Resilience and vitality as necessary leadership traits

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Introduction

This chapter will explore some early theories of leadership, including 'personality trait theory' and indicate how problematic this has become as a prescription for successful leadership. However, two personal traits, resilience and vitality, are suggested as required overarching traits in all leaders, irrespective of other traits or 'leadership styles'. Following a discussion of what 'resilience' is and its importance for school leadership, the chapter will look at how it can be developed in leaders and managers. It is of interest that, despite resilience perceived as being an 'essential' quality for school leaders, little has been written about it in this context (Day and Gu, 2013). The chapter will argue that resilience capacity among leaders is developed throughout their careers and continues within leadership; in so doing it also draws upon the author's own published research own and the concept of 'vitality'. Finally, the notion of a *resilient school* is addressed.

Individual / group task

Before reading this chapter please consider the following:

You probably already have an understanding of the term 'resilience'– what do you think it is? Can you think of a situation in your life when you have been highly resilient?

The role of a school principal

School principals or headteachers (the more international term 'principal' will be used as it is becoming more frequently used in the UK too) have a varied but demanding role. It can be all-consuming and very demanding on an incumbent's time, spending long hours dealing with the different aspects of the post. Rhodes and Fletcher (2013), citing BBC work, provide a list of an account of one primary principal's day which illustrates not only the variety of

roles expected of a principal, but also that they are 'presented in rapid, unpredictable succession:

- dealing with health and safety issues;
- dealing with school support staff;
- modelling the values of the school;
- meeting with parents;
- rewarding success by teachers and staff;
- implementing sanctions to combat misconduct;
- interacting with external agencies for pupil support;
- overseeing school finances and reporting to interested parties;
- overseeing school building and maintenance of school accommodation;
- contributing to the culture of enquiry with a view to improved practice; and
- interacting with local council officials to combat youth related problems' (Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013: 52).

The high expectations and accountability which go with this multiplicity of roles creates a post that is physically and mentally demanding and requires high resilience in order to survive and flourish.

Defining 'resilience'

The leadership of schools can be very rewarding, helping others, both staff and students fulfil their ambitions. It can involve deliberately developing an organisation's improvement either in part or as a whole. Having a vision and desire to improve an institution can bring significant reward when an image is manifested. However, school leadership also has its own challenges, from reluctant staff to poor student behaviour or parental complaints. The daily role brings adversity and the practice of leadership is an emotional activity (Crawford, 2009). Leadership requires an ability to be able to endure such inherent difficulty. It is this area that resilience occupies.

The challenges that school principals face vary across sectors from early years to high school, from schools that serve economically disadvantaged communities to those that cater for the wealthy and elite; they all have their own difficulties. Globally such difficulties differ; however, they will always be present; any school will face different challenges in different phases of its history. Being able to cope with adversity is an important trait for a principal.

Resilience is to do with this ability to be able to cope in adversity and can be defined as 'the ability to overcome and "bounce back" from the extremes of adversity' (Day, 2014: 639). It is frequently perceived as a trait within individuals and research around it is normally within the field of psychology. Resiliency has the Latin root meaning 'to jump back' from the verb *resilire*, though some definitions go further than simply 'bouncing back' from adversity. There is a growing literature on resiliency, which has parallels with those on wellbeing which emphasises the positive nature of resiliency and its development. Day (2014) proposes the notion of 'everyday resilience', seeing it as 'an essential everyday quality because of the variety, intensity and complexity of the worlds which principals inhabit' (Day, 2014: 641); it is necessary to cope with the daily role. For Patterson and Kelleher (2005: 1), on the other hand, resilience is a 'multidimensional…construct', defined as

> using your energy productively to emerge from adversity stronger than ever… Three dimensions form a comprehensive resilience framework: the interpretation of current adversity and future possibility, the resilience capacity to tackle adversity, and the actions needed to become more resilient in the face of the adversity (Patterson and Kelleher, 2005: 3).

These definitions focus on an individual's traits and can be related to trait theory of leadership.

Leadership and trait theory

According to Earley and Weindling (2004), leadership theory has developed chronologically under five headings, the earliest being trait theory, followed by styles then contingency theory (the coexistence of the person and context), power/influence, and finally back to trait theory. They were writing in 2004 and one could argue that leadership models and system leadership have been dominant theories in the intervening years. Trait theories, although still popular, have declined during this century. Trait theory attempts to portray the characteristics of successful leaders such as being inspiring, at ease with others, sufficiently forceful and able to accept criticism. Managerial qualities such as effective communication, being decisive, an interest in colleagues and their work all follow (Earley and Weindling, 2004). The problem with personal trait theory is that of definitions of traits: what is 'inspirational' or 'sufficiently forceful' to one person may not be to another. Equally, the belief that certain people have the correct traits, could produce a situation whereby some people are deemed to

be [natural?] leaders, i.e. those who hold the traits and others not so. This could result in restrictions in leadership development and access to employment opportunities.

Leadership styles and models have also been researched and promoted, each one containing their own advantages and challenges. Space does not allow for such discussion here, but the recommended reading list below has some references you may wish to follow up. However, it would appear fundamental to successful leadership that such a person would have a high level of resiliency, irrespective of what their preferred style is or individual traits they possess; without being able to cope with adversity they would find school leadership problematic.

It is interesting to question whether resilience is innate or learned: are some people innately more resilient? If resilience is important for anyone to become a leader, then it becomes important for us to know if it is innate or can be developed. Resilience theory and research have their roots in child development: for example, humans develop resilience in being able to walk, despite initially falling over and hurting themselves. Studies of resilience in children have been undertaken in a wide variety of conditions globally, the results of which point to a remarkable consistency in the conditions which promote higher resilience and that there are several key strategies to be used in intervention to help foster resilience (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). It is no surprise, therefore, that resilience-building in children is a key element in early years curricula.

Research has also been conducted into novice teachers' success and resilience and the ability of adults to develop resilience over a career in different contexts and in times of change (Tait, 2008). As Day (2014) concludes, 'resilience in education, then, is not a quality that is innate. Rather, it is a construct that is relative, relational, developmental and dynamic' (Day, 2014: 641). Resilience, then, becomes part of career development for a leader; it can be developed in staff and is not a chance occurrence.

The importance of resilience in school leadership

In their seven strong claims about successful school leadership Leithwood *et al.* (2008), in a frequently cited and important paper, refer to 'understanding and developing people' in which the 'primary aim is building not only the knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need in order to accomplish organisational goals, but also the dispositions (commitment, capacity and *resilience*) to persist in applying the knowledge and skills' (p. 30). Resilience becomes the heart of successful school leadership. Furthermore, they also state that 'most

successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), *resilient* and optimistic' (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008: 36 italics my emphasis).

Research on the work and lives of principals suggests that the process of leading successfully requires more than the ability to bounce back in adverse circumstances (Day and Gu, 2013). It requires them to have a '"hardiness", a resolute persistence, hope and commitment which is supported in these by strong core values over three or more decades' (Day, 2014: 642). Day's (2014) notion of 'everyday resilience' becomes an essential quality and a necessary capacity for leaders.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) go further than this idea that leaders require resilience: they describe a type of leader that they name a 'resilient leader', one who, due to resilience being embedded in them and their practice, operates in a specific way. They then distil this analysis into what they term 'Six Strengths of Resilient Leaders' (Patterson and Kelleher, 2005: 147). These strengths are each worth considering describing:

1. 'Resilient leaders accurately assess past and current reality'. Earlier in this chapter, it was pointed out that Patterson and Kelleher use a three-dimensional construct to resilience, the first of which is the interpretation of current adversity and future possibility. So, in this first strength resilient leaders have an accurate sense of reality, they expect the world to be full of disruptions and they develop a tolerance of ambiguity. Further to this they are able to see reality from multiple perspectives, a point has links with emotional intelligence – see later in the chapter.

2. 'Resilient leaders are positive about future possibilities'. Such leaders are the glass half-full rather than half-empty person, they focus on opportunities not obstacles, maintain a positive outlook which affects others and believe that good things can happen despite adversity.

3. 'Resilient leaders remain true to personal values'. Such leaders know which values are important to them and have a clear value hierarchy. Their focus is *value*- rather than *event*-driven. They create opportunities for others to give feedback and align this with their value set; finally, they present a model for others leadership based around their personal core values.

4. 'Resilient leaders maintain a strong sense of personal efficacy'. Later in this chapter we will look at self-efficacy and its role in leadership resilience, and it is not surprising that Patterson and Kelleher ensure its position in the six strengths. These leaders have a strong self-belief that they can achieve something and concentrate on small wins, celebrating them. They maintain a strong level of personal competence and recover quickly from setbacks. Resilient leaders maintain a base of caring and support for others and themselves.

5. 'Resilient leaders invest personal energy wisely'. Resilient leaders look after their own physical and mental health to allow for recovery. They retain mental focus and concentration in the face of adversity, and they develop self-awareness and emotional empathy which also has links with emotional intelligence covered later in the chapter.

6. 'Resilient leaders act on the courage of personal convictions'. Resilient leaders are clear about what matters and act accordingly, even when risks are high. They act decisively, based on their deepest values and remain resolute even when faced with strong opposition. Finally, they are reflective and learn from their mistakes, modifying actions accordingly.

Individual / group task

Discuss the following questions:
What sort of challenges do school leaders, whether senior or middle leaders, face where their resilience would be important?
How would a high level of resilience help them?

Resilience links with self-efficacy and emotional intelligence (EI)

Self-efficacy

The sense of efficacy is a 'belief about one's own ability (self-efficacy), or the ability of one's colleagues collectively (collective efficacy), to perform a task or achieve a goal. It is a belief about ability, not actual ability' (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008: 497). Leaders tend to have high levels of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy differs from self-belief in that it is specific about roles and tasks, whilst self-belief is more general.

The main theorist on self-efficacy is Albert Bandura. In addition to his work on aggression and social cognitive theory, he researched self-efficacy. Efficacy can be influenced by the context and is part of Bandura's social cognitive theory of learning. School leaders face

differing contexts with differing external and internal environmental pressures, so leadership as a practice becomes complex. Bandura (1997) asserts that:

> People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples' beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1997: 118).

For Patterson and Kelleher (2005) the role of self-efficacy in resilience is as a fuel, along with personal values and personal energy, to make up a leader's resilience capacity. Efficacy is a belief, you think you can do the task required; however, leaders will need to assess the situation to see if the environment hinders or assists in actioning the task.

Emotional intelligence (EI)

In recent years the notion of emotional intelligence (EI) has gained traction, even in the media, following the success of popular books by Daniel Goleman and others. The idea that some leaders appear to appreciate others' motivations and emotions is beneficial to their success. EI can be defined as, 'the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships' (Goleman, 1998: 373). This skill would have many uses for everyone, but particularly leaders of any organisation. It would involve leaders' reining in their emotion when needed, to read others' feelings and in so doing handling relationships smoothly. For Goleman this emotional intelligence is an expanded view of what it is to be intelligent and includes self-control, persistence and self-motivation (Goleman, 1995). It differs, but is complementary to, academic intelligence, the cognitive capacity measured by IQ tests. The pervasiveness of Goleman's argument is that, for him, IQ is essentially hard-wired, but emotional intelligence can be taught and improved. It would follow from Goleman's perspective that EI improvement should form part of leadership preparation and development programmes.

Without EI, high levels of resilience may become problematic for leaders in that they may become intolerant of a lack of resilience among others in the staff they lead: for example, being insensitive in dealing with a teacher who is distraught over their teaching experience. EI then becomes a counter to the 'hardiness' of leaders that Day (2014) refers to earlier. It would not be exaggerating to suggest that leaders have greater resilience than some of their staff, and it could be argued that it is that which is required in order to get to their leadership

position. It would be important, though, for leaders to appreciate that they are potentially different to their staff in this regard, and to have an empathy for others' positions, which is all part of EI.

Self-efficacy and EI link with resilience. In order to be resilient you will need to feel you can do what is required of you, to have a level of self-efficacy. Equally EI can reduce the hardiness of resilience to make leadership more humane.

Building resilience

Building resilience, whether planned or fortuitous, is an important part of leadership preparation and development for those in post; as Day (2014) states, 'it is both a product of personal and professional histories, exercised through professional dispositions and values' (Day, 2014: 641). The adversity that leaders face prior to leadership, and moreover overcoming this adversity helps build resilience capacity. However, much of the literature on school leaders' resilience focuses on the school leader's role rather than evaluating the formative influences on such individuals (Steward, 2014).

The research on resilience capacity building can be summarised as leaders developing healthy coping mechanism, such as a routine of exercise and healthy diet; accentuating the positive as a life view; a focus on one's own values and professional mission; spiritual renewal, and this may mean time away from the 'coalface'; to seek reward in being able to model resilience for others, and utilising supportive networks (Farmer, 2010). Lugg and Boyd (1993) also emphasise the importance of strong communication in the workplace and recommend that individuals create positive alliances and groups to establish a collaborative culture, minimise stress and encourage resiliency in others.

In order to build resilience based on past experiences, Patterson and Kelleher (2005) posit a *Resilience Cycle*: 1 Deteriorating, 2 Adapting, 3 Recovering, and 4 Growing. This cycle will commence following a disruption to what they call 'normal conditions'. Such conditions will vary from context to context and may well in some situations involve conditions that will be adverse when compared with the norm; Day's (2014) work on principals of challenging schools is an example. The point that Patterson and Kelleher make is that irrespective of your conditions which are the norm for you, further adversity frequently occurs, and this is stage 1, deteriorating. This adverse event causes the individual significant emotional problems, either professional or in their home life. Initially there may well be denial, anger and grief and this is an unhealthy stage to remain in for a prolonged period. Most school principals move to

stage 2, adapting, where they reverse the trajectory of the downward trend by taking personal actions. Adapting this deterioration involves less anger, confronting any denial. This phase is seen as a necessary transition but is still not a healthy place, as long-term here will result in operating in survival mode. For those principals that continue on the upward curve, they address the issues through the recovering phase. Finally, and importantly, resilience is built not only by going through these experiences, but also reflecting on them, making permanent changes to such skills as self-efficacy that allows phase 4 growth. Through repeated uses of this cycle, principals can develop high levels of resilience.

School leaders' resilience: Does coaching help?

There has been an increase in the use of coaching in school leaders' professional development in the last decade or so (Lofthouse and Whiteside, 2019; Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013). Coaching and mentoring are used frequently in different areas of school professional development, from induction of new entrants to teaching experienced staff, to staff gaining a new leadership role. 'Leaders need peers to enable them to develop a sense of what is possible to be achieved but need to implement action to validate a sense of their own self-efficacy' (Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013: 49).

Principals, in particular, can benefit from coaching that is external to the school; being non-judgmental and confidential, it gives them time out to reflect on their work (Steward, 2014). Evaluations of coaching schemes in England for principals have been highly positive, Lofthouse and Whiteside (2019) reporting that a coaching programme supported principals in developing and maintaining effective management practice had a positive impact on their self-belief and reduced resilience erosion. This view is supported by other research, Sardar and Galdames (2018) summarising that 'coaching is beneficial to increase resilience and confidence, cope with stressful situations, bounce back from obstacles and emotional detachment from practical perspective' (p. 57).

It appears then that resilience, which is an extremely important trait for successful school leadership, can be nurtured, developed and increased. This is important for developing future talent and maintaining the quality of present post holders.

Individual / group task

Discuss the following question:

In what ways can prospective school leaders build their resilience?

Resilience in extremis: Testing resilience of school leaders

Resilience, as we have seen, is important for school leaders as they face regular adverse conditions; their ability to 'bounce back' is crucial to success. Sometimes when looking at an issue it is interesting to look at outliers, situations that are not the norm in order to gain greater knowledge. The following two situations, leading in the Covid-19 lockdown and involuntary job loss provide extreme situations where resilience is tested highly.

Resilience and the Covid-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic many education systems globally closed for face-to-face teaching in 2020 and 2021, moving to remote learning as governments restricted people's movement in order to contain the spread of the virus. Teachers were required to upskill their teachers using online methods, and school principals also became remote leaders, leading staff, students and parents in a world where frequently there was little guidance.

In a large survey of school leaders (n=1491) conducted in April/May 2021 by Greany *et al.* (2021), most leaders were seen as coping with the challenges, but there were negative aspects such as lack of sleep, becoming overweight, drinking too much alcohol, hospitalised by catching the virus, put on medication for depression and, in some 40 per cent of cases, a desire to leave the profession. Managing staff and parental anxieties were indicated as the most stressful areas, with nearly half of participants indicating parent-related issues being the main stressor. However, Greany *et al.* (2021) note that 'success in meeting ongoing challenges gave most interviewees a profound sense of satisfaction in providing a worthwhile public service at a time of national crisis' (Greany *et al.*, 2021: 7) and that, in responding to the crisis, their staff had rapidly gained new skills and relationships, and had developed stronger relationships in the staff and the communities they serve. Clearly there were high levels of resilience operating which were recognised by other work: McLeod and Dulsky (2021) for example were impressed with the resilience and courage their principal participants showed in rising to the challenge. However, amongst these findings there will be many principals who may have found the situation of the Covid-19 lockdown too much an adversity: the literature here also calls for external support such as mentoring or counselling services for principals too.

Resilience and involuntary job loss

I conducted work with a colleague, Sue Simon, from the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia on school principal job loss (Gibson and Simon, 2020; Simon and Gibson, 2019). The participants in this study were all former school principals in England and Australia; all lost their job when they did not wish to lose it, referred to as 'involuntary occupation dissolution'. This became a situation in which their resilience was highly tested. It is important to note that none of the participants in the study was dismissed from their role, but rather specific individual contextual circumstances led to events where each one felt they had no choice but reluctantly to resign. We interviewed 10 participants. This job loss affected them personally and professionally, having effects on them and their families particularly economically.

There was a high level of congruence between data from the two countries and key findings were effects on former principals' physical and emotional health, self-belief, professional identity and finances, plus a sense of loss of power. The effects of these job losses were significant and long-lasting.

Health and wellbeing issues ranged from anxiety and depression to suicide ideation, to cardiac problems, through to social withdrawal. Several found counselling helpful. Two were prescribed antidepressants, two experienced significant weight loss, one of those also experiencing physical skin rash and hair loss. In addition to this they spoke of a lack of self-esteem, one saying he was made to feel like a criminal, despite not doing anything wrong. There were also issues surrounding relationships with family members. It is unsurprising that this scenario tested their resilience. They referred in their interviews to previous levels of self-efficacy, making a point of how successful they had been. The fact that all these participants had 'got back on track' despite such an adverse circumstance points to high levels of resilience. Each participant gained employment again, despite long lasting effects, some returning as school principals, others moving into other sectors, for example university lecturing.

Personal vitality

The participants in the study above talked of their self-efficacy in acknowledging that they felt confident and competent at being a school principal; in fact, for several of them the adverse condition of potential job loss (Stage 1 of Patterson and Kelleher's (2005) resilience model) came as a surprise, given that recent employer performance appraisal ratings had been

high. In addition to this they talked passionately about what originally motivated them to teach and then to lead a school. In a second paper Sue Simon and I concentrate on this passion (Simon and Gibson, 2019). They had a strong sense of belonging to a community, feelings of pride about such work. The use of this original motivation to teach we regard as personal vitality, defining it as 'the retention of the original passion for teaching and then leading a school' (Simon and Gibson, 2019: 710). Vitality emphasises the positive, and is developed over the course of a career, rather than just something one innately possesses. It is also developed in parallel with resilience; they are complementary. However, it differs from resilience in that it is a counter to the negative use of term 'resilience' in performative agenda – whereby the term 'resilient' is used as a deficit, "s/he has not got enough resilience" and resilience can be perceived as negative rather than the positive of 'vitality'.

Personal vitality – the ideas and drivers that first inspired leaders to work with youngsters and then to lead their schools – is challenged by the long hours and complex nature of their work and the sense of isolation that comes from being at the top. Leaders will need to 're-vitalise' their vitality; this is not the same as their wellbeing and mental health (though would be part of that); it is returning to those original drivers. Simon *et al.* (2016) refer to participants in their study (all school principals) on a particular challenging day, engaging in such activities as going into classrooms and having conversations with young learners or even reading to small children under a tree. This sustenance of vitality was important to them.

According to Simon *et al.* (2016) there are seven interrelated but interconnecting themes of personal vitality and leadership development, although they also accept these are presently under researched. The seven themes are:

1 Motivational roots. This area is about the seeds of a leader's leadership, where their motivational has been generated and may even refer to their childhood and how this may produce durability.

2 Emotions. Leadership as an emotional activity has been explored by some (Crawford, 2009); here it is seen as at the core of personal vitality.

3 Self-efficacy. This concept has been explored earlier but here it is noted that it can help in the sustainability of personal vitality.

4 View of role / leader efficacy. Efficacy here is not just about ability and confidence to be able to undertake a task, but links with a view of the principal's role and further

motivation having effects on professional functioning of principals and their subsequent success in the role.

5 Reaction to stress. Despite a principal's role being to be able to manage stress in themselves and others, there is a lack of research in this area and maybe in a post-pandemic world we may see further action from employers on caring for the leader.

6 Coaching / mentoring – ways of topping up vitality levels. This theme has also been addressed earlier in the chapter, Simon *et al.* (2016) suggesting that such practices as coaching and mentoring will improve and sustain personal vitality.

7 The Vitality - Fragility Continuum. The final theme in developing personal vitality points to the polar opposite, fragility, and how these two operate on a continuum. Leadership constructs such as moral purpose, and self-sacrifice can curb the tendency to fragility. These aligned with EI and resilience help build personal vitality.

In further work Simon *et al.* (2018) have developed a programme for serving principals in Australia to help develop vitality. The 'PIVOTAL' (Partnerships, Innovation, and Vitality—Opportunities for Thriving Academic Learning) model addresses the gap identified in recent research in the preparation and ongoing development of school leaders. The programme offers opportunities for educational leaders to address their own vitality and places an emphasis on coaching, peer mentoring, and activities which promote an understanding of factors contributing to personal vitality in complex leadership roles.

In writing this piece I am reminded of a relevant event from my own past. A few years ago I was at one of my older brother's 40th birthday party where a friend of his, whom I had not met in about 15 years or so, talked to me. He said rather sarcastically, "Well Mark you don't seem to have done it, I'm afraid". "Done what?" I replied. "Changed the world," he said, "changed the world through teaching and education". He then proceeded to describe the young man I had maybe forgotten, the young man who was fired up and passionate about what education could achieve, how it could improve people and society as a whole, seemingly curing all ills. Although this brother's friend had initiated this conversation in a joking manner, he had reminded me of my vitality; there it was so real to me. I am acutely aware of the renewed verve and zeal with which I approached my professional work subsequently.

Resilient schools

In this chapter resilience has essentially been about individual leader's resilience. However, it was acknowledged at the beginning that part of leadership is to not only building self-resilience but team and even school resilience. A resilient school will have high levels of resilience across the staff and students as a whole. For Day and Gu (2013) there is much to be learned about the resilience of leadership in challenging schools, the ones that serve disadvantaged communities. These leaders face 'a greater range of more persistent, intensive challenges than others' (Day and Gu, 2013: 113). They refer to the development of resilience through an ability to be able to take (calculated) risk, academic optimism, trust and hope. The building of these dispositions leads to resilient schools. This model, though it still has a large emphasis on the individual principal, it is their (shared) dispositions. Aguilar (2016) on the other hand places the emphasis on team building via coaching to build a resilient school.

Aguilar's (2016) model commences with the principal having a high level of self-awareness and in particular a strong EI. The next step to build a strong team is to *intentionally* build a culture of trust that involves, for example, modelling behaviour that reinforces trustworthiness. The teams then need a clear purpose and product. Following trust as a norm being a foundation of the team, team EI can be developed. Other stages involve effective communication and being able to navigate conflict. The key here for Aguilar is the 'art of coaching' as a mechanism to build a resilient school.

Resilient schools, however, still need maintenance, Allison (2012) indicating five signals to leaders that their school's resilience is at risk: top leaders stop learning; people blame everything on the budget; leaders ignore critical indicators; too many initiatives drain people, and that success goes uncelebrated. It clearly falls to the leader of such a school to be able not only to recognise these signals where they occur, but also to take action to ensure they are addressed; school resilience maintenance becomes part of the resilience of the school principal.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nature of resilience and vitality and how they are key traits for school leadership. Resilience, the ability to be able to 'bounce back' after adverse conditions, is built during a career following several situations that demand it. There is a resilience cycle where challenging conditions break the status quo and after initial denial, leaders will confront the event, and this 'conquer' will build further resilience (Patterson and Kelleher,

2005). Resilience has links with self-efficacy, belief that you can be competent at a task and emotional intelligence. The latter is required to temper the hardiness built by resilience.

Resilience can be developed in staff during preparation for leadership and continually developed within leaders. Such techniques as quality coaching and mentoring have been shown to be beneficial, although financial constraints can hinder their use.

Schools, not just their leaders, can become resilient. This would enable staff and students alike to be able to sustain quality learning as they cope with difficulties that working and learning brings; this would be the ultimate goal. Team development and trust appear key facets of resilient schools, building a collective efficacy.

In addition to resilience, the chapter has explored the nature of leader personal vitality, which is defined as that initial driver and value set that the leader possessed on entry into the profession and continued to motivate them. Time will need to be provided for leaders to re-vitalise themselves during leadership, to engage in being reflective and acknowledge their own core beliefs and values.

An experienced leader develops leadership over time on different levels, those that are personal, system and peer based. On a personal level this may involve reliable and trustworthy staff and familial relationships that are steadfast in difficult times. The personal level will also include their vitality, their inner drive that has been present from the onset of teaching. Equally, systemic alliances become important in times of challenge in building self-efficacy and providing collegial reassurance. Resilient leaders have a positive outlook on life and their professional role, they possess longer-term views. They believe adversity makes them stronger and a better leader.

Resilience and vitality are core traits of school leadership and are mutually coexistent, they are required irrespective of any leadership styles such as authoritative or laissez faire, or models such as transformational leadership or distributed leadership (which are well documented). Without resilience or vitality school leaders would not be able to function competently and may not last long in post.

Summary points

- Resilience is an essential trait for school leadership and is defined as the 'the ability to overcome and 'bounce back' from the extremes of adversity'.
- Levels of resilience can be developed and improved throughout a teaching career.

- Resilience has links with emotional intelligence (EI) and the notion of self-efficacy.

- Vitality, defined as 'the retention of the original passion for teaching and then leading a school', is also developed in parallel with resilience; they are complimentary. Vitality emphasises the positive and is seen as a core trait for successful school leadership.

- Resilient schools can be developed, ones where all adults and students have high levels of resilience.

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