



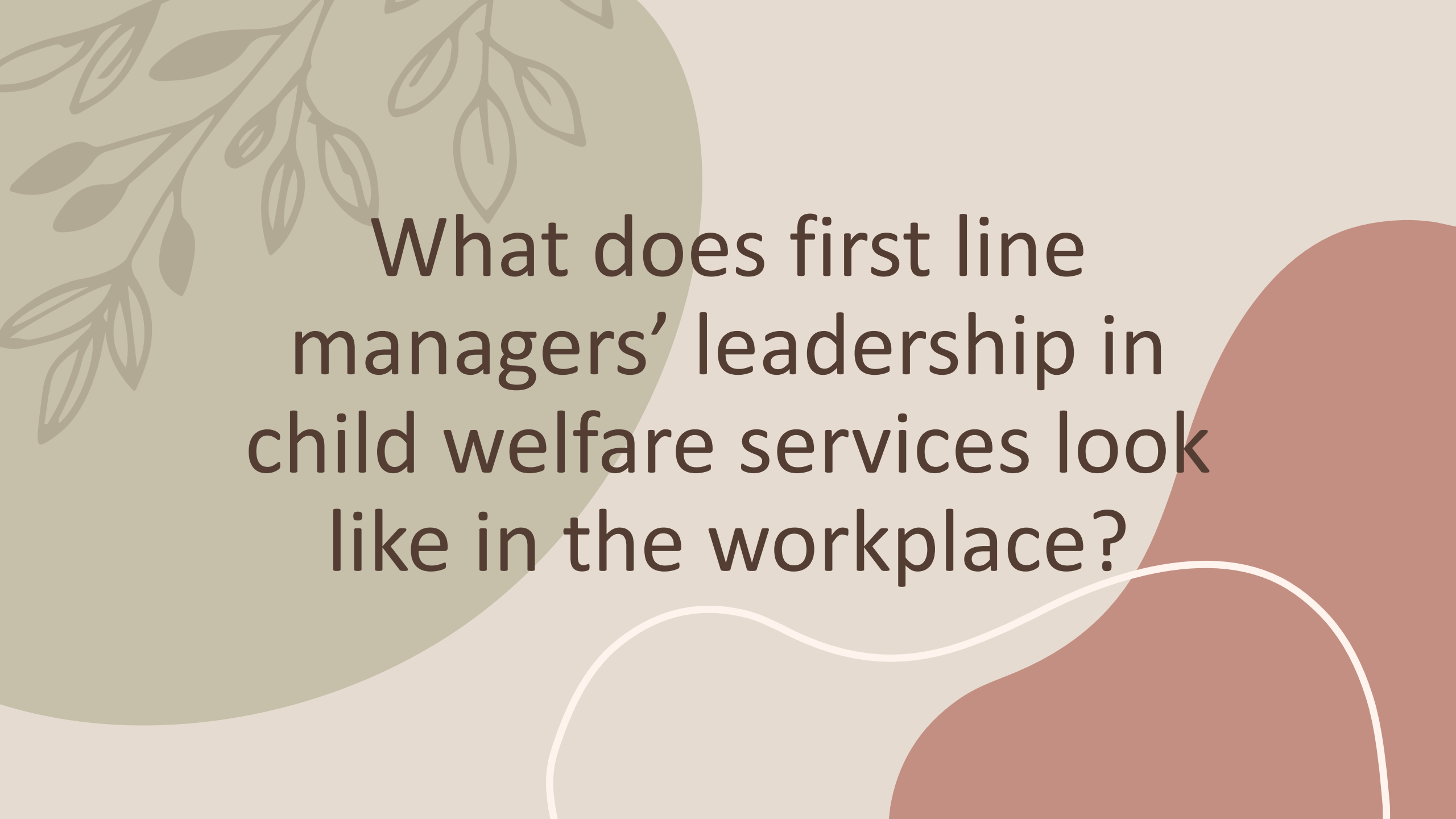
Belfast Health and  
Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

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Presenting as part of Research and Evaluation Methods (3) at Ulster  
University



What does first line  
managers' leadership in  
child welfare services look  
like in the workplace?



AIM

TO EXPLORE THE  
LEADERSHIP OF FIRST LINE  
MANAGERS (TEAM  
LEADERS) IN CHILD  
WELFARE TEAMS FROM  
THEIR OWN PERSPECTIVE  
AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF  
THE FRONT-LINE SOCIAL  
WORKERS THEY MANAGE.



# objectives

1. To gather demographic information of a cross-sectional convenience sample of the child welfare workforce in the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. (Age, race/ethnicity, gender, length of time in post and with Trust, full-time or part-time staff, role, first management role, permanent staff, leadership training, consider themselves as a leader.

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2. To explore team leader's perception of their leadership in the workplace.

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3. To explore social worker's perception of their team leader's leadership in the workplace.

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# How? – Collecting the Data

- Online mixed methods survey (mainly qualitative in design with some quantitative questions) created using JISC
- Divided into three sections to meet the three objectives of the study
- Section one – demographics (11 questions)
- Section two – asks first line managers to explore and analyse how and why they behave in relation to leading their team (12 questions based on Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, third edition, Bass and Avolio, 2004) Required to answer Yes or No or Sometimes and then explain their answer.
- Section three – answered by front-line workers who consider the leadership behaviour of their team leaders. Required to answer Yes or No or Sometimes and then explain their answer. (10 questions)

# Who? – The Participants

- Teams which have a child protection (welfare) element to their work and provide longer term intervention.
- Social workers and team leaders (diverse sample – also including Assessed Year in Employment, bank workers and senior practitioners)
- 11 - family support teams
- 7 - looked after children
- 3 - children with a disability
- 2 - intensive adolescent
- Forty-seven respondents (37%) -12 team leaders, 15 senior practitioners, 14 social workers and 6 assessed year of employment.

# The Results - Demographics

- All White/Caucasian
- Gender: 37 female
- Most participants (twenty-three, 49%) were aged between twenty-five and thirty-four years
- Of the 35 front line workers twelve (34%) were in their current position for less than one year, seventeen (49%) between one to four years
- Of the 12 team leaders, nine (75%) indicated this was their first team leader role
- Three team leaders (25%) had been in post for under one year, four (33%) between one and two years and four (33%) between three and four years.
- Five respondents (11%) had attended 'leadership training', four of whom were team leaders.
- Twenty-three respondents (49%) considered themselves as a leader within the workplace.

# Quantitative Data

	Leader:			Staff:		
	Yes	No	Sometimes	Yes	No	Sometimes
Role Model to staff	7 (58%)	0	5 (42%)	19 (54%)	5 (14%)	11 (31%)
Motivate staff to perform to full potential	5 (42%)	0	7 (58%)	24 (69%)	4 (11%)	7 (20%)
Encourage staff to develop strengths and build on knowledge	11 (92%)	0	1 (8%)	27 (77%)	4 (11%)	4 (11%)
Talk enthusiastically and optimistically about staff's future	10 (83%)	0	2 (17%)	21 (60%)	4 (11%)	10 (29%)
Teach and coach staff	5 (42%)	3 (25%)	4 (33%)	11 (31%)	11 (11%)	13 (37%)
Focus on mistakes, complaints and standards	1 (1%)	3 (25%)	8 (67%)	12 (34%)	13 (37%)	10 (29%)
Encourage staff to be creative and innovative	6 (50%)	2 (25%)	4 (33%)	19 (46%)	6 (17%)	10 (29%)
Available to staff	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	16 (46%)	6 (17%)	13 (37%)
Lead (team leader) or a member (staff) of an effective team	8 (67%)	0	4 (33%)	26 (74%)	1 (3%)	8 (23%)
An effective team leader	4 (33%)	0	8 (67%)	24 (71%)	2 (6%)	8 (23%)



# Analysis of Qualitative Data

- Sentiment analysis called 'feature- based' (Liu, 2010) was used to initially code the responses as positive (green), negative (red) or neutral (yellow).
- Six-phase framework and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021)
- **Theoretical Framework** – Job Demands-Resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) used in immersive process of analysing and making sense of the data and interplay between the emerging themes.

# Thematic Analysis

## Job Demands

### Capacity

Time Pressures  
Competing Responsibilities  
Inexperienced staff and staff  
requiring extra support  
Staff shortages and High  
Workloads

### Climate

Feeling blamed and Unsafe  
Bureaucracy  
Lack of Professional  
Development  
Managing Complaints and  
Mistakes

## Resources

### Culture

Support and Encouragement  
Promoting Social Work Values  
Feeling Safe  
Professional Development  
Camaraderie

### Climate

Autonomy and Collective Leadership  
Experienced Staff  
Manager Visibility/Availability

# Thematic Analysis

## Job Demands

### Capacity

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# Job Demands- Capacity

## TIME PRESSURES

- “I feel the team leader works .....a lot of additional hours and I worry that I am unable to work those additional hours to maintain the work level expected.” (front-line worker 29)

## COMPETING RESPONSIBILITIES

- “My team leader .....does not engage with the emotional aspects of this mentally challenging work. My team leader does not support members emotionally.” (front-line worker 12)
- “.....I am not readily available to my staff as I am trying to complete case work on the cases I hold. It is impossible to do two roles at the same time and provide a service to the standard that our service users deserve.” (team leader 1) (No control)

# Job Demands- Capacity

## INEXPERIENCED STAFF AND STAFF REQUIRING EXTRA SUPPORT (NO CONTROL)

- “Being new in a leadership role..... There are several staff members that require significant support within the team, and this can feel as though my leadership and management skills are limited.” (team leader 7)

## STAFF SHORTAGES AND HIGH CASELOADS

- “I have the outmost respect for the profession and try to maintain optimism about the future of the service amidst very challenging times. This can wane owing to pressures in the service and can then impact on morale and positivity.” (team leader 2)

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# Job Demands- Climate (current perceived atmosphere or feeling)

## FEELING BLAMED AND UNSAFE

- “I do not feel 'safe' or supported in my practice. I worry that if something were to go wrong, I would be made the scape goat.” (front-line worker 12)

## BUREAUCRACY

- “Advice is often rigid and does not take into account individual young person or circumstances.” (front-line worker 1)

# Job Demands- Climate (current perceived atmosphere or feeling)

## LACK OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- “I always encourage and forward any training that comes around, but the workforce pressures limit opportunity to uptake these, and staff increasingly resent training opportunities as impacting on diary commitments. I would protect time for staff to attend training where I can, and this is appreciated.” (team leader 2)



# Thematic Analysis

## Job Demands

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## Resources

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### Climate

- Autonomy and Collective Leadership
- Experienced Staff
- Manager Visibility/Availability

# Resources- Culture (established practices)

## SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

- “They always push me to be the best practitioner I can be and will always try to boost my confidence in every situation.” (front-line worker 31)
- “I feel that she takes so much work on to support everyone that she often has spread herself too thin.” (front-line worker 18)

## PROMOTING SOCIAL WORK VALUES

- “The importance of respect and a psychological safe space to discuss the issues is also beneficial for team culture and wellbeing.” (team leader 4)“
- “...she is supportive and compassionate.....motivates me to do my best for the children and families I work with.” (front-line worker 27)

# Resources- Culture (established practices)

## FEELING SAFE

- "...I never feel stupid or upset if I make a mistake as she is very understanding and helpful" (front-line worker 18)
- "No matter how stressed or lost I feel when I speak to my team leader, I feel more secure, comfortable and knowledgeable about my task." (front-line worker 20)

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- She encourages training but also encourages questioning and thinking outside the box. We use supervision to consider cases and think of new ways to keep things moving." (front-line worker 27)
- "I try to play to my staff members' strengths when allocating cases but also to challenge them, so they grow, and practice doesn't become stilted." (team leader 12)

# Resources- Culture (established practices)

## CAMARADERIE

- “I work with a long-established team of people who are empathetic towards each other in times of crisis. There is a balance of skill mixes, and co-working has been useful to those who are learning new skills.” (team leader 8)
- “Even when times were really hard, we all pulled together.” (front-line worker 27)

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# Resources – Climate (current perceived atmosphere or feeling)

## AUTONOMY AND COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

- “I feel that everyone in the team can have a lead role at times, despite their band or time spent in their area.” (front-line worker 20)

## EXPERIENCED STAFF

“.....as one of the more experienced members of the team I can offer knowledge to the other members within our team.” (front-line worker 34)

# Conclusion

- Sheds a light on the working environment and experiences of first line managers in these child welfare teams, the challenges they face on a daily basis and how this impacts on their leadership.
- There are many examples of good leadership (transformational style of leadership) though is not consistent throughout the teams
- When job demands are high for team leaders a transactional (management) style of leadership is more likely to be practiced.
- Due to the current climate there is a danger of leadership practices which do not meet and prioritise the individual needs and aspirations of front-line workers persisting and becoming a culture in teams.
- The JD-R model suggests when job demands are high and resources are low, stress and burnout is more likely to occur

# Recommendations: Organisations to consider

A WORKFORCE OF INEXPERIENCED TEAM LEADERS IS SEEN AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING CULTURE IN WHICH THEIR LEADERSHIP CAN GROW AND DEVELOP.

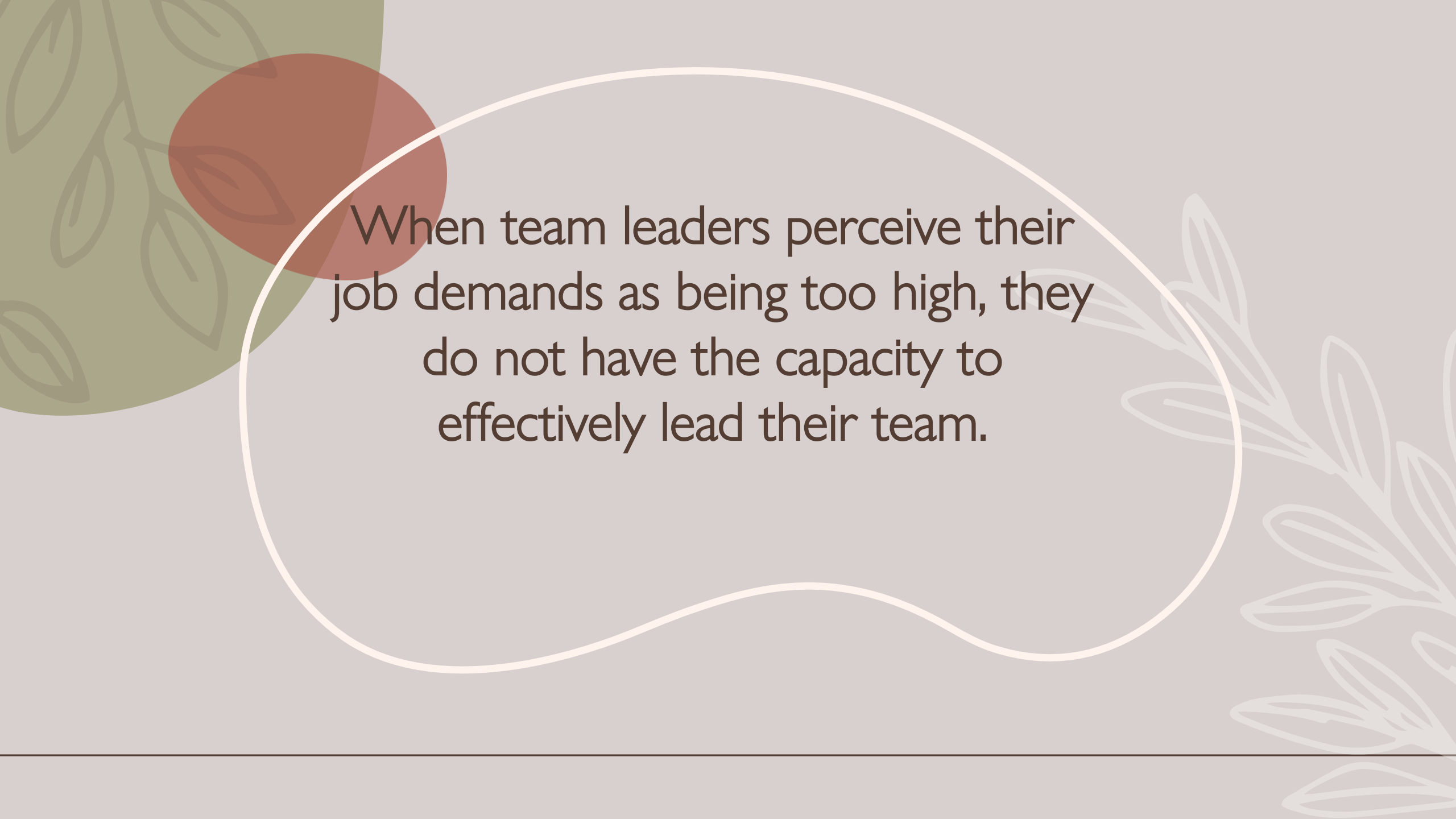
SUPPORT TO BE INDIVIDUALISED AND GIVE CONSIDERATION TO EACH TEAM LEADER'S NEEDS AND STRENGTHS.

SUPPORT OFFERED TAKES INTO CONSIDERATION EACH TEAM LEADER'S JOB DEMANDS ENSURING THEY DO NOT FEEL IT IS ADDING TO THEIR WORKLOAD AND STRESS LEVELS.

FOR TEAM LEADERS: A SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP FOCUS IN REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION, ON-GOING TRAINING, USING LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK, PEER SUPPORT, ROLE MODELLING, SHARING BEST PRACTICE, OBTAINING ONGOING FEEDBACK FROM STAFF.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WHEN JOB DEMANDS ARE HIGH, TEAM LEADERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PRACTICE A MANAGERIAL STYLE OF LEADERSHIP.





When team leaders perceive their job demands as being too high, they do not have the capacity to effectively lead their team.



thank you

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