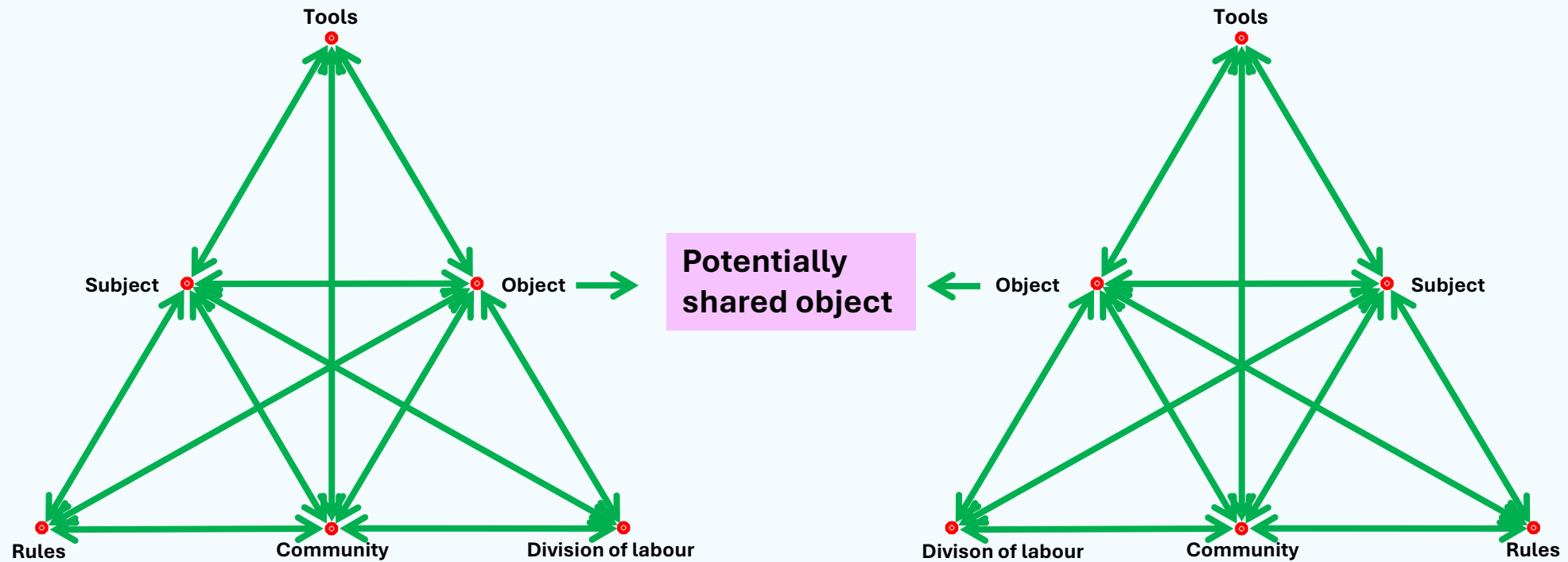
# First Generation Activity System (Vygotsky)



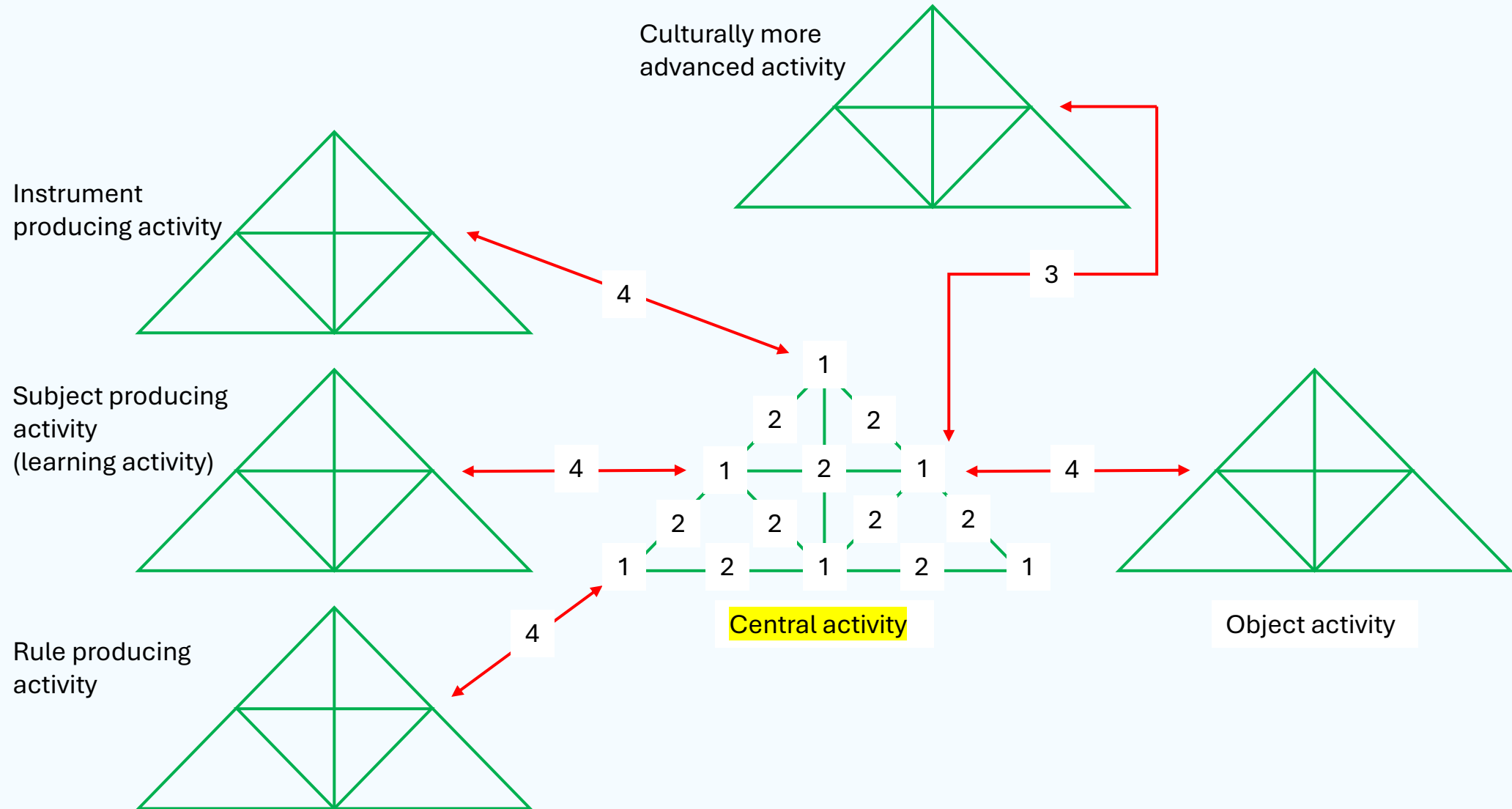
## 2nd. Generation Activity System (Leont'ev/Engeström)



# 3rd. Generation Activity System (Engeström)



# Neighbouring systems and levels of contradiction



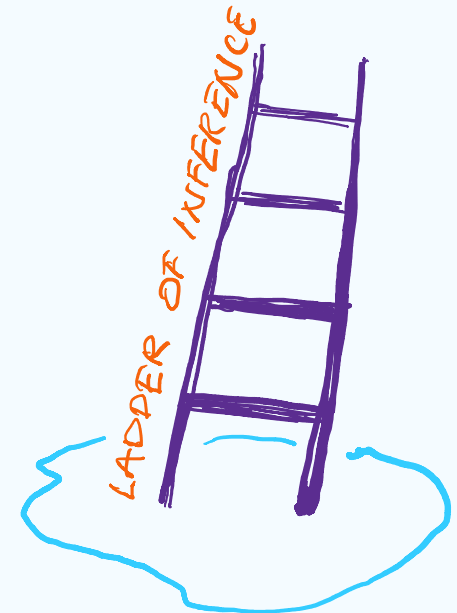
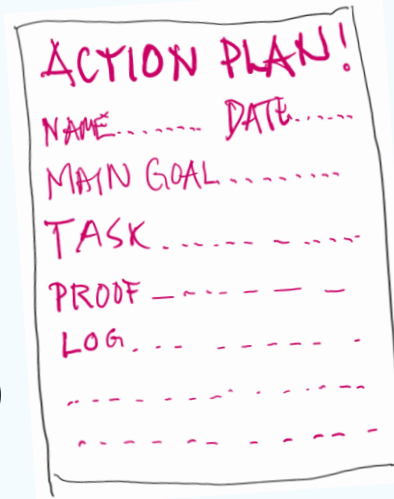
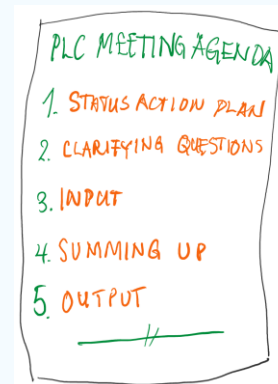
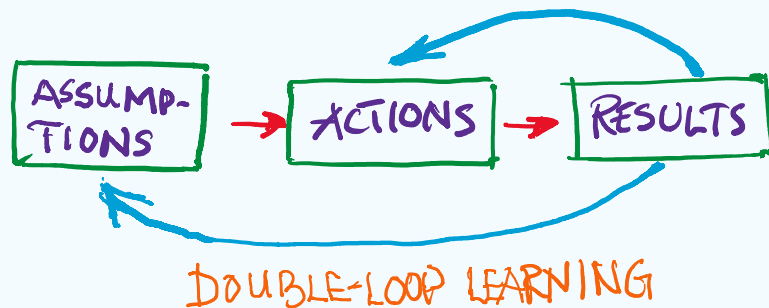
# Findings

Three factors were found to be significant for the principal's PLC leadership

1. Availability of suitable **tools** («the toolbox»)
2. **Learning** through leading and facilitating PLCs («the two-stage rocket»)
3. **Time** to do the work («the new normal»)

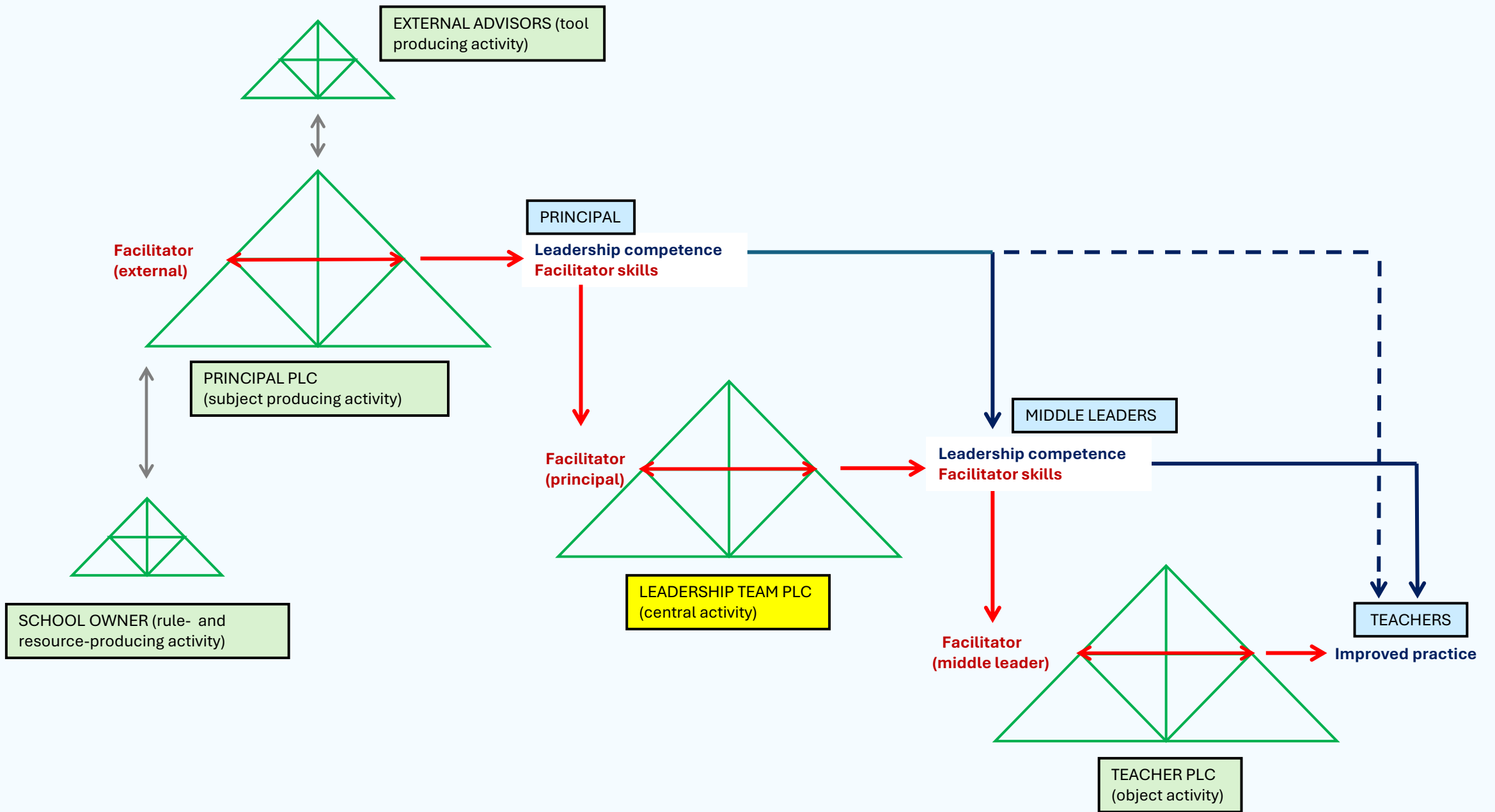
# 1. “The Toolbox”

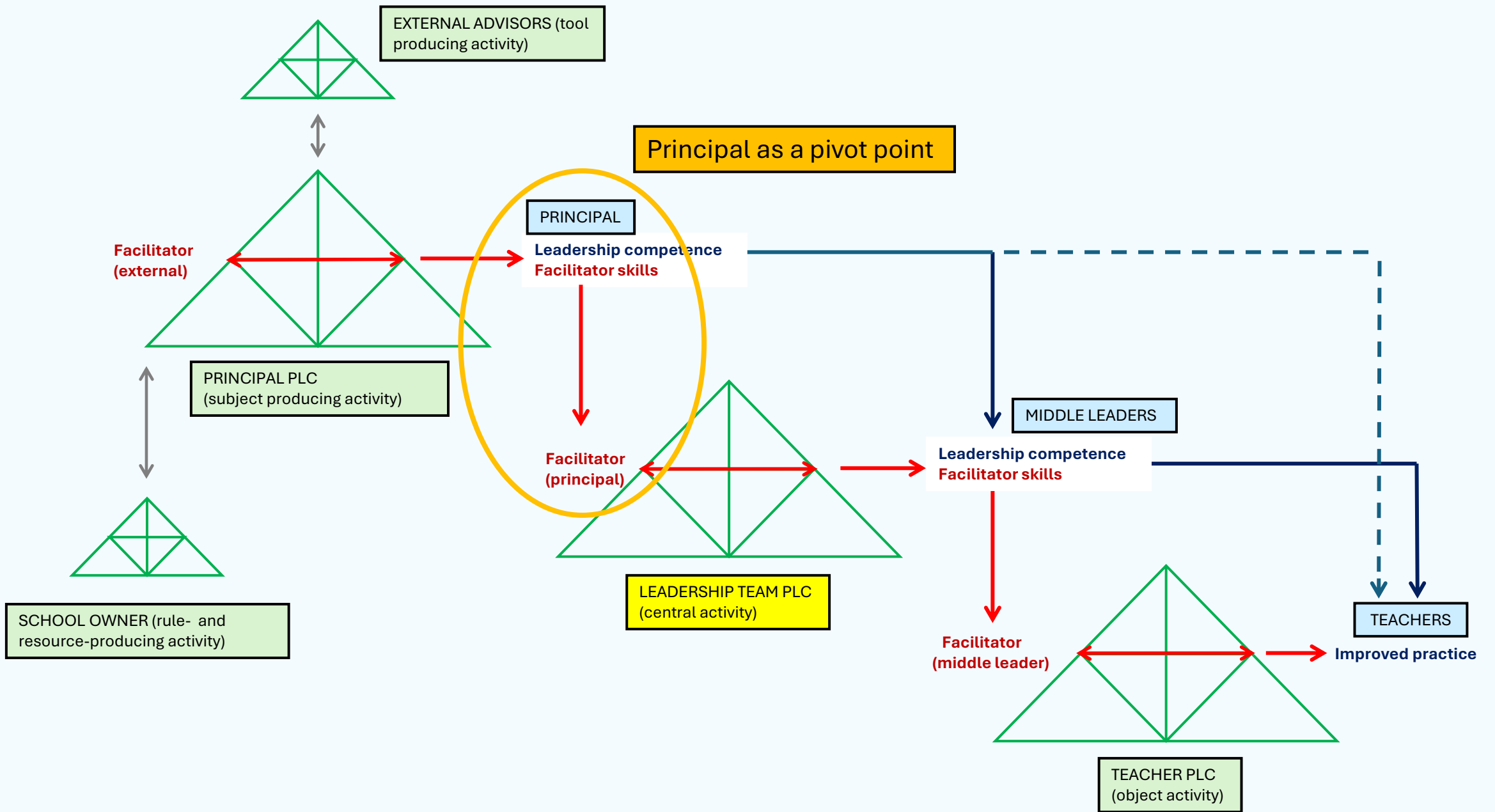
- Consisted primarily of conceptual tools (routines, agendas, models, templates...)
- Provided by the external experts (the tool producing system)
- Important in the implementation phase, but also mentioned by the experienced
- Instructions in the proper use of the tools was regarded as important
- Leadership theory was activated, especially learning leadership (Robinson)



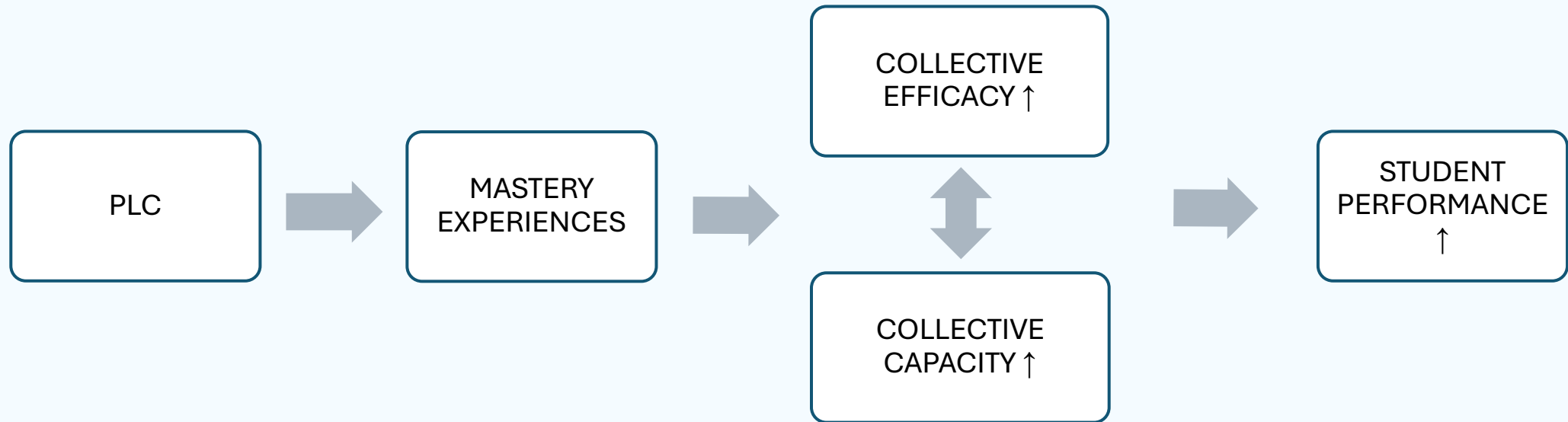
## 2. “The Two-stage Rocket”

- How do principals learn?
  - Learning through **participating** in the principal PLC (subject producing system)
  - Learning through **facilitating** the school’s leadership team PLC (*consumption* within the central system)
  - “Learning in tandem” – Carmi et al., 2022
- What do they learn?
  - **Facilitator expertise**
  - **Leadership competence**





# Mastery, efficacy and capacity building



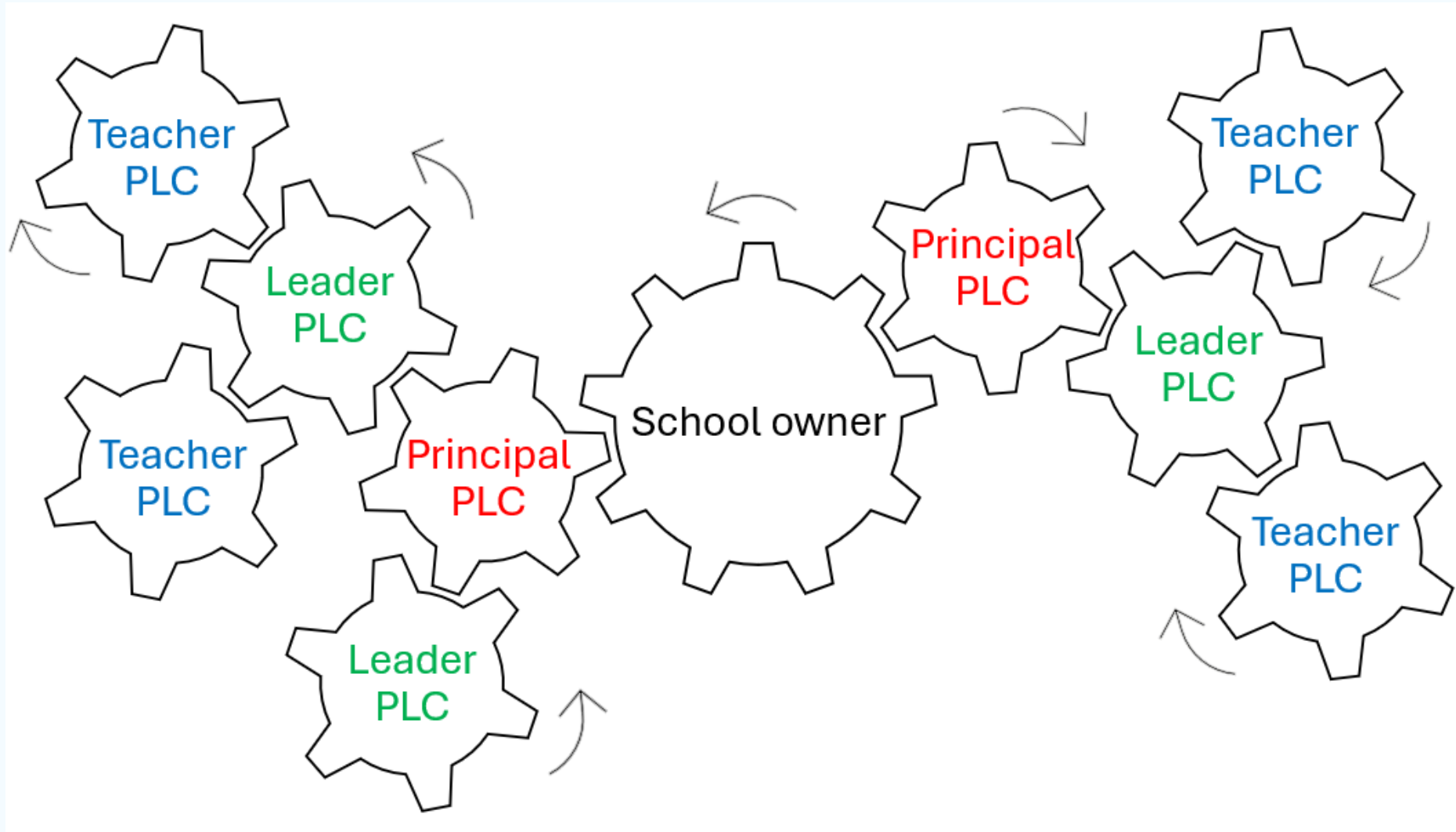
### 3. “The New Normal”

- *Time* as a critical factor. Two dimensions:
  - *Dedicated time* to carry out the PLC activities – time as a resource
  - Time as *continuity* – sustained effort – managerial system-level decision (a rule)
- School owner as both *rule* and *resource* producing systems (Hyppönen, 2007)
- Disruption through leadership team turnover was expressed as a threat
- Sustained systemic effort and support a necessity for systemic capacity building

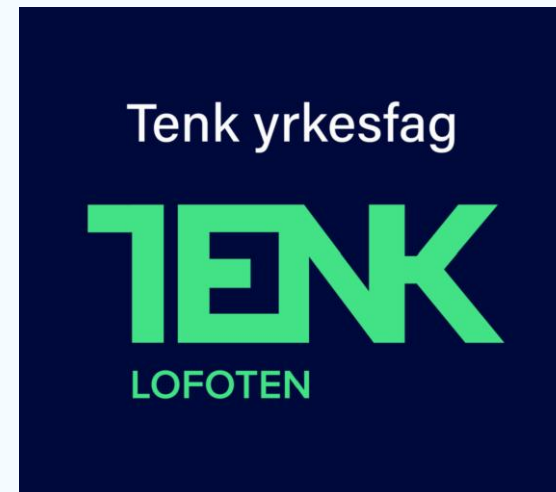
# Quote from one of the interviewees

*“Now we must use this, and it must become the new normal, so that it goes on and on. And then, at some point, we might feel that we are trained well enough to stand firmly on our own feet in this. But we must continue with the same methodology, and not shift to something new all the time, because if you look back a bit, there have been many brief waves of different types of development initiatives, and we have never stopped to do an evaluation. Where are we, and where are we going? Instead, something new has just come along. And all these things are, in themselves, positive, but they need to be placed in a larger context.”*

# A Systemic Perspective: “The Improvement Machinery”



# Institutions



# Thank you for listening!

