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# **People Management in Schools: Practical Strategies Used by Selected UK Local Headteachers to Create Supportive and Respectful Working Environments for Teachers**

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*ABSTRACT: Headteachers who overlook the importance of teachers' professional expertise and contributions can negatively affect teachers' occupational wellbeing, by increasing the risk of attrition, and breaking an element of the UK Headteachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2020). These challenges may often stem from ineffective people management, particularly the failure to nurture a working environment in which teachers feel valued and respected. Although existing literature acknowledges these issues, there remains a gap in research concerning the practical, day-to-day strategies local UK headteachers as people managers could employ to foster*

*such environments. To address this gap, this study investigated the following research question: As people managers, how could headteachers nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected?*

*Using Microsoft TEAMS and the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc) Online survey platform, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six headteachers from two underrepresented regions in England—namely the Midlands and Yorkshire—which are seldom explored in existing research literature relevant to this study. Additionally, four more headteachers contributed through an online qualitative survey. Purposeful convenient or opportunity sampling was used to select interviewees, and a snowball strategy was used to attract survey participants. The NVivo software was used to analyse the data. Both universities involved granted ethical approval.*

*The findings revealed that, as a key aspect of people management, selected local UK headteachers fostered a working environment in which teachers feel valued and respected by engaging in a range of supportive practices. These include supporting teachers' personal and professional welfare, treating the process as a moral responsibility and high priority, being mindful of their time and emotional wellbeing, offering meaningful recognition and rewards, communicating effectively, motivating staff, treating teachers as professionals, enabling teacher voice, providing leadership opportunities, and promoting collaboration. While these findings are not new, they contribute to the literature by validating and extending knowledge within a new geographical context—Midlands and Yorkshire, England. Although well-documented in broader educational discussions, applying previous findings to a localised setting provides valuable evidence of how national and international occurrences manifest in regions often overlooked by the literature.*

**Key words:** Headteachers, principals, teachers' wellbeing, people management

## Introduction

Headteachers who overlook the importance of teachers and acknowledging their professional abilities and contributions are factors that significantly affect teachers' occupational wellbeing and may contribute to attrition. A recent Office for Standards in Education ([Ofsted], 2019) report helps to support this idea when it highlights that "... only 57% of teachers surveyed in the report said their headteachers gave them praise or recognition" (p. 46). A respondent in the Ofsted (2019) report also said, "Higher management walk past teaching staff and do not even say hello" (p. 45). The report goes on to state that this lack of praise, recognition, and appreciation for the work done by staff or unpleasant behaviour negatively influences staff occupational wellbeing in schools (Minott, 2024). Importantly, this lack of valuing and respecting teachers by some headteachers breaches an aspect of the UK Government's Headteachers' standards 2020 (Department for Education, 2020).

While we recognise the many and varied daily demands facing headteachers, we suggest that the less-than-complimentary findings outlined in the Ofsted citation above may stem from ineffective people management, particularly the failure to nurture a working environment in which

teachers feel valued and respected (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Having said this, and in the spirit of critical reflection, we are mindful of the difficulty of establishing a clear cause-and-effect relationship within complex social settings such as schools. Therefore, we intentionally use the word “may” to indicate a degree of caution, suggesting a possible, but not definitive connection.

Importantly, what is missing from the literature is focused research on the practical, everyday actions local UK headteachers as people managers could use to nurture environments where teachers feel valued and respected. Given the foregoing discussion, the aim of this study was to provide answers to a research question: As people managers, how could headteachers nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected?

This article commences with a review of the literature and then presents the research supporting the article, the findings, summary, limitations, and implications for practice.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review succinctly examines the concept of people management including challenges headteachers may encounter in their role as people managers and ways that they could, potentially, nurture a working environment where teachers feel valued and respected.

### **People Management: Definition**

The term people management (PM) is often linked to the fields of business and Human Resources, leading to most definitions being framed within the context of these disciplines. For example, Visier Team (2025) and Armstrong (2020) see PM as a set of practices that includes talent acquisition, onboarding, development, and retention, all while providing continuous support to the organisation and individual employees. While this definition could be applied to education and schools, it does not fully capture the nuances and uniqueness of these areas—education and schools—where people are the most valuable resource (Bush & Middlewood, 2005) and they are prioritised above earnings, budgeting, marketing, and business planning.

A synthesis of several recent works provides a useful definition of people management that captures the uniqueness of education and schools. Jerrim et al. (2025) explore the relationship between school leadership, teacher job satisfaction, and retention in England. Their longitudinal study highlights the pivotal role of headteachers in shaping working conditions and emotional support for staff. People management is conceptualised through the actions of school leaders who balance job demands and resources, foster positive relationships, and protect staff from external pressures. This framing positions leadership as central to staff wellbeing and motivation, with direct implications for retention outcomes.

See et al. (2024) present an international evidence review on the relationship between school leadership and teacher wellbeing. People management is defined as an integral component of school leadership, encompassing activities such as shaping a shared vision, fostering a supportive school climate, developing leadership capacity in others, improving instructional practices, and managing people, data, and processes. The review highlights the importance of

supportive and empowering leadership that protects staff from external pressures and promotes professional development and wellbeing.

ImpactEd (2022) conducted a national survey exploring staff satisfaction in schools, with a particular focus on the role of leadership in shaping school culture, communication, and morale. People management is conceptualised through the quality of line management, assessed via observable behaviours such as openness, fairness, consistency, conflict resolution, guidance, relationship-building, and developmental support.

A synthesis of the above studies reveals that people management in schools refers to the strategic and relational practices employed by school leaders—particularly headteachers and line managers—to support, develop, and retain staff. This suggests that people management must be purposefully planned and is a central responsibility of leaders such as headteachers. But, most importantly, people management encompasses creating a supportive work environment, balancing job demands and resources, fostering professional growth, and cultivating trust through fair and consistent leadership behaviours. Effective people management also involves shaping a shared vision, empowering others, managing interpersonal dynamics, and protecting staff from external pressures, all of which contribute to staff wellbeing, morale, and retention (ImpactEd, 2022; Jerrim, 2025; See et al., 2024).

An examination of the synthesis and subsequent definition of PM above reveals several key insights. Firstly, it removes direct references to business-oriented terminology such as budgeting, finance, talent acquisition, onboarding, marketing, and earnings, thereby shifting the focus away from business priorities. Secondly, it places people at the centre, recognising them as the most valuable resource within an organisation (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Thirdly, it emphasises that a key component of people management is the creation of a working environment in which staff feel valued and respected, and where their wellbeing is actively supported (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Finally, it involves practices such as recognising achievements, providing opportunities for growth, fostering open communication, and building strong interpersonal relationships among staff.

## **People Management: Local Challenge**

Heath and Sherwood (2024) and Allen et al. (2025) support the idea that presently in the UK, headteachers face numerous significant challenges in their role as people managers when striving to nurture a work environment where staff feel valued and respected. Challenges such as limited time to engage meaningfully in the process and addressing a wide array of responsibilities that demand their attention, many of which are perceived as more urgent or pressing. These include, but are not limited to, staff recruitment and retention, student attainment, the integration of technology, the increasing prevalence of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), mounting pressure on SEND services, and the mental health and wellbeing of both students and school staff. Despite all these, it is a responsibility of headteachers as people managers to nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Therefore, as managers of people, how could they nurture such a working environment? The upcoming discussion considers a range of potential answers.

## **People Management: Nurturing a Working Environment Where Staff Feel Valued and Respected**

The literature suggests several potential ways headteachers, as people managers, could nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected. These are discussed here.

### ***Prioritising Staff Personal and Professional Welfare***

Day and Sammons (2014) identify understanding people as a key trait of effective school leaders, including attention to teachers' personal and professional welfare, which positively influences their feelings (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). Several suggested activities in which headteachers could engage are connected to the idea of looking out for teachers' personal and professional welfare.

One is to display empathy. Doing so fosters emotional safety and trust and helps teachers feel understood and valued (Twyford & Le Fevre, 2019). Twyford and Le Fevre found that teachers felt respected when headteachers considered their perspectives, treating them as "whole persons" (p. 315), which promotes flexibility and understanding (Mattock, 2017). Two, is to offer supportive classroom supervision that encourages teachers' growth. It involves active engagement in supervision of teachers—observations, feedback, goal setting—and care for teachers' development (Quick & Normore, 2004). Ebmeier (2003) and Hughes et al. (2014) add that headteachers must also understand daily school realities in order to reduce teacher isolation and burnout. Three, is to provide general support that empowers teachers professionally. This includes being approachable, offering constructive feedback, advice, and encouragement (Mestry & Vanitha, 2021; Twyford & Le Fevre, 2019). Four, headteachers must be attentive to teachers' time and promote work–life balance. Headteachers might also protect non-contact time and avoid introducing initiatives during peak workload periods (Morris et al., 2021). There is also a broader call among writers such as Scott et al. (2021), Masoom (2021), Bayles and Knowles (2019), and Butt and Lance (2005), to reduce curriculum changes, improve communication, and increase preparation time, though this poses timetabling challenges. Finally, there is also the suggestion that headteachers and school leaders should personally help to mitigate teachers' workload by (where possible) taking responsibility for extra tasks placed on teachers. This action is defined as "tasks exclusion" (Soini et al., 2016, p. 464)—where headteachers taking on extra responsibilities can reduce teacher stress and burnout, thus allowing focus on teaching and personal wellbeing (Soini et al., 2016).

### ***Fostering a Culture of Recognition and Appreciation***

Recognising or acknowledging teachers via monetary incentives or pay increases is just one form of recognition and appreciation. Braga et al. (2020) suggest such incentives or pay increases may only appeal to a limited group. Teachers also value public recognition from headteachers and colleagues, changes in responsibilities, and career advancement opportunities (Hughes et al., 2014).

Additionally, teachers perceive effective headteachers as those who are visible within the school (Johnson et al., 2005). Lambersky (2016) supports this view and states that headteachers'

presence in school physical spaces enables impromptu social interactions that provide opportunities to express appreciation and set a positive tone for staff and students.

### ***Building Autonomy and Trust***

Blase and Blase (2000) emphasise the importance of school leaders showing fundamental respect for teachers' knowledge and abilities, viewing them as intellectuals rather than technicians (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Butt and Lance (2005) further highlight that teachers value being trusted to exercise professional judgement. This includes being encouraged to use their skills and initiative, express ideas, receive constructive feedback, and feel genuinely valued in their roles (Masoom, 2021).

### ***Encouraging Open Communication***

Communicating with teachers is a keyway for headteachers to demonstrate value and respect for teachers. Hughes et al. (2014) emphasise that communication supports a positive school culture, helping to overcome barriers and implement constructive ideas. Open and frequent dialogue, soliciting teacher input on instruction, and involving them in decision making are essential communication practices (Blase & Blase, 2000; Easley, 2008; Ford et al., 2019; Quick & Normore, 2004). Central to this is enabling teacher voice. Lambersky (2016) found that when headteachers seriously consider and act on teachers' input, professional engagement improves. Drawing on Lundy's (2007) model, headteachers should create opportunities (space) for teachers to express their opinions, allow teachers to express their opinion (voice) without fear of reprisal, taking their opinion seriously (audience), and appropriately acting on the opinion (influence).

### ***Providing Professional Development***

Providing continued professional development (CPD) is another way headteachers can demonstrate value and respect for teachers. This includes allocating departmental funds for teachers to attend conferences and seminars and encouraging them to share knowledge gained during staff meetings (Mattock, 2017).

### ***Promoting Collaboration***

Blase and Blase (2000) advocate for headteachers to intentionally create time and opportunities for peer connections among teachers. Ford et al. (2019) and Hughes et al. (2014) emphasise not only the need for collaboration time but also the importance of meaningful interactions. These should involve strategic exchanges that support teacher growth and practice improvement, rather than focusing solely on school or student needs.

While the above literature suggests several potential strategies that headteachers in their role as people managers could use to nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected, there remains a gap in understanding how selected local UK headteachers actually nurture such a working environment. To address this gap, the present study was launched.

## **Methodology**

The study uses an instrumental case study approach, where the case serves to highlight a broader issue (Creswell, 2018; Stake, 2000). In our study, local UK headteachers from two regions rarely explored in the existing research literature addressing the concerns of this study—namely the Midlands and Yorkshire England—were used to explore how headteachers, as people managers, could nurture working environments where teachers feel valued and respected. This methodology also aided in providing answers to our research question as aptly demonstrated in the section titled **Discussion of Findings**.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

Semi-structured interviews and qualitative online surveys were the data collection methods used. Interviews were conducted and audio recorded via the Microsoft Teams online platform. Two of the three members of the research team individually arranged and carried out one-to-one interviews with participants. A copy of the interview questions developed based on the literature reviewed above can be requested from the authors, if desired. For individual interviews, at an agreed time, the interviewer called the participants (via Microsoft Teams), requested confirmation that they had understood the study information and addressed any questions they had. The interviewer then carried out the interview. The qualitative online survey was created and implemented using the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc) Online survey platform. The reviewed literature was used to aid the construction of survey questions. A copy of the qualitative questionnaire can be requested from the authors, if desired. Via interviews, six headteachers provided data and there were four additional respondents to the online survey. The online survey ran from November 2023 ending in March 2024.

### **Piloting of Instrument**

The piloting of the interview schedule confirmed the research interview schedule as effective in collecting relevant data within the specified time allocated for its use. The piloting of the interview was also confirmatory in the relevance of the interview questions to generate data to answer our main research question (Creswell, 2018).

### **Participants Selection Process**

Interview participants selected for the study were primary and secondary headteachers (five males and one female) working in the Midlands and Yorkshire regions of England. Aside from identifying participants by gender here in this section, no additional background or biographical data were collected, as such information was not relevant to achieving the study's aim. In the selection process, we used purposeful convenient or opportunity sampling (Creswell, 2018). The participants were selected based on their extensive experience as headteachers and their capacity to offer in-depth insights into the research issue. An analysis of the study's findings and participant responses will demonstrate that they were able to provide in-depth insights and relevant and unique

perspectives on the topic under investigation. Participants were also introduced to the research team by university staff or were known personally by members of the team hence easily accessible and readily available.

Qualitative survey participants were those in the interviewees' network. Here too, no background or biographical data were collected, as such information was not relevant to achieving the study's aim. Interview participants were asked to forward an electronic link of the qualitative online survey to their network of headteachers, following a snowball sampling technique.

## **Data Analysis**

The automatic transcribed qualitative interview and qualitative questionnaire data (Jisc Online software and Microsoft TEAMS) were added to the NVivo computer software, and the content analysed to identify phrases or words that captured the essence of the data (Cresswell, 2018; Stake, 2000). The data from the interview were treated as the primary data and that from the survey as the secondary. This means, the qualitative survey data were used to make plausible the findings of the interviews. These were analysed using "within and cross-case" analysis (Creswell, 2018). This meant that an analysis was done on each participants' views as was a cross-examination of emerging categories or themes to discern findings that were common to all cases (Creswell, 2018). This process was carried out individually by members of the research team. Later, the team met to discuss and finalise the emerging categories or themes. This process also aided in reducing researchers' bias and the use of "investigators' triangulation" (Archibald, 2016) adds further rigour to the study. Table 1 displays the identified theme and subthemes.

## **Ethical Issues**

Ethics committees of the universities involved approved this research. Consent forms were created, sent to participants who signed and returned them, thus indicating their willingness to participate. To ensure anonymity, unique identifiers were assigned to interview participants (headteachers). These were H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6, that is, headteacher 1–6. The online survey participants were assigned the following identifiers R1, R2, R3, R4, that is, respondent 1, respondent 2, respondent 3, and respondent 4.

## **Discussion of Findings**

As indicated above, we commence this discussion by presenting the main theme and subthemes in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Main Theme and Subthemes*

Main Theme	Subthemes
Supporting Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending to teachers’ personal and professional welfare</li> <li>• Internalising the need to support teachers</li> <li>• Viewing support as a moral responsibility</li> <li>• Being mindful of teachers’ time</li> <li>• Displaying “affective-ness”</li> <li>• Offering recognition and rewards</li> <li>• Communicating effectively</li> <li>• Motivating teachers</li> <li>• Treating teachers as professionals</li> <li>• Enabling teachers’ voice</li> <li>• Offering leadership opportunities</li> <li>• Promoting collaboration</li> </ul>

The main theme was supporting teachers. This phrase emerged consistently across all participant responses. Also, in their role as people managers, headteachers prioritised a range of supportive practices (Subthemes).

**Supporting Teachers**

An overview of the findings reveals that, while headteachers never directly used the term “people management”, the results point to the fact that they engaged in the area.

For example, leading teaching and supporting staff with empathy—see the discussion under subheading **Displaying “Affective-ness”**—and seeking to develop supportive working environments. When asked to describe his working environment, H4 stated: “I think it’s very supportive, very positive, we call ourselves—it’s not just me—, but we call ourselves our school family”. Implicit in this statement is the idea that a family is a source of support (Buchanan & McConnell, 2017). Taken together, these actions are indicative of people management (ImpactEd, 2022; Jerrim, 2025; See et al., 2024).

**Attending to Teachers’ Personal and Professional Welfare and Internalising the Process**

“I think we ... for the staff and the children, really, we focus on supporting people’s emotional wellbeing, on supporting their development” (H1). “I’ve been headteacher for several years now and I view my work in England as doing my very best to protect staff, the first port of call is always support” (H3). H4 said, when talking about supporting teachers, “that is what I am”. Used this way, H4 has internalised the process for the phrase reflects an inherent quality, indicating that supporting teachers is internal, satisfying, and enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## **Viewing Support as a Moral Responsibility**

For H1, supporting teachers is a moral responsibility or a sense of duty based on her personal beliefs, values, and principles. Therefore, she views supporting teachers as her “moral role” which prompts her to deliberately find ways to support their development. She said: “I’ll take a breath and notice what’s going on around and then look at how best to utilise a person— and not always for the benefit of the school— but to support that person’s development” (H1). This sense of duty seems to result in some participants prioritising the support of teachers. For example, H2 sees the support of teachers as a high priority. This means ensuring teachers are well, supported, heard, and able to teach. This prioritisation is especially important, given the current demands on headteachers’ time to attend to issues considered more urgent and pressing (Allen et al., 2025; Heath & Sherwood, 2024).

## **Being Mindful of Teacher’s Time**

In relation to planning, preparation, and assessment (PPA) time, H1 supported by R2 stated that teachers’ PPA time is precious and must be protected. H1 supports teachers by giving them options to engage in their weekly PPA responsibilities and sees this as valuing them.

One of the simple things we do is with their PPA time each week. Teachers are given the option of half a day a week or a day, or a fortnight, and they do not have to be on site to have their PPA. They can do the PPA from home. (H1)

Bayles and Knowles (2019), Butt and Lance (2005), and Masoom (2021) call on schools and headteachers not just to be time flexible in relation to PPA as suggested by H1, but to extend the PPA time offered to teachers.

The discussion of literature in this article outlines several time-related support headteachers could employ. Morris et al. (2021) and Soini et al. (2016) suggest headteachers (as appropriate) take responsibility for extra tasks placed on teachers and not introduce new initiatives or a school-wide improvement project during periods when teachers are engaged in marking student work or students’ examination script. Further, Lemaire (2014) suggests beginning each academic year by reviewing school practices that may divert teachers from focusing on student learning.

## **Displaying “Affective-ness”**

Headteachers valuing and respecting teachers is reflected in support that is mindful of the affective aspect of the teacher, that is, looking out for their personal wellbeing (Day & Sammons, 2014; Quick & Normore, 2004; Twyford & Le Fevre, 2019). Participants demonstrated that they value and respect teachers by offering support that is mindful of emotional and relational needs (affective). H1 gives an example:

We do initiatives from time to time. This Christmas, the last few weeks we do a staff prize draw every day ... and there’s little gifts and things we do like that during the year as well, if we detect that staff struggling a little bit ... towards the end of the year we just try and put things in to boost morale a little bit.

Twyford and Le Fevre (2019) also argue that being affective during lesson observations means going beyond the technical aspects of teaching to also recognise and celebrate the teacher as a person.

## **Offering Recognition and Rewards**

Participants showed they valued and respected teachers by providing recognition and rewards. Recognition took the form of saying thanks or writing a thank you letter to staff (H1, H4, H5, H6), giving badges for years of service (H5), encouraging students to say thank you to teachers (H1), rewarding teachers with an extra day for a good Ofsted outcome (H5), and giving cards to teachers and sending letters to parents outlining staff achievements (H3). One participant highlighted that while headteachers are not always able to offer financial recognition or rewards to teachers, they can be progressed faster through the pay scale (H5). However, teachers also value a personal thank you from headteachers and/or public recognition (Braga et al., 2020; Hewett, 2023). H3 noted that he does not always engage in traditional forms of recognition, such as sending thank you letters. He states:

I don't do the sort of classic recognition of you know, let's send a letter saying you're great ... I try and encourage people to get involved in things that they like ... it's getting people involved in the things that they're interested in.

## **Communicating Effectively**

Participants engaged in both personal and formal supportive communication with teachers. Personal communication included actively listening (H4, H5, H2, R1, R2) and holding regular one-to-one meetings (H1, H4, H5). These meetings may involve informing teachers about a system that will be used (H5) and explicitly sharing the headteacher's vision for the school and consulting with staff on various matters (H3).

Lambersky (2016) adds that personal communication also includes impromptu social interactions—such as informal chats in hallways—which give headteachers small but meaningful opportunities to express gratitude and set a positive tone with staff and students. In personal supportive communication, participants highlighted the need for openness, that is, an open-door policy and open discussion culture.

So, at the end of the academic year, we have a full review of how the year's gone ... it's very much an open-door policy where staff feel that they can always see me or the deputy and talk. (H6)

I'm not saying we never have any staff issues. Of course, we do, but we meet and talk these through ... we have an open discussion culture where people can come and add their concerns and then we work together to address them. (H1)

Formal supportive communication included staff surveys, briefings, feedback, and meeting notes—tools used to keep teachers informed and to gather their views, reinforcing a sense of inclusion and support.

## **Motivating Teachers**

Participating headteachers identified key motivators for teachers. These included a love for teaching and seeing children progress (H2, H1, H4), being listened to and fast-tracked on the pay scale (H2), headteachers' sense of humour (H5), and being granted time off for urgent personal matters (H1). The findings support the use of Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a useful framework for headteachers to foster and sustain teacher motivation.

According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), people are motivated by three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the intrinsic motivation individuals experience when engaging in activities they find inherently interesting (Skinner et al., 2012). H3 shared an example of identifying what motivated a staff member named Chris and enabling her to lead a whole-school project. This action encouraged Chris to stay at the school, even after receiving a job offer elsewhere. H3 made the point that motivating teachers involves "finding opportunities that work for the member of staff and actually produce something productive for the school" (H3).

In SDT, competence refers to teachers' tendency to engage in activities where they feel skilled and capable (Izzati et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In Chris's case (H3), competence is reflected in her completion of a relevant master's degree and upcoming PhD, which made her feel capable of performing the project tasks. Stupnisky et al. (2017) note that teachers with high relatedness tend to collaborate more, learn from others, and support their peers. Chris's running of the whole school project would require the ability to collaborate with, learn from others, and support peers. H3 however cautions headteachers that this way of motivating teachers demands flexibility.

If you talk to teachers about what they want, you should be willing to realign the values of the organisation to fit various needs. So, you've gotta change your sense of direction to fit ... You've gotta be willing to change the goals of the organisation.

## **Treat Teachers as Professionals**

The literature reviewed indicates that treating teachers as professionals reflects headteachers' value and respect for them (Blase & Blase, 2000; Easley, 2008; Ford et al., 2019; Masoom, 2021; Quick & Normore, 2004). Participants in our study suggested that one way to demonstrate this is by trusting teachers to carry out their assigned tasks.

So, that's what we do ... trust them to undertake their work as professionals who don't need somebody waiting for them to trip up. And if they do trip up, we kind of pick them back up and help them along the way. (H4)

H6 highlighted the importance of resisting micromanagement and allowing teachers to take ownership, lead, and make decisions. R3 emphasised the need to develop a personal philosophy built on trust, while R2 stressed that headteachers should focus on enhancing teachers' professional practice.

## **Enabling Voice**

H1 made a statement that encapsulates the essence of this section: “I think everybody wants to feel heard”. H4 added to this noting that teachers “... respect the fact that they’re given an opinion so that they don’t just have a voice, but their voices are actually listened to”. H6 echoed this idea stating: “Staff are motivated when they feel as though their ideas are listened to”. An examination of the literature discussed suggests that by using Lundy’s (2007) model, headteachers should provide space for teachers to share their views, ensure their voice is heard without fear, treat their input seriously, and act on it appropriately.

## **Offering Leadership Opportunities**

The findings of this study support Skerritt et al. (2023) who suggest that headteachers demonstrate respect for teachers by deliberately supporting their promotion into middle leadership roles. Participants highlighted the significance of positions such as subject leaders, heads of year, and leadership team members. H3 spoke positively about distributed leadership, where responsibilities are shared across individuals or teams rather than centralised in the headteacher. Participants often contrasted this approach with authoritarian leadership. While distributed leadership offers benefits such as shared responsibility, H3 cautions about a potential issue. In the following quotation, he highlights this concern while also noting a benefit of authoritarian leadership.

So, one of the issues that you get when you distribute leadership is sometimes the things that you want to happen are harder to make happen. It’s much easier to be authoritarian sometimes. But as soon as you disempower somebody else in a leadership position, then you’ve lost their faith and trust.

In promoting teachers to middle leadership positions, participants shared two insights. One was that headteachers play a key role in “growing leaders” from within, and another suggested that promotions should align with teachers’ skills and areas of interest.

It just improves morale a bit more.... we often have a lot of our senior leadership team, and our middle leadership team are grown leaders. So, we’re growing them, and the Trust [Multi Academy Trust] are also enabling us to grow our own. (H2)

I think again, it’s tapping into people’s personal interest and their skill set and allowing them to engage in those areas. So, for example, if you’ve got a musical member of staff ... putting them leading in that area, you [will] get a better result from someone passionate about that area. (H1)

R3 also supports this idea of tapping into people’s interest and also highlights the importance of providing staff with opportunities to engage in activities that are genuinely interesting and motivating. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which states that people are intrinsically motivated when activities are inherently enjoyable and meet personal needs and interests (Skinner et al., 2012).

## **Promoting Collaboration**

Blase and Blase (2000) and Johnson et al. (2005) suggest that headteachers who support teacher collaboration demonstrate value and respect for their staff. Most participants described their schools as collaborative environments (H6, H5, H1, H4, R2, R3) where teamwork fosters a sense of contributing to educational improvement, and the opportunity to make a difference for students.

So, I would describe the work environment at my school as incredibly collaborative ... teachers feel as though they can contribute to the improvement of the education for the children. And I think that in most cases because staff feel part of the team and because they feel as though they can contribute and collaborate, they then inherently feel motivated because they are making a difference in the job they love. (H6)

H4 highlighted the centrality of collaboration in his school, stating that “every time we would look at changing something, whether it’s curriculum, leadership, documentation, whether it’s how we do assessment, there is always collaboration to assess how the change might have an impact”. R3 added that collaboration shapes the leadership team in their school, while R2 emphasised that the goal is for everyone to work and play together, enabling all to reach their full potential.

## **Summary**

An overview of the findings reveals that, while headteachers in this study never directly used the term people management, the results point to the fact that actions in which they engaged were indicative of the area (ImpactEd, 2022; Jerrim, 2025; See et al., 2025). This suggests participants viewed their role through the lens of people management. This is important because teaching is a people-driven profession where staff morale, motivation, and wellbeing directly influence the quality of teaching and, ultimately, student outcomes. By prioritising people management—protecting teachers’ time, reducing workload, recognising contributions, and fostering trust—headteachers can create conditions where teachers feel valued and respected. This also strengthens professional practice and collaboration. In other words, effective people management is not an insignificant task for headteachers; it is key to nurturing a positive school environment.

This study was guided by a broad research question: As people managers, how could headteachers nurture a working environment where staff feel valued and respected? The findings highlight that this could be accomplished in several ways: 1) supporting and attending to teachers’ personal and professional welfare and internalising the process; 2) viewing the process as a moral responsibility and prioritising the process; 3) being mindful of teachers’ time; 4) displaying “affective-ness”; 5) offering recognition and rewards; 6) communicating effectively; 7) motivating teachers; 8) treating them as professionals; 9) enabling teachers’ voice; 10) offering leadership opportunities, and 11) promoting collaboration.

While these findings are not new, they contribute to the literature by validating and extending knowledge within a new geographical context—Midlands and Yorkshire, England.

Although well-documented in broader educational discussions, applying previous findings to a localised setting provides valuable evidence of how national and international occurrences manifest in regions often overlooked by the literature.

## **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. It draws on a small sample—10 participants (six interviewees and four online survey respondents) and three researchers. This narrow perspective allowed only relatively general statements and precluded large-scale generalisation of the findings.

While headteachers as people managers described support strategies in detail, the study did not capture teachers' perspectives. As a result, it remains unclear whether these efforts were effective in creating a working environment in which teachers felt valued and respected. Consequently, the study cannot fully assess the impact of headteachers' practices, highlighting the need for future research that incorporates teachers' voices to achieve a more balanced understanding. That said, it is important to acknowledge that capturing teachers' views was not the primary aim of this article.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings highlight key implications for the professional practices of headteachers as people managers. As people managers, headteachers should continue to nurture a working environment where teachers feel valued and respected, protecting and flexibly scheduling PPA time, and reducing non-essential workload to prioritise student learning. Support teacher wellbeing through recognition, morale-boosting activities, and small but meaningful rewards. Effective communication that builds openness and trust is also vital. Motivation among teachers can be strengthened by applying Self-Determination Theory and empowering teachers with autonomy, voice, and leadership opportunities. Promoting distributed leadership and collaboration in decision making further enhances engagement and morale. Collectively, these strategies help headteachers as people managers create working environment in schools where teachers feel valued, respected, and supported.

## **Competing Interests and Funding**

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