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The Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD) tool and workbook

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Introduction

The project

The SWORD Change Project from Research in Practice and Dr Louise Grant (University of Bedfordshire) and Professor Gail Kinman (Birkbeck University of London) was developed to improve organisational resilience in child and family social work. It has since been revised, with the additional expertise of Dr Kelly Alexander (University of Bedfordshire), so it is relevant also for social workers who work with adults. This includes, for example, practitioners who work as part of a community multidisciplinary team in an NHS trust or inpatient mental health services. So where the workbook refers to 'social work organisations', this covers all organisations that employ social workers, including in an inter-professional context and where management responsibility might be held by those from other professional disciplines.

Our objectives were to draw on our systemic approach to provide senior leaders with an accessible, research-informed diagnostic tool and associated workbook to understand, build and sustain resilience in their organisations. At each stage of development, the underpinning model, and the diagnostic tool and workbook, were co-produced with groups of social workers, line managers and leaders.

The diagnostic tool takes the form of a staff survey which will provide feedback on organisational strengths and weaknesses.

The workbook

This workbook aims to help leaders in social work contexts to create a workplace climate that builds the capacity for resilience. It draws on established research findings, together with learning developed from interviews, workshops and seminars with groups of social workers and leaders. It provides a range of evidence-informed practical interventions and 'quick wins', as well as more in-depth strategies, to foster the conditions that have been shown to underpin resilience at individual, team and organisational levels.

Dimensions of organisational resilience: 5 Key Foundational Principles (KFPs)

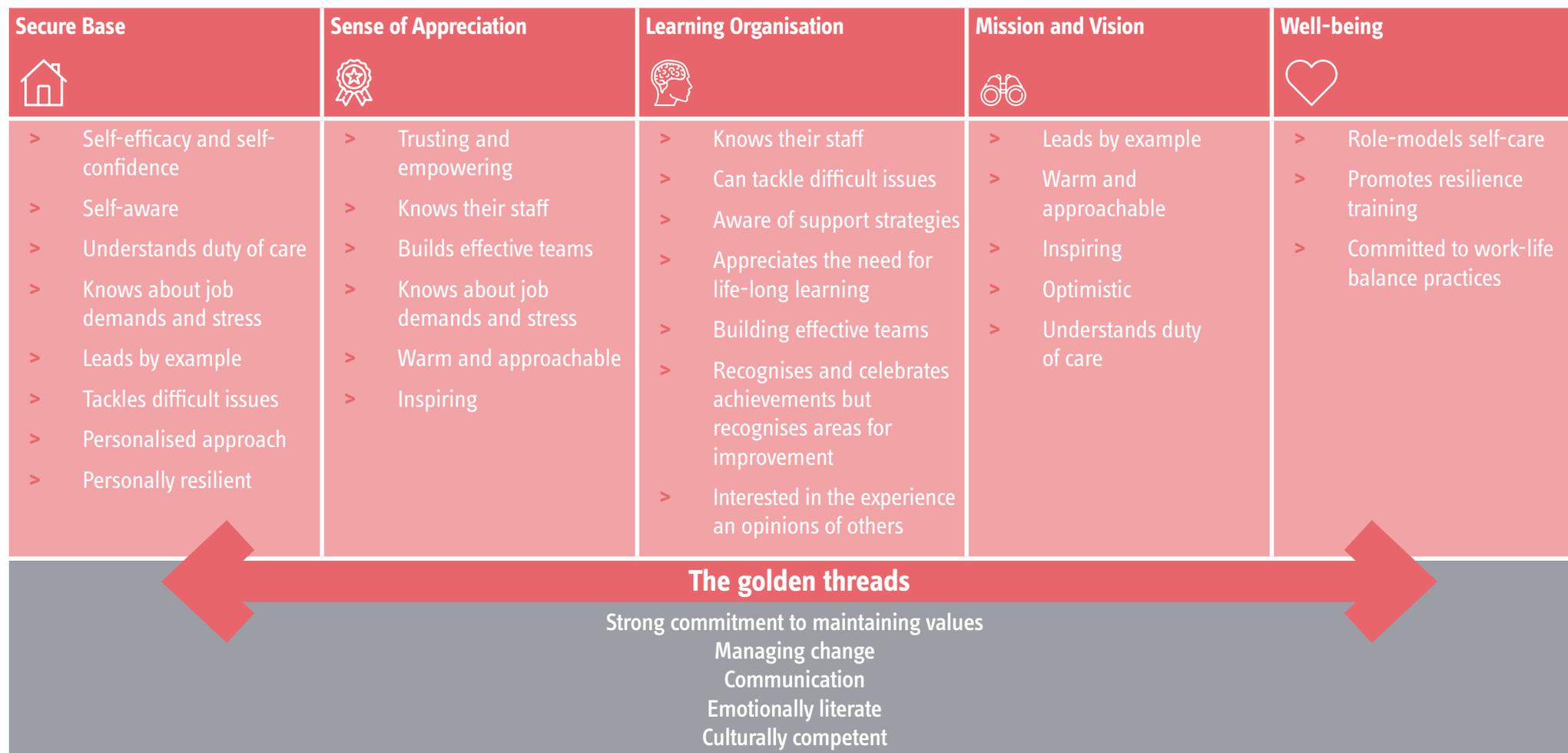


Figure 1: The 'golden threads' – the knowledge, skills and abilities that underpin organisational resilience

Figure 1 shows the knowledge, skills and abilities that, in the course of the co-production, the Change Project group identified as being most strongly associated with organisational resilience. Five dimensions – Key Foundational Principles (KFPs) – were identified, which provide the structure for the diagnostic tool and workbook:

1. Secure Base (KFP1)
2. Sense of Appreciation (KFP2)
3. Learning Organisation (KFP3)
4. Mission and Vision (KFP4)
5. Wellbeing (KFP5).

Workshop participants also identified some critical ‘golden threads’ – i.e. factors that are particularly influential in underpinning the conditions required for organisational resilience in social work organisations and that are relevant to several KFPs. These are:

- A strong commitment to maintaining social work values
- Managing change successfully
- Emotional literacy
- Effective communication structures
- Cultural competence.

Ways in which managers and leaders can enhance these ‘golden threads’ to foster resilience at the organisational, team and individual levels are considered in each of the five KFP sections of this workbook.

The Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD) Tool

Information obtained on the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with organisational resilience has been used to develop this diagnostic tool. Its purpose is to assess, through a survey of practitioners, the extent to which social work organisations have in place those conditions that have been found to underpin the wellbeing of practitioners and promote optimum practice. (The workbook is designed to be used alongside the SWORD Tool but can be used independently.)

The survey questionnaire was co-produced and refined over time in workshops with social workers from a range of backgrounds to capture diversity and difference in experience. It defines each of the five Key Foundational Principles (KFPs) and asks social workers to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a series of statements related to each KFP. (Higher scores represent higher levels of agreement for all questions: i.e. strongly disagree = 1, and strongly agree = 6.)

A 'traffic light' system is used to assess the extent to which social workers agree or disagree that these conditions are present in their organisation:

Green	= strongly agree/agree (Score 5 or 6): good practice identified
Amber	= slightly agree/slightly disagree (Score 3 or 4): some action required
Red	= disagree/strongly disagree (Score 1 or 2): urgent action needed

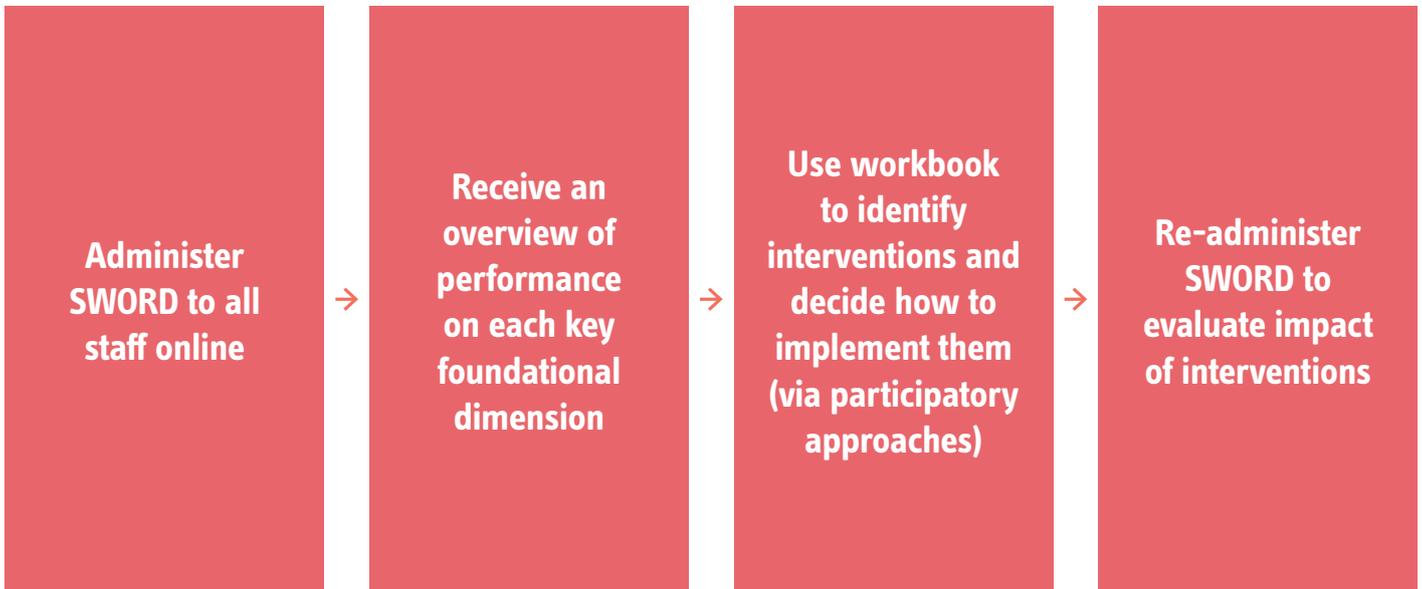


Figure 2: The SWORD Tool in action

The survey findings will provide managers and leaders with a profile of their organisation’s performance for each of the five KFPs, and with the evidence they need to address issues identified in a targeted way.

As set out in Figure 2, we recommend leaders and managers use the SWORD Tool and workbook to underpin a process of continual development to:

- Provide an initial diagnosis of problem areas
- Identify and introduce interventions, and
- Evaluate these interventions by re-administering the tool.

Most organisations are likely to have some variation in their profiles. For example: Organisation A may score highly on Secure Base and Sense of Appreciation, moderately on Learning Organisation, and fairly low on Wellbeing; Organisation B might have high scores for Learning Organisation and Mission and Vision, moderate scores for Wellbeing, and low scores for Secure Base and Mission and Vision.

An example of an organisational profile can be found [here](#).

Strategies for fostering the conditions required to enhance organisational resilience are set out in the five KFP sections of this workbook. The chart Organisational resilience: Strategies for supporting the 5 Key Foundational Principles (KFPs) outlines all the key strategies that support the KFPs and associated quick wins and will help you navigate the workbook. Many strategies support more than one KFP. The ‘golden threads’ are revisited in each section, reflecting their importance in developing resilience.

The SWORD questionnaire

The survey questions are all listed below under each KFP heading. We would like to thank [What Works for Children's Social Care](#) for their consultation on this survey.

KFP 1: Secure Base

The organisation provides a sense of containment (protection, safety and being cared for), while also offering opportunities for workers to explore fears and threats and to raise constructive challenge to practice and organisational change. This 'safe haven' provides workers with support and gives them renewed energy and resources.

Managers are available when I need support	Senior managers take responsibility for creating a safe working environment
This organisation appreciates the demands of my job	Work-related stress is recognised as a serious issue and action is taken when required
I get the support and reflective supervision required to manage the emotional demands of my work	I have a 'safe haven' at work where I can share my experiences and concerns
There is an understanding of the impact of organisational change, and action is taken to manage this effectively	I am given opportunities to work with others and find solutions to difficulties
I have a sense of belonging and commitment to my team	Managers are sensitive to the feelings of others and offer support
Social work values are at the heart of what we do	I feel respected and supported by my colleagues.
Staff feel able to raise issues of bullying and harassment and 'whistle blow' if necessary	I find my job meaningful
The organisation is proactive in promoting anti-discriminatory practice.	

KFP2: Sense of Appreciation

Practitioners feel valued and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated. Managers are open and approachable, genuinely interested in workers and trust them to do a good job. Managers understand the pressures of the work and the need to support practitioners to engage in self-care and ensure a healthy work-life balance.

I am trusted to do a good job	Good work is acknowledged and appreciated
I feel that the contribution I make is valued	Managers are open and approachable
People are treated as individuals and their diverse contribution recognised	Managers appreciate the challenges that I face in my work
Managers recognise and value the tasks that each team performs	Individual and team success is communicated and celebrated
Managers are aware that staff have personal responsibilities, and support them in maintaining a healthy work-life balance	Staff are respected for their knowledge and experience
Staff are trusted to have control over how they plan and complete their work.	

KFP3: Learning Organisation

Within the organisation there is a system of shared values, beliefs, goals and objectives, and this is communicated clearly. Individuals, teams and the organisation itself can reflect and learn from experience and take an evidence-informed approach to improving practice and managing change. The input of individuals in accomplishing this is actively encouraged. Problems provide an opportunity for learning rather than blame or individual scapegoating.

Managers tackle difficult issues and work towards solutions	When something goes wrong, lessons are learned rather than blame attributed
I receive reflective supervision that helps me to learn and develop in my practice	Learning and development is a priority in this organisation
Managers encourage me to express my opinions, and these are considered wherever possible	Managers encourage open and honest communication
The reason for change is communicated clearly	Change processes are informed by evidence and clearly focus on improvement
There is an understanding of what 'good practice' looks like and how it can be achieved	I am given time and space to reflect on my work
Leaders are committed to continuous improvement	Managers prioritise my need for supervision
The supervision I receive helps me to improve my practice	I can access the training I need to do my best work.

KFP 4: Clear Mission and Vision

Managers are committed to developing a clear mission and vision for the organisation and use their communication skills to motivate others in working towards achieving this. They are optimistic but realistic, focus on continuous improvement, and inspire practitioners to identify what 'good' looks like and how it can be achieved. Change is managed sensitively, and time for consolidation and stability is prioritised.

Managers set a good example, which inspires me to do my best	Managers are committed to maintaining high standards and social work values
Managers are well respected	Managers are self-aware and inspire and motivate others
Managers have the confidence and self-belief to succeed	Managers talk optimistically about the future and what can realistically be achieved together
Practitioners know what they need to do to meet goals and objectives	Practitioners work together to achieve positive outcomes
Managers articulate a clear identity, purpose and vision	Change is managed sensitively, and a balance maintained between change and stability
The organisation has a clear practice model which supports good social work practice.	

KFP5: Wellbeing

Workers believe that the organisation is committed to supporting their wellbeing and, wherever possible, to reducing stress and improving working conditions. Practitioners feel able to thrive, in a job that is rewarding and manageable, and to focus on making a difference in the lives of children, young people and families, and adults with care and support needs. For these reasons, practitioners are committed to the organisation and their role within it.

I am treated fairly at work	On the whole, my workload is manageable
My job is satisfying and rewarding	My job helps me flourish and grow
On the whole, I feel I make a difference to the lives of the children and families or adults that I work with	Appropriate support is available to me if I have a bad experience at work
I can access expert counselling if I need it	I am committed to this organisation
The physical conditions at work allow me to do my job effectively	I have opportunities to debrief before leaving work
Overall, I have a good work-life balance	If I am unwell, I can take time off to recover
I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work	I see a future for myself in this organisation.

SWORD workbook:

Key Foundational Principles (KFP) table

Key Foundational Principles (KFP) table

KFP	Definition	Core Strategies					Additional Strategies	Quick Wins	
 Secure Base	Knowing yourself: enhancing emotional literacy as a leadership trait.	Check your inner chimp: supporting and modelling emotion regulation	Availability of support	Agile working	Fostering a sense of belonging	Building team resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Mindful listening  Appreciative Enquiry  One-page profiles  CBT  Peer coaching  World Cafe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quick wins ✓ Managing Anger ✓ Breathing Exercises for reducing stress ✓ Open door policies: making them work ✓ Checking in using technology ✓ Making hot desking work ✓ Building social connectedness using Fika 	
 Sense of Appreciation	Fostering a sense of appreciation at work	Mindful listening	Appreciative Inquiry	One page profiles	Sparkling moments	Being grateful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Fostering a sense of belonging  Fika  Serious success reviews  Working with strengths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Walking the floor ✓ Give SMART feedback ✓ Celebrating success in team meetings ✓ Ways to show your gratitude 	
 Learning Organisation	Reflective Leadership	Serious Success Reviews	Schwartz rounds	Learning from critical incidents and managing organisational shock	Peer coaching	Working with strengths	Using action learning sets for group learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Sparkling moments  Appreciative Enquiry  Tell me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Creating your own Personal Board of directors ✓ Strength spotting ✓ Spotting character strengths in meetings and to improve relationships
 Mission and Vision	Managing change effectively	Coproducing and communicating organisational direction and the importance of clear communication	Succession planning	Culturally competent leadership	Pay attention to your shadow side and use 360 degree feedback	Organisational justice	Staying on track	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Fika  Appreciative Enquiry  Mindful listening  Fostering a sense of belonging  Managing conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Achieving effective change ✓ Pay attention to the fish tank not just the fish ✓ World Café ✓ Tell me ✓ I did lists ✓ Kanban
 Well-being	Using the HSE resources	Enhancing management competencies	Managing conflict	Promoting a healthy working environment: mental first aid and wellbeing champions	Work life balance	Managing email	Developing an individual toolbox of wellbeing: Self-compassion; CBT; Mindfulness; selfcare for managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Appreciative Enquiry  Fika  Sparkling moments  Peer coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Six steps to manage conflict ✓ Tips to improve work-life balance ✓ How to be e-resilient ✓ Encourage expressive writing ✓ Individual and strategic mindfulness

SWORD workbook:

Understanding resilience

Introduction

Social work is a challenging and rewarding career, but all practitioners require organisational support to protect their wellbeing and develop their emotional resilience. Research findings show that, for the most part, social workers enjoy their work. Social workers in children's services have reported feeling valued by children and families, and supported by their managers and colleagues (Murray, 2015). Similarly, adult social workers experience their work as personally rewarding (McFadden et al., 2018), while those working in mental health settings generally report being satisfied with their role (Nelson et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the work can be emotionally demanding. Data from the annual Labour Force Survey (Health and Safety Executive, 2019, p. 5), suggests social workers are at greater risk of work-related stress, depression and anxiety than most professional groups. As listed below, the sector faces many challenges and each of these can threaten the wellbeing of social workers and the quality of service they provide:

- > Rapidly changing social policies, complexity of multi-agency working, frequent reorganisations, and regular revision of policies and procedures.
- > Public scrutiny and mistrust exacerbated by a 'blame' culture and negative perceptions of the profession promoted by the media and social media, whereby social workers are publicly criticised and sometimes even named.
- > Heavier caseloads and rising intervention thresholds for child protection, with services offered only for more serious cases.
- > An increased focus on risk assessment and risk management in mental health practice.
- > The ongoing systemic challenges facing adult social care.
- > Limited resources and reduced funding for services, so that social workers are increasingly expected to 'do more with less'.
- > The introduction of centralised management models of practice and decision-making with increased administrative burdens.
- > The widespread introduction of agile and flexible working and associated practices (e.g. hot-desking) with little guidance and support.
- > High levels of absenteeism and 'presenteeism'¹ (i.e. where workers continue to work when sick).

1. Presenteeism is discussed in KFP5 Wellbeing.

Social workers who work with children and families are at high risk of burnout (McFadden, 2015), a condition involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation/cynicism and low personal accomplishment. A recent study of social workers employed in 22 local authorities in England (Hussein, 2018) found a high proportion of children's social workers were emotionally exhausted, felt jaded and cynical about their work, and lacked a sense of self-efficacy and achievement. More experienced social workers were less likely to show signs of burnout, but high turnover meant there were fewer in post (Hussein, 2018).

Research with social workers in mental health settings has found that they experience burnout when organisational factors impair their ability to deliver good care (Acker, 2010) and where they feel they have limited autonomy and poor managerial support (Hamama, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012). Lower self-perceived competence and increased in-role stress, including as a result of the changing ethos of mental health services (e.g. an emerging business ethos or target-based practice), are also correlated with burnout (Acker, 2010). Moves toward care management models, including the management of individualised budgets and their associated risks, have also added to the pressure adult social workers can feel in their role (Wilberforce et al., 2014). Other studies have found that many social workers are dissatisfied with their work-life balance, due to stress and emotional strain (Social Work Watch, 2014). There is evidence that some, particularly those working with children and families are seriously considering leaving the profession (Ravalier, 2018). The most common reasons given are the demanding nature of the job, a sense of lack of control and poor managerial support.

High turnover rates are extremely costly for organisations and have a negative impact on people who rely on services. In addition, there is some evidence that secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue can impair social work practice and have an adverse impact on the people with whom they work (Bride, 2007). In some circumstances this can lead workers to develop negative attitudes toward people using services (Hansson et al., 2013). It is therefore crucial to provide social workers with adequate support. Organisations have a key role to play in creating a workplace climate that builds the capacity for resilience so that the wellbeing of practitioners is protected. A healthy workplace climate can also help reduce practitioner turnover and enhance the delivery of social work services.

Defining resilience

There is no consensus on the definition and meaning of resilience. It has been conceptualised as a personal trait that helps people adapt positively to adversity, as an aspect of the external environment that enables people to thrive, and as a dynamic interplay between personal characteristics and the effective utilisation of supportive environmental features (see Grant & Kinman, 2014).

Building resilience: individual approaches

In their work with social workers (from different professional backgrounds), Grant and Kinman (2013) have found that resilience is most commonly seen as an individual capacity: the ability to resist, 'bounce back' or recover from difficulties or setbacks. More specifically, as the ability to use negative experiences to adapt to different contextual and developmental challenges. Social workers also refer to individuals' capacity to achieve personal growth during times of adversity, so that they emerge more resourceful than before.

Evidence suggests that a range of personal qualities and environmental resources are associated with individual resilience:

Self-awareness: the capacity for introspection and a strong sense of personal identity.	Confidence and self-efficacy: positive beliefs and attitudes about oneself and one's ability to exert control over motivation, behaviour and the social environment.
Emotional literacy: the ability to attend to, recognise and regulate moods in oneself and others; an understanding of how emotional states can influence problem-solving and personal functioning.	Autonomy, purposefulness and persistence: a sense of mastery and purpose; the capacity to identify priorities now and in the future; the ability to derive meaning and recover from difficulties.
Social support: a strong network of supportive relationships that one can draw upon during challenging times;	Social competence: advanced social skills and self-assurance in social situations.
Adaptability, resourcefulness and effective problem-solving skills: the ability to respond to challenges positively and flexibly, and to generate ideas and solutions from different perspectives; successful adaptation to change and the ability to learn from experience.	Enthusiasm, optimism and hope: having a positive but realistic outlook; generally expecting that positive change is possible.

Clearly, no one individual will be able to draw on all these resources, and those that are available will depend on the individual and the context in which they are working.

Table 1 sets out key resilience-building qualities and resources, along with examples of interventions and strategies that can enhance those resources at a personal level.

Key resilience-building qualities	Definition	Relevant interventions/strategies
Emotional literacy / emotional self-efficacy	Attending to, monitoring and regulating emotional reactions to practice; awareness of the impact of emotions on decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mindfulness > Reflective supervision > Emotional writing
Bounded empathy	Showing warmth, compassion and concern to service users; awareness of the need for emotional boundaries to avoid personal discomfort arising from their negative experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reflective supervision > Mindfulness > Cognitive behavioural strategies > Emotional writing
Prioritising self-care and practising self-compassion	Being as understanding and tolerant of oneself as to others; acknowledging personal vulnerabilities as inevitable rather than a sign of weakness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reflective supervision > Mindfulness > Peer support / coaching
Social resources	Building a community of support; self-confidence to interact with people from different backgrounds and value systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Time management/personal organisation > Peer support/ coaching
Reflective ability	Reflecting on actions, decision-making and emotional reactions to practice; communicating self-reflections with others and adjusting working practices accordingly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reflective supervision > Mindfulness
Coping flexibility	Possessing a variety of coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused) and selecting those appropriate to the situational demands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Self knowledge / stress appraisal skills > Cognitive behavioural strategies > Emotional writing
Work-life balance	Setting clear boundaries between work and personal life to ensure opportunities to recover from work demands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mindfulness > Time management / personal organisation > Peer support / coaching

Table 1: Key resilience-building qualities and strategies

2. More information on these approaches can be found in Grant and Kinman (2014), which provides in-depth guidance on developing a toolbox of strategies to help social workers build their resilience and protect their wellbeing.

As well as developing the personal resources associated with resilience (e.g. emotional literacy, bounded empathy, self-compassion and reflective ability) these interventions can protect mental health in social workers at different stages of their career (see Grant et al., 2014; Kinman & Grant, 2017; Kinman et al., 2019).

It is important to remember that employers have a legal and moral duty of care to protect the wellbeing of their employees. However, it should be emphasised that social workers also have a responsibility to maintain their emotional resilience to assure their continued fitness to practise. But while social workers need to be sufficiently resilient to meet the emotional demands of their work without burning out, strategies focused on the individual will not in themselves be enough: even the most resilient social worker will be unable to cope with toxic working conditions. Social workers must be supported by organisational policies and practices that enable them to flourish and do their best work. Multi-level, systemic interventions are therefore needed at both team and organisational level to support the development of personal resilience.

Building resilience: team-based approaches

Team resilience has been defined as ‘a dynamic psychosocial process that protects a team from the potential negative effects of the disturbances they collectively encounter’ (Morgan et al., 2013, p. 552). Disturbances can be external or internal factors that have the potential to threaten team functioning. These might include a dramatic increase in referrals, rising case complexity, and changes in team or organisational leadership, as well as everyday difficulties such as staff absence and turnover.

Building team resilience is crucial because it is greater than the sum of its parts. Resilience in a team goes beyond the collective personal resilience of its members. A resilient team is one whose members use their individual and collective resources to adapt positively to maintain wellbeing and performance, and to achieve common goals or purposes. Optimal collective functioning is particularly important in complex and uncertain environments such as social work and related multi-disciplinary teams, where effective collaboration within and between teams is vital.

These characteristics of team resilience expand upon the qualities of resilient individuals highlighted above.

Some examples are:

Resourcefulness: employing members’ personal strengths and resources to foster a culture of continuous improvement; developing processes that allow a clear focus on priorities.	Robustness: having a sense of collective purpose, meaning and goals; adapting to change successfully and addressing issues proactively.	Perseverance: maintaining a solution (rather than a problem) focus; persisting when faced with obstacles to success.	Self-care: managing stress effectively and being aware of signs of overload and distress in other team members; prioritising individual and collective work-life balance.
Capability: seeking feedback to identify what works well; building capacity through professional networks and other sources of support.	Connectedness: being mutually cooperative and supportive; encouraging a sense of belonging and group identity.	Alignment: coming together to meet desired goals; monitoring progress towards goal achievement; celebrating success but putting ‘failure’ in perspective.	

Although generic frameworks for building resilience can be useful, it is important always to consider the specific requirements of a particular professional group. The following qualities expand on those above to identify the characteristics of a resilient team:

<p>Sense of purpose:</p> <p>there is a shared mission, vision and purpose; and a desire to work together to create change for children and families and adults with care and support needs.</p>	<p>Collective sense of responsibility:</p> <p>there is recognition that everyone in the team has a key role to play, and people should share the load; networks are used to find solutions to problems.</p>
<p>Appreciation not blame:</p> <p>success is recognised and celebrated; when mistakes occur, there is a genuine desire to learn from them rather than jump to conclusions or seek to attribute blame.</p>	<p>Conditions for reflection and challenge:</p> <p>supervision is reflective and supportive, and not focused only on tasks; opportunities for reflection and growth are encouraged.</p>
<p>Positive mind-set:</p> <p>crises are temporary; setbacks and crises are seen as opportunities for the team to come together and use a solution-focused approach to facilitate change.</p>	<p>Caring and inclusive leadership:</p> <p>workers feel cared for and that their wellbeing is important; managers 'role model' healthy work-life balance and prioritise their wellbeing; managers understand their staff and use their emotional intelligence to show care and respect.</p>

Building organisational resilience

Definitions of organisational resilience from the business world draw on the individual and team-based approaches outlined above. Typically, they describe an organisation's ability to recover and return to 'normal' functioning after facing a disturbing or unexpected event, through having strategies in place to manage such a situation. Although this is a crucial aspect of resilience across all fields of social work practice, a more nuanced understanding is needed of the conditions required to support social workers in leading, managing, recovering and learning from a traumatic event – for example, following the death of a child in children and families social work, or the suicide of a person using mental health services.

As well as supporting practitioners through distressing situations, organisational resilience is more commonly characterised by the ability to help them manage the day-to-day demands they experience. Although some characteristics of resilient organisations will be common to all types of job (e.g. manageable demands, adequate training, understanding of role), it is important to develop frameworks that meet the requirements of different sectors and are congruent with the needs and expectations of workers.

Introducing a systemic approach

Grant and Kinman's research with social workers supports the view that resilience is contextual, multi-dimensional and systemic. A resilient organisation seeks to understand how resilience can be fostered at individual, team and leadership levels to develop a working culture that supports wellbeing and optimum practice. What makes an organisation strong is not only the ability to manage shocks and respond to difficulties and setbacks, but also to implement initiatives that enable individuals and teams to do their best work. Examples of ways to enhance organisational resilience include ensuring leadership is fit-for-purpose, improving job content and the working environment, enriching support networks, building a culture that prioritises self-care, and sharing good practice.

In line with this systemic approach, initiatives at a public policy level also play an important role in improving workforce wellbeing. Recommended strategies include national workload management initiatives, recruitment and retention strategies, and risk assessments and 'pulse checks' to monitor workforce wellbeing over time (see Kinman & Grant, 2016). Guidance on using the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards approach to preventing work-related stress can be found in the Key Foundational Principle (KFP5) Wellbeing section later in the workbook. Introducing an evidence-informed 'emotional curriculum' to support resilience and wellbeing from recruitment to retirement is also a priority

It is generally agreed that stressors should be eliminated or reduced at source wherever possible, but a resilient organisation also requires strategies at individual and collective levels. The multi-level systemic approach shown in Figure 3 involves developing emotionally literate leaders, as well as resilient teams and resilient individuals. This can have a wide-reaching impact on the wellbeing and performance of the social work workforce.



Figure 3: A multi-level systemic approach to building organisational resilience

The emotionally literate and ethical leader

Leaders are in a unique position to develop psychologically healthy workplace cultures as they have the power and authority to implement change. They therefore play a particularly important role in managing work-related stress by:

Prevention:

identifying signs of stress in practitioners at an early stage; supporting risk assessments and communicating their findings; working with teams, occupational health and human resources to develop appropriate interventions and adjustments to improve working conditions.

Training and development:

enabling practitioners to access appropriate training to reduce stress at individual and team levels.

Support:

being aware of the various ways stress can manifest itself and the need for support to be targeted according to individual need.

There are strong links between the behaviour of leaders and the wellbeing, satisfaction and performance of the workforce. The Health and Safety Executive (in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Investors in People) has developed a useful framework to help managers assess whether they have the competencies and behaviours found to be effective for preventing and reducing work-related stress in their staff. (For more information see the KFP5 Wellbeing section of this workbook.) However, leadership is a quality that is required at all levels, and every worker has a responsibility to develop the competencies and behaviours that can help prevent and reduce stress in others.

Ethical leaders are those who adhere to a set of moral standards underpinned by respect for the dignity and rights of others. They act as role models for ethical behaviour and decision-making and support their practitioners to grow as professionals. Crucially, ethical leaders prioritise the health and safety of their workforce and cultivate a sense of resilience in their organisation. There is evidence that positive leadership also contributes to fostering positive emotions among workers. Helping practitioners achieve their goals and praising them for good performance can build their psychological capital (i.e. resilience, optimism, hope and confidence), enhance their job commitment, satisfaction and performance, and help to protect them against burnout (see Kelloway et al., 2013).

Emotional intelligence, or literacy, is a particularly important quality in managers (Lopes, 2016). Characteristics of emotionally literate organisational leaders include:

Understanding self and emotions:

awareness of one's emotional state; insight into how emotions can influence thought processes and decision-making; the ability to attend to and 'repair' unwanted emotional states.

Understanding and relating to others:

an appreciation of how other people (might) think; an understanding of their impact on others; knowing how to get the best out of people using a 'tailored' approach; the ability to evoke positive emotions in workers; understanding how to develop cohesive teams.

Communicating effectively:

the ability to create the conditions required for effective communication; the ability to instigate difficult conversations, and to mediate, negotiate and manage conflict directly.

Strategies to help social work leaders and managers develop these skills are provided throughout the workbook.

SWORD workbook:

KFP 1 Secure Base



Introduction

Making sure social workers have a secure base within which to operate is critical to organisational resilience and is the first Key Foundational Principle. A secure base provides:

A sense of protection, safety and feeling cared for.

A constructive challenge for workers to explore fears and threats relating to practice and organisational change.

A 'safe haven' that offers support, nurtures energy and provides resources for wellbeing and improved practice.

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the organisation is safe. It is the foundation of a healthy and productive organisational culture, and social workers need to feel psychologically safe at an individual, team and organisational level. Several studies have found that nurturing psychological safety is crucial for effective teams and organisations (Frazier et al., 2017; Kahn, 1990; Kessel et al., 2012).

In psychologically safe organisations, members feel accepted and respected, able to express their emotions openly and to share knowledge freely. They believe they will not be penalised for making a mistake, and errors are seen as opportunities for learning, creativity and growth. Such organisations acknowledge that practitioners need a secure base that offers constructive yet supportive challenge to enable them to thrive.

Alexander (2019) found that when organisational restructuring is driven by a desire to improve cost-effectiveness and streamline services, there is a risk of losing focus on the day-to-day working context for practitioners. Professionals who took part in her study (i.e. members of multi-disciplinary community mental health teams) reported experiencing fragmentation of teams, loss of connection and increased isolation stemming from imposed organisational change. A sense of *situational connection* is key to professionals feeling equipped and supported to fulfil their roles – i.e. a working context in which collegiate relationship-based practice is valued and facilitated. *Situationally connected* organisations recognise the value of relationships between practitioners in creating a secure base, the role of teams in providing containment for individual practitioners, and the need for teams to feel anchored within the organisational structure in order to provide psychological safety.

Box 1.1 describes ways to foster psychological safety in your organisation. Psychological safety also links to KFP3 Learning Organisation and KFP5 Wellbeing and illustrates their interconnectedness: strategies that are effective for one can also be used to support others.

Box 1.1: How to make your organisation psychologically safe

Lead by example and use self-disclosure:

Managers are role models, and what they do sets standards for behaviour across the organisation. Ask for practitioners' feedback on what you're doing well and not so well; acknowledge your mistakes openly. Be receptive to different opinions; be approachable and encourage people to ask you questions.

Encourage active listening:

This lets people know their opinions matter to you. Make meetings 'phone free' so people can give their full attention to the matter in hand. Demonstrate understanding by repeating what has been said; encourage people to ask questions; make sure everyone has a chance to speak, especially those who are reticent. The section on mindful listening in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation provides more in-depth guidance on improving listening skills.

Create a safe environment:

Make sure people feel comfortable voicing their opinions and can speak their mind without being embarrassed, judged or punished. Work with them to develop some ground rules for personal interactions – e.g. no interruptions, all ideas are accepted equally, never blame or judge.

Keep an open mind:

Trying to see things from a different perspective can provide solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Encourage teams to share feedback widely and help them respond to input from others without defensiveness; encourage individuals and teams to view feedback as a way of strengthening and expanding their ideas and processes (and not as criticism).

Distinguish between psychological safety and accountability:

Acknowledging personal fallibility, and dealing with errors and failure openly and productively, are key to a psychologically safe workplace. Nonetheless, it is important to be supportive and not offer a crutch; organisations that are too psychologically safe can stifle creativity and sanction poor performance.

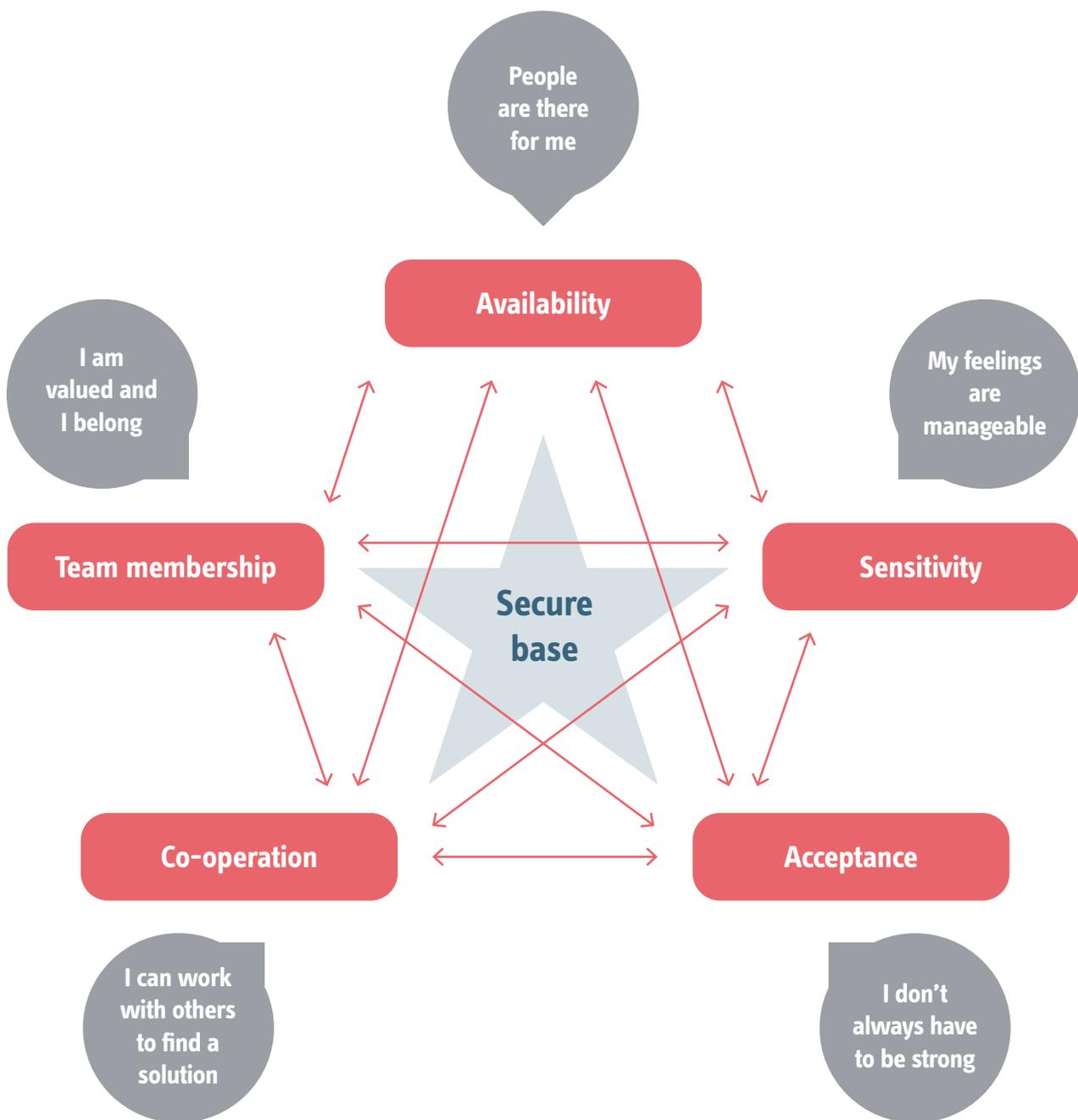
By applying Schofield and Beek's (2014) Secure Base model to data from social work teams, Biggart et al. (2017) offer insight into how social work organisations can develop a safe haven in which practitioners feel supported and able to flourish. They identified five key dimensions for a secure base at the team level: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and team membership (see Figure 1.1).

Social workers who feel secure believe:

There are people they can turn to within the team	Their team is emotionally containing	Their team provides an opportunity to moderate negative feelings caused by stress.
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Although this work was based on research at the team level, it can also be applied at the organisational level.

Figure 1.1: Key dimensions for developing the team as a secure base (Biggart et al., 2017)



Knowing yourself: enhancing emotional literacy as a leadership trait

In order to create a secure base, leaders need to recognise the importance of controlling their own emotions and responding effectively to those of others. Emotionally literate leadership (or emotional intelligence) is one of the golden threads that underpin organisational resilience. Everyone would like to think of themselves as an emotionally literate leader, but we can all succumb to focusing on process and targets at the expense of relationships and humane response to work pressures. Emotional literacy is a capacity that can be developed, however. Self-awareness is a key step in developing and consolidating emotional literacy: a helpful quick quiz that tells you how emotionally literate you are as a leader can be found [here](#). Use the reflective checklist in Box 1.2 to help you assess your emotionally intelligent leadership skills and highlight any areas for development.

Box 1.2: How emotionally intelligent am I?

Is my style participatory?

Do I make sure I get 'buy-in' from practitioners for new ideas and change? Do I engage with people in a truly participatory manner to inform decision-making processes?

Do I put people at ease?

Do people find me easy to engage with? Am I culturally competent in understanding that I may need to adjust my communication style?

Am I self-aware?

Am I aware of my strengths and limitations, and do I share this information with others, showing that it is OK not to be good at everything? Do I ensure there are people around me who are better at things I am not so good at? If not, do I know where to seek help?

Do I model good work-life balance?

Do I make sure people notice that I take time out for myself? This shows I understand the importance of self-care and that I can manage my work in a healthy and sustainable way.

Am I able to remain composed?

If I make a mistake, do I remain calm, recover, stay optimistic and learn from the experience?

Can I build and mend relationships?

Am I able to negotiate work-related problems without alienating people? Can I agree to differ, or do I hold a grudge?

Do I show tenacity?

When faced with obstacles, am I able to take action and be responsible for leading a plan, while also taking on the views of others?

Am I decisive?

When needed, can I make a decision and stick to it? Am I able to review the effectiveness of my decisions and adapt them if required?

Do I confront problems with staff?

Am I able to act with authority when necessary without being authoritarian? Do I treat people fairly, even when they disagree with a course of action?

Can I manage change effectively?

Can I implement change initiatives and overcome resistance?

Check your 'inner chimp': supporting and modelling emotion regulation

Dr Steve Peters, author of the best-selling book *The Chimp Paradox* (2012), helps us understand why, even as emotionally intelligent human beings, we are sometimes prone to think or respond in an overly emotional or irrational way. For example:

Jumping to conclusions, or thinking in black and white terms	Paranoid thinking	Experiencing a sense of inner turmoil that makes us overreact if we feel threatened or undermined.
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Peters distinguishes between the 'human brain' (which enables us to be compassionate and to react calmly, using both emotions and rational thinking) and the 'chimp brain' (where we react without thinking, say things we don't mean, sulk or 'lose it' when faced with opposition). Our chimp is ever-present, and reacts five times faster than the human brain, but we can train ourselves to be aware when it is making an appearance. The aim is not to kill your chimp, merely to tame it – being able to calm the chimp and use logic to reassure it makes us emotionally intelligent leaders and social workers.

Box 1.3: Learning to tame your 'inner chimp'

We can only regulate our emotions if we also have an opportunity to express them; this can help us process feelings such as frustration, anger and disgust. So, it's important to vent, to let your inner chimp have its voice in a safe space. Find people (within and outside the workplace) who you can vent to safely. The section on your Personal Board of Directors (see KFP3 Learning Organisation) will help you with this.

We can then begin to address our emotional reaction calmly and allow the human part of our brain to determine a more rational reaction to the situation.

Remember, being angry is perfectly natural and a logical response to some situations, but it is not always proportional or functional. Quick Win 1.1 offers some tips on how to manage anger more effectively.

When we need to divert our inner chimp, it can help to count to ten or use a breathing technique (see Quick Win 1.2) before we voice our initial reactions.

Cognitive behavioural techniques (see the KFP5 Wellbeing section) can also be useful in calming your inner chimp. Strategies to help manage inter-personal conflict are discussed in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Encouraging practitioners find an appropriate person to vent to (and recognising their need to do so) is important – although as a manager, you may not be the appropriate sounding board.

Quick Win 1.1: Managing anger

Do I need to get angry about this?

Trying to avoid being angry doesn't mean suppressing your feelings, which can lead to feelings of shame, depression and (possibly) more anger. Instead, try to change your outlook and ask yourself whether what's just happened is something you need to be angry about.

How does anger affect you?

Think back to previous situations when you have been angry at work and ask yourself how it affects aspects of your life, both good and bad. Identify the impact on you, your relationships with colleagues, your job performance, your wellbeing and energy, how you feel outside work, and your relationships with family and friends.

Was anger an appropriate response?

Did your anger arise from an accurate or logical reading of the situation, or your own interpretation? Talk the situation through with somebody you trust who is neutral to the situation.

Is your anger out of proportion?

Minor things can trigger significant anger. Acknowledging that anger is actually a response to something else (e.g. being tired, hungry or angry with someone else) can help you contain your feelings.

Am I taking this personally?

We often become stressed and angry in situations that tap into deep-seated feelings of not being good enough or having failed in some way. Be aware of your emotional triggers and challenge your initial reactions. Setting boundaries will also help you take things less personally.

How can I frame the problem more clearly?

Jot down the relevant details, including the points you and the other person/people made during the encounter, and any misunderstandings you think might have occurred. Read it out loud to try to see the situation more objectively.

How did I feel and what did I want?

How were you feeling before and during the situation? Was your anger triggered by unmet needs? Did you project your anger onto other people because they misinterpreted what it was you wanted?

Identify your objective

What do you want from this situation? Define your goal in a way that other people can understand. Do you wish to resolve it directly, or to tackle an underlying problem?

Quick Win 1.1: Managing anger

Be realistic

Having unrealistic expectations of others can set them up to fail and disregard who they are. Having unrealistic expectations of yourself can lead to self-blame and self-punishment.

How can I move on?

Shift your focus from what was done to you, to what you can do to fix it. Sometimes the best response is just to chalk it up to experience and let it go. This doesn't mean you have 'lost' a battle.

Acknowledge and respect differences

Trying to take another person's perspective enables you to see issues in a different light.

Get moving

Physical activity can help deal with anger – go for a brisk walk outside, away from the working environment.

Quick win 1.2: A breathing exercise for reducing feelings of stress

Paying attention to your breathing is an effective way of calming yourself at times of stress. It only takes a few minutes and can be done anywhere, without other people noticing. Practising this technique regularly will help you get the most out of it, so try to build it into your daily routine.

As you're likely to be doing this at work, it's best to practise by just sitting in a chair that supports your back. Make yourself as comfortable as you can with your feet flat and roughly a hip-width apart so that you feel grounded.

Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable without forcing it. Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathe in gently. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from one to five. You may not be able to reach five at first.

Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from one to five again, if you find this helpful.

Keep doing this for three to five minutes.

Based on NHS advice; full details can be found [here](#).

Availability of support

As discussed earlier in this workbook, feeling supported provides practitioners with a secure base. It is an important component of organisational resilience. An effective manager is available to offer support and encourage open communication, feedback and discussion. Making yourself available at any time to discuss any topic is not feasible, however. Quick Win 1.3 outlines how a bounded open-door policy can help workers feel more supported and enhance their sense of security.

Quick Win 1.3: Making open-door policies work

'Open-door policy' implies that managers encourage workers to come into their office at any time to discuss any issues or concerns. This can be effective, as the manager will be seen as accessible and an open flow of communication will be encouraged. Managers will also be more aware of day-to-day problems and able to resolve minor issues before they escalate. Nonetheless, an open-door policy must be well defined, otherwise managers may spend a lot of their time listening to concerns without practitioners reaching solutions autonomously. Without boundaries and guidelines, you may unwittingly develop a culture of dependency, in which practitioners are reluctant to solve problems independently. Alternatively, they may be reluctant to bother you with their problems, especially if they think you are busy. These steps should help you reap the benefits of open communication, and minimise the disadvantages:

Set boundaries for the 'open door' by managing expectations of your availability

For example, an open door means people are free to drop in, a closed door means you're unavailable. And before they come to you with a problem, you could ask people to work through some preliminary issues. For example: a) How would they express the problem in a few sentences? b) Does it affect only them, or others also? c) Can they think of two or three options that might solve the problem?

Listen carefully

Let people speak without being interrupted by phones, email or others dropping in. Use mindful listening techniques (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation). To make sure you have fully understood the problem, summarise what you think the worker has said. Drive the conversation from a problem focus to a solution that is generated by the employee themselves (see c above); if necessary, schedule a follow-up meeting, rather than ask them to 'stop by at any time'.

Be aware of time:

If possible, try to solve any issue the first time to avoid reducing your own productivity. More complex problems, and those involving other people, will probably need you to schedule a meeting.

Agile working

'Agile' working is increasingly common in social work. Practitioners may work at home, in public areas such as libraries and coffee shops, or even in their car. But as well as benefits, such as increased flexibility for professionals and financial savings for organisations, not having a physical 'base' or having to share a workspace can threaten psychological safety and a sense of belonging. It can even increase the risk of burnout (Stone et al., 2018). There is evidence that most organisations do not provide workers with guidance on how to manage the psychosocial risks of agile working, or even recognise the need to do so (McDowall & Kinman, 2017).

So, it is essential leaders think carefully about the downside as well as the advantages of introducing agile working and identify how they will provide support. There is little research on the implications of agile working for social workers, but a recent study (Jeyasingham, 2018) used several data sources (diaries, photographs and interviews) to explore child protection social workers' experiences when working away from office spaces. The findings highlighted a sense of ambivalence: agile working offered practitioners a 'superficial' sense of control, but concerns were raised about data security, the risks of working in public spaces, and lack of opportunity to interact with others. There is also evidence that working remotely using technology can threaten employees' work-life balance, by extending working hours and allowing the job to 'invade' their home environments (Kelliher et al., 2019).

When introducing flexible working, it is crucial that managers ensure practitioners have opportunities to engage with colleagues on a regular basis. All too often, insufficient attention is given to what happens at the end of the working day, when people are unable to return to a physical base or may return to find there is no one to check in with. Social workers need a sense of community and value the secure base provided by their team, particularly during stressful times. They may need an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, debrief or just have a chat before they go home, which can be an effective way to maintain boundaries between work and personal life. Quick Win 1.4 offers guidance on how to use technology to 'check in' with colleagues when working remotely.

Quick win 1.4: Using technology to 'check in'

'Checking in' is a challenge when social workers don't have a physical base, so using technology to create opportunities to interact online can be helpful. For example, 'virtual coffee breaks' using Skype or similar applications can work well. The 'Fika' approach (see below) can also be adapted for online use to help people feel connected.

It's important to schedule the break, as colleagues aren't going to bump into each other accidentally. A strong internet connection and a quiet background (or a headset) will help you hear each other. Bringing your own coffee is essential. And consider the creative use of icebreakers to help get conversations started.

But remember, the use of virtual technology for communication is most effective if people have previously met face-to-face.

Hot-desking is a form of agile working and a common source of dissatisfaction in social work and other professions. A recent survey (Stevenson, 2019) found more than eight out of ten social workers felt hot-desking was not compatible with the work they do. More than six out of ten who were currently hot-desking said their experience was 'entirely' or 'largely' negative. Most also said they had not been properly equipped or supported to hot desk.

Hot-desking can work if managed carefully. But losing a familiar workspace and being separated from team members can make people feel isolated and demotivated, and their wellbeing and performance can suffer (Ayoko & Ashkanasy, 2019; Morrison & Macky, 2017; Webber, 2019). So, introducing hot-desking requires more than simply providing workers with laptops and asking them to share desks. Quick Win 1.5 addresses issues that should be considered before you introduce hot-desking. In organisations that are already using hot-desking, these can also be used to check that conditions are optimal.

Quick Win 1.5: How to make hot-desking work in your organisation

Planning:

Consider carefully how long it will take to move to hot-desking, what resources you need and the budget you have. Identify your desired outcome, and how you will measure its success or failure.

Enhance buy-in:

Co-produce the hot-desking policy by involving workers at each stage. Asking for feedback and ideas will increase acceptability and minimise resistance. A steering group can provide creative ideas to inform hot-desking policy and help you monitor progress over time.

Manage the change:

Explain the reasons for introducing hot-desking. Highlight the benefits but acknowledge potential disadvantages. Listen to concerns – e.g. about how hot-desking might impact on working relationships, and practitioners' wellbeing and job performance. Consider how it may impact on belonging and commitment.

Expect disruption:

Hot-desking will be a major change for people, and it will take a while to bed in. Policies may need to be revisited and adapted.

Confidentiality:

Emphasise the need for privacy of data by never leaving computers unattended when email or confidential documents are open.

Hot-desking in practice:

Ensure you have the appropriate technology and sufficient workspaces. People can waste precious time searching for a work-station or getting to grips with unfamiliar or unreliable technology (this can also be a source of anxiety). Decide whether desks will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis, informal desk-sharing system, or via apps to formally book desks and rooms.

Quick Win 1.5: How to make hot-desking work in your organisation

Try zoning:

Consider providing larger office space where team members can hot-desk alongside their managers (rather than in undesignated areas). This will enable them to discuss cases, provide updates and offer support.

Inclusivity:

Chairs and computer monitors need to be easily adjustable to accommodate people's individual needs and preferences. Consider the needs of those who require specialised equipment, such as adapted keyboards and chairs.

Create a variety of spaces:

Wherever possible, offer workspaces for different types of task, such as breakout rooms, cubicles for one-to-one meetings or private phone calls, and quiet areas to facilitate deep concentration.

Personalising space:

Studies show that an inability to personalise our working areas with things that define our identity can be stressful. Think of ways to provide people with a sense of ownership by encouraging them to add personal touches to their workspace. They could bring personal items that are small and portable, vote on a choice of pictures for the walls, or put personal photographs on a noticeboard. Policies should be co-produced with workers.

Clean desk policy:

Workspaces and computers should be kept free of personal or confidential material. People are often less inclined to keep shared desks clean and tidy than their own personal workspaces. Provide wipes for people to clean up at the end of the day and a shared space where they can eat lunch away from their desk.

Accept that hot-desking may not work:

People often gravitate to the same spaces and some people may stake out their territory by 'adopting' a desk as 'theirs'. As well as causing resentment, a hot-desking space can easily revert to the traditional arrangement of employees having permanent desks.

Some guidance on introducing flexible working practices is provided [here](#).

Fostering a sense of belonging

Feeling that we belong at work is essential to our sense of security and commitment to the organisation, so creating a sense of belonging among social workers is crucial to building a resilient organisational culture. It is especially important to encourage a sense of belonging among newly recruited practitioners, those who have changed teams, and those who have returned to work after sickness, a career break or maternity leave. Letting new people know about work etiquette and ‘how we do things around here’ in an open and kindly way encourages a sense of belonging. As a manager, think about assigning a ‘buddy’ to new recruits to advise on basic issues such as where to get lunch, or where the loo is. Overlooking these simple things can cause anxiety in new recruits.

As social workers, our professional identity protects our wellbeing and resilience, even during times of stress and trauma. Feeling we belong helps maintain identity, as well as helping us feel psychologically safe and engaged. Box 1.4 uses findings from research (adapted for social work) to identify factors that can help build a culture of belonging in the workplace.

Box 1.4: How to foster a sense of belonging

Check out how people feel about working in your organisation

As a leader, it’s tempting to believe everyone loves working under your leadership, or to become defensive if indicators suggest otherwise. But being open to listening about people’s experiences of work is crucial to making them feel heard and understood. The SWORD Tool will help you identify priorities for change and the extent to which people feel they belong in your organisation. However, remember that listening without taking action can alienate, which is the antithesis of fostering belonging.

Getting employees to speak freely can be a challenge. They may be wary of authority figures or may tell you what they think you want to hear. So, to learn what people really think, begin by identifying issues that seem to cause silence, then invite them to lunch or other informal settings to discuss them in a neutral space. You can also consider using employment engagement surveys to establish the feelings of under-represented groups.

Develop trusting work-based relationships

To develop trust, people need to feel truly appreciated for what they bring to an organisation; KFP2 Sense of Appreciation has tips on how to achieve this. Simply put, if people are to feel they belong, they must believe their abilities and contribution are recognised and valued. A workplace that invests in employees’ professional development will be repaid by increased commitment and loyalty, as well as improved performance. There is evidence that workers who have a trusting relationship with a mentor are better able to take advantage of critical feedback and learning from their practice. KFP3 Learning Organisation outlines the features of a peer coaching/mentoring scheme that can be used, with minimal cost and set-up time, to encourage a solution focus to workplace issues.

Box 1.4: How to foster a sense of belonging

Take action on inclusion

Studies in different occupational settings show that making people feel valued for who they are enhances retention. When workers see managers, leaders and co-workers who 'look like them', they are more likely to feel they fit in. So it's important to ensure your workplace represents the community you serve. Excluding people may be unintentional but it can still undermine a sense of belonging. Being culturally competent is an important leadership capability. Guidance on enhancing culturally competent leadership is in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Knowing there are people who may not come forward with ideas, and making opportunities for everyone to have a voice, underpins a sense of belonging. Actively encouraging inclusion is more than inviting people to meetings (which is important); it means sharing documents beforehand and setting aside time for people to contribute. Writing down ideas on Post-it notes, for example, can encourage contributions from those who are less comfortable speaking out in larger groups of people.

Tailored listening

Another way to show employees that their contributions are valued is simply to listen respectfully and attentively (Heathfield, 2019). How this is done should be tailored to a team member's personality: quieter people prefer someone who pauses, listens, and creates a space, while more outspoken people value the opportunity to bring their thoughts to the here and now.

Encourage people to bring their 'whole selves' to work

For people to feel they belong, they must be their authentic selves at work. This means accepting that social workers (like all human beings) are vulnerable and imperfect and will need extra support and compassion from time to time. The importance of leaders 'role modelling' self-care and self-compassion is outlined in the KFP5 Wellbeing. It also helps if leaders role-model humility and ask for help when required.

A shared vision makes all the difference

If social workers find their work meaningful and have a collective sense of purpose, they will feel they belong. Helping people reconnect with why they came into social work in the first place, and how their own values match those of the organisation, can be developed through exercises in Appreciative Inquiry that are outlined in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation.

Quick Win 1.6: Building social connectedness using Fika

Fika, or sharing coffee and sweet treat with colleagues, is an important everyday activity in Sweden that encourages peer-to-peer support and develops the capacities that underpin emotional resilience. It's a retreat from the stress of the day and an opportunity to bond with colleagues. Fika helps build team spirit and motivate employees.

Evidence suggests that developing a working culture that acknowledges the importance of regular breaks away from the desk can make a real difference to wellbeing and performance (Troughakos & Hideg, 2009). So, think about how groups can be brought together for a Fika break. If coffee and cake aren't right, a group walk would also embody the spirit of Fika. The important thing is to create opportunities for people to get together and refrain from talking about work. All you need is a space where people feel comfortable to gather and chat.

Remember work, is not just what we do behind our desks: problem-solving, reflective conversations and peer-to-peer learning can all emerge from informal conversations about something completely different. This is likely to happen during a Fika break.

Building a secure base by enhancing team resilience

Building an effective network of teams helps to consolidate organisational resilience. When individuals can openly discuss their strengths and concerns, collective resilience is strengthened, and team members also feel empowered to share emotionally distressing experiences.



Figure 1.2: Enhancing team resilience

The characteristics of a resilient team are discussed earlier in this workbook in 'Understanding resilience'. Figure 1.2 shows a helpful framework for building team resilience, which was developed by Cooper and colleagues (2013). The in-depth strategies and Quick Wins included throughout this workbook will help you apply this framework to your own organisation. To use the framework effectively, it's important also to consider the following questions:

Where are the stressors / burnout risks in my organisation?

While a formal wellbeing audit can identify the key stressors in an organisation (see KFP5 Wellbeing for further information), research suggests that high workloads, low control and bureaucracy are much more stressful for social workers than the type of work that is done. As a leader, it is important to consider how these hazards can be minimised; otherwise, over the long term, they will dramatically increase the risk of health problems, sickness absence and poor retention. Providing support, security and a sense of purpose can help social workers manage demands and remain healthy and motivated.

What is the impact of my leadership style?

Leaders need to have a flexible leadership style. It is possible to overuse your strengths: for example, as managers are powerful role models for expected behaviour in an organisation, being overly conscientious and working long hours will probably encourage others to do the same. Similarly, being overly sympathetic to all workers may encourage others to see you as a 'soft touch'. Coaching and 360 Degree Feedback (see KFP4 Mission and Vision) can help you gain insight into your leadership style and reflect on how it could be developed.

What is the impact of personal resilience on team resilience?

Helping people to enhance their individual resilience can increase the resilience of the team as a whole. KFP5 Wellbeing offers some ideas for how you can improve the personal resilience of those with whom you work.

Some further guidance on how to build effective teams to provide security for social workers in practice is set out in Box 1.5.

Box 1.5: Building a secure base through teams

How do we build a sense of trust within a team? And how will we know trust exists within that team?

When people make a mistake, or when they are successful, the collective learning that can be gained from those experiences should be considered and shared. Trust is evident when people readily ask for help, admit to mistakes and skill gaps, and are prepared to disagree with the views of others. You will know trust when you see it: people will proactively help each other, be prepared to show vulnerability, and support each other when there are temporary spikes in workload.

How do we build commitment?

For teams to work effectively, they should be aware of how their role contributes to the mission and vision of the wider organisation (see KFP4 Mission and Vision). In other words, they must be able to see where their contribution fits into the wider endeavour. So, managers at the team level should – preferably with the input of their team – develop a strategy, with goals and objectives, that is explicitly linked to that wider enterprise.

How do we build a culture of shared responsibilities?

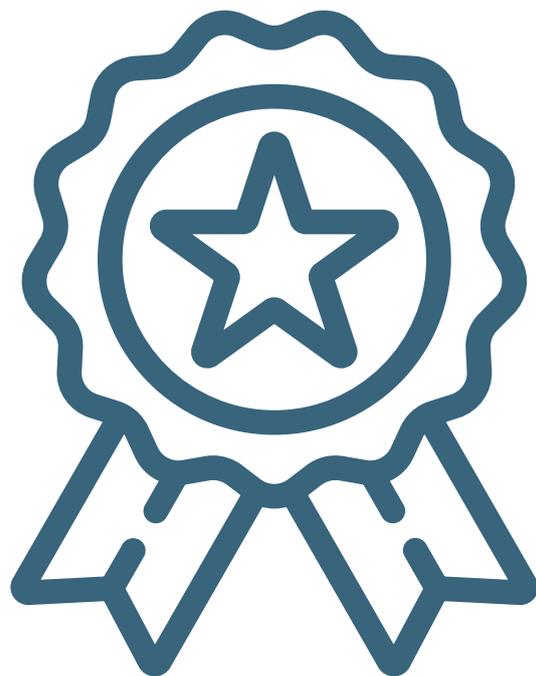
Stress is often triggered when people have a lot of responsibility but feel they lack control over how they do their work. Responsibility without authority is an acknowledged source of stress, so engaging the team in considering how problems can be shared and resolved collaboratively can enhance a sense of control. Group supervision is a good way of encouraging this within a social work setting. Opportunities to increase control can be explored using Appreciative Inquiry and World Café approaches (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation, KFP4 Mission and Vision and KFP5 Wellbeing).

How do we build a team that recognises individual strengths?

An effective team needs a wide range of skills and experience. It's easy to think of social work as individualised practice. Social workers rarely work in pairs or observe the practice of others. Encouraging a culture in which people ask for a second opinion, or for someone to help them do a joint piece of work, will ensure social workers are recognised for their individual skills and strengths, while strengthening the expertise and resilience of the team as a whole.

SWORD workbook:

KFP 2 Sense of Appreciation



Introduction

Promoting a culture in which all members of staff feel appreciated is the second Key Foundational Principle for organisational resilience.

This is when:

Workers feel valued, and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated.

Leaders are approachable, genuinely interested in people and trust them to do a good job.

Leaders understand the pressures of the work, and support practitioners to prioritise self-care and a healthy work-life balance.

Strategies for fostering a sense of appreciation

Feeling appreciated at work, especially if you've gone 'above and beyond' what is expected in your role, is highly motivating, and helps protect people from stress and burnout. Without this recognition and feedback, workers can see themselves as just a 'cog in the wheel' and feel taken for granted. This in turn can affect performance and the extent to which workers are able to meet the needs of the children, families or adults they're working with.

Feeling unappreciated when doing emotionally demanding work places workers at particular risk of becoming resentful and embittered. Over time, this can lead to burnout. The cycle of emotional exhaustion, cynicism/compassion fatigue, and lack of personal accomplishment that characterises burnout can impair social workers' wellbeing, personal relationships and job performance. There are also major implications for retention. Feeling undervalued or underappreciated is one of the most common reasons for social workers leaving their job.

So, it's crucial to show appreciation for work well done. Feedback works best when it's authentic, rather than tokenistic, and recognises someone's unique contribution or skills. This helps people feel that the work they do is noticed and appreciated.

In order to provide authentic feedback, leaders and managers need insight into the everyday working lives of individuals and teams. One way of doing this is to 'walk the floor' on a regular basis and listen to what people are saying about their successes and challenges at work (see Box 2.1). What you learn will help you ensure that expressions of appreciation and feedback are sincere, personalised and well timed (see Quick Win 2.1). Walking the floor can also help develop other aspects of organisational resilience. It will be particularly useful in building and communicating a shared mission and vision, and facilitating a learning environment. Enhancing cultural competence and an appreciation of the diversity of your workforce will support social workers to feel that managers and leaders have interest in their lives (see KFP4 Mission and Vision).

Box 2.1: Walking the floor

Managing via email and formal meetings is the norm in many organisations. Staff surveys often indicate that managers are not sufficiently visible, and this can be a strong source of dissatisfaction. KFP1 Secure Base includes tips on introducing an effective open-door policy, but another way to encourage spontaneous questions and feedback is to walk the floor. Put simply, this is the habit of stopping to talk to people face to face. Research for *Community Care* (Schraer, 2014) found social workers would value opportunities to engage in open dialogue with managers on a regular basis. Walking the floor helps managers be more visible, connect with practitioners, share ideas, and invite suggestions for how things could be improved. It also allows them to express their appreciation to workers in a personalised way.

Make walking the floor part of your routine:

If you can, ring-fence some time in your diary each day to drop in on people for an informal chat. This doesn't have to take long: even 30 minutes will do, and you can visit different teams on a rotating basis. It's best to schedule your walkabouts at different times of the day to avoid them becoming too predictable.

Do it alone:

Walking the floor works best when it involves one-to-one conversations. Praise and gratitude are often best expressed to people individually to avoid them becoming self-conscious and embarrassed.

Visit everybody:

Dropping in on only some people regularly may be seen as favouritism and can lead to gossip and resentment. So try to spend roughly the same amount of time with each person.

Listen more than you talk:

Take the opportunity to get to know people. Ask about their accomplishments; say something positive and offer praise.

Take the rough with the smooth:

As well as providing feedback and praise, it's important to be receptive and open to criticism. The Community Care survey found that social work managers needed to 'dig deep' to establish how people actually feel about working for the organisation (Schraer, 2014).

Be persistent:

During your first walkabouts, you might find that people feel awkward and don't communicate freely. Don't be discouraged; repeated visits will eventually pay off. When done well, simple gestures of appreciation can be hugely motivating and replenishing for employees; they can increase morale and enhance workers' ability to manage setbacks.

Go beyond work:

Knowing people as individuals doesn't only mean being aware of their strengths in relation to the job they do. Managers need to be aware of employees' personal circumstances and any challenges they face (while ensuring their privacy is not invaded). When handled sensitively and in confidence, this can help people feel understood and appreciated, and any necessary accommodations can be put in place.

Providing clear and authentic feedback is vital in fostering a sense of appreciation. This will highlight workers' strengths and achievements, and identify areas for development. Quick Win 2.1 offers some tips for giving effective feedback.

Quick Win 2.1: Tips for giving effective feedback

Be clear:

Make sure you are clear in your feedback.

Be specific:

Focus on what you've noticed people have done well, or what they could improve on. If improvement is required, make sure you let them know that it is linked to a specific issue.

Be real and be realistic:

Your authenticity is pivotal to making sure feedback is well received; so, avoid giving feedback unless you really believe it is necessary or deserved. Make sure you're able to give concrete and constructive feedback that is realistic and will help people achieve a goal.

Timely:

Feedback should be provided at the right time. If you wait too long to give feedback, it may seem random or ill considered. And praising every small action can appear overly ingratiating and superficial.

Leaders also need to develop an organisational culture that promotes good practice in relation to self-care. Showing appreciation also means ensuring those who have worked additional hours (for example, when moving a child to a foster placement or completing a Mental Health Act assessment) have time to recuperate and that nobody (yourself included) is working 'out of hours' too frequently. This means that you need to notice the extra hours worked and build in mechanisms to ensure a healthy work-life balance is maintained. KFP5 Wellbeing has guidance on maintaining a healthy work-life balance (this includes managing emails).

Encouraging mindful listening

Effective communication is essential to foster an organisational culture in which people feel valued and that their individual talents and skills are appreciated. It has been estimated that the average person remembers only around a quarter of what somebody has said directly after the conversation (Shafir, 2003). Mindful listening underpins effective communication. It helps people retain information by reducing the ‘noise’ of their own thoughts, so they can really hear what other people have to say. And because listening mindfully means listening without judgement, criticism or interruption, this also helps the speaker feel understood.

Box 2.2: Tips to help you listen more mindfully

Be fully present:

Focus on the person you’re listening to, without any disturbance. Simplify your surroundings; avoid multi-tasking and other distractions. Before you meet, take a few moments to clear your mind to make room for the other person’s point of view. You could practise a few relaxation exercises to help you ‘focus on the moment’ during the forthcoming conversation (e.g. try the breathing exercise suggested in KFP1 Secure Base).

Cultivate empathy:

We tend to see the world through the lens of our own experiences, beliefs and personality. So, try to understand the situation from the other person’s perspective. You don’t have to agree with them but validate their perspective by acknowledging their views.

Listen to your own cues:

Be aware of the thoughts, feelings and physical reactions that you experience during a conversation, and how they can divert your attention from the other person. Several things – e.g. our past experiences, our motives, our preconceptions, negative self-talk – can make us focus more on ourselves than who we’re talking to. Feeling impatient or frustrated (particularly if our ‘inner chimp’ makes an appearance – see KFP1 Secure Base) can make us interrupt or dominate the conversation. Thinking about what we’re going to say next can also prevent us listening carefully and attentively.

Consider doing a mindfulness course:

The Kinman et al (2019) research with social workers from different contexts found that mindfulness training can improve social workers’ listening skills and ability to determine what people are really saying. They also found that mindfulness had wide-ranging positive effects for wellbeing and job performance.

Using Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organisational change. Developed by Whitney and Cooperrider (2012), AI is a framework that helps implement positive systemic change from a position of respect and mutuality, enabling individuals and organisations to create a shared vision for where they want to be. AI differs from the more commonly used deficit approach (i.e. what is going wrong and what can be improved), as it offers a strengths-based, optimistic strategy that ‘appreciates’ what has gone well and envisions what could be developed in the future.

AI is a particularly appropriate method for fostering a sense of appreciation in organisations. Its flexibility will help enhance the other KFPs that underpin a resilient organisation. AI can also be beneficial for supervision.

The AI model involves a four-stage process:

1. What is currently going well?
2. ‘Dream’ about how things could be improved
3. Design a strategy for how these dreams could be realised
4. Consider ways of delivering the change

AI can be used at an individual, team or organisational level. Its premise is that individuals have experience and that helping them to express this provides a stimulus for change. AI also builds positive relationships within organisations and enables a shared understanding of members’ contributions. It can enhance feelings of appreciation by recognising people’s individual experience and skills and helping them to contribute towards shaping change.

Based on a resource developed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and NHS Education for Scotland (2016) (which can be found [here](#)), Box 2.3 outlines how organisations can use AI to inform organisational change. Moving away from a problem focus to one that acknowledges and builds on success is likely to be a useful approach for social work leaders, who are often tasked with implementing change initiatives. A constant change of direction that disregards what has worked well in the past is often unsettling and demotivating.

Box 2.3: Using Appreciative Inquiry to implement change

This approach to planning change involves engaging with people to consider how good work can be built upon. This may seem a simple exercise, but AI can be a powerful tool in helping people move from being 'stuck in a rut' and lacking motivation, to a position from which a new future can be imagined and then realised.

The approach involves working in pairs, at first, to discover strengths. These are then shared, and small groups begin to imagine and plan for the future of a service. The four key steps to using AI are outlined using the example below:

1. Discovery

What has been your best experience of social work practice? Think of a time when you felt:

- > Most engaged, alive and enthused by your work
- > That it worked well for people

Now think:

- > What made this possible?
- > What did 'good' look like?
- > What was important to its success?

2. Dream for the future

Imagine it's a year from now, and your team or service is working very well. It may have achieved recognition for its work – e.g. best team working, partnerships with families, or enablement-based practice with adults.

- > What are you doing differently that enabled this change?
- > What is it like to work in this team?
- > What does 'good' look like?

3. Strategising

To move from dreaming about the future to a more concrete strategy and plan, you should now consider the steps you need to take to achieve this goal. These need to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely).

- > What is going to make this possible?
- > What will you have to do differently to make this work?
- > Who do you need to help you to get there?
- > What else might you need to pay attention to?
- > What might be the signs that you are moving in the right direction?

4. Implementation

- > How are you going to implement these plans?
- > How are you going to communicate your plans to others?
- > How will you know if you are continuing to move in the right direction – how will you measure success?

The principles of AI can also be used as a framework to guide a more narrative approach. The Tree of Life exercise (Box 2.4) is a playful and creative tool that can be used in teams to enable people to communicate what they appreciate about their work, their colleagues (in their own team and beyond) and their organisation. Feedback from Change Project participants suggests it can be an effective way to help people identify their contribution to the wider vision and mission of their organisation as a whole, and to refocus on what drives them to continue in practice. Many of our participants have subsequently used the exercise in their own organisation with considerable success. More resources on AI can be found [here](#).

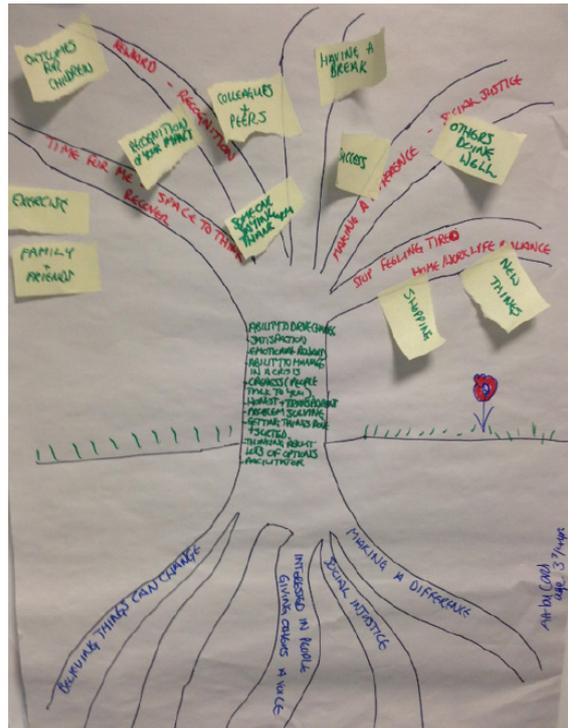
Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

The Tree of Life is a narrative therapy tool, which was designed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough (for more information see [here](#)) for young people with HIV. It aimed to encourage the children to believe in their own abilities, acknowledge their dreams and stand in a safer place from where they could talk about their difficult experiences in ways that were not re-traumatising, thereby enabling them to feel stronger in themselves.

The Tree of Life has since been adapted to various settings to help individuals and organisations recognise their strengths and create co-produced knowledge about how to respond to new opportunities. Here it is used as an exercise to help social workers reconnect with their professional identity and appreciate their values, strengths and resilience. It also enables practitioners to explore how strengths can be used to overcome potential difficulties or storms in their career.

The exercise may appear simple, but it can be a powerful tool. It can take several hours to do well or can be simplified if you only have a shorter period of time. Figure 2.1 shows examples of completed trees.

Figure 2.1: Examples of completed trees using the Tree of Life exercise



Box 2.4: The Tree of Life exercise

Materials needed:

All you need are brightly coloured felt-tip pens, Post-it notes and flipchart paper. Experience suggests that any initial reluctance to 'play' is usually quickly overcome, and senior leaders will soon engage in creating amazing and meaningful visual images.

Instructions:

Explain that participants should draw a tree – step-by-step – to represent themselves, their team or their organisation. This can be done individually, in pairs or in a group. Tell participants they can be as elaborate as they want. Let them know that they can share as little, or as much, as they want to in their drawing (but the content should be anonymised when sharing later). They should begin by drawing the roots of the tree, then the ground, the trunk, the branches and finally the leaves. Below are some questions to guide their drawing (these should be adapted for group work). Tell them when to move from section to section (allow about 10 minutes for each section).

Aim:

The aim of the exercise is to help people see that understanding individual and collective strengths can enable us to build a sense of individual, team and organisational resilience. This will also foster a sense of appreciation for our individual and collective skills, values and professional hopes and dreams.

Roots

- > What shaped your life and your decision to be a social worker?
- > What brought you into the work; who influenced and inspired you?
- > What aspects of your past influenced who you are today; what keeps you grounded?

Trunk

- > What are your skills and values?
- > What drives you in what you do?
- > What are the 'non-negotiable' codes that guide the way you act?
- > What values have you learned, or what do you appreciate from those who have influenced you?

Branches

- > What are your hopes, dreams and wishes for your career, your service and your organisation?
- > Throughout your time as a social worker, what have you contributed that has made you proud?
- > What do you want to achieve for your organisation?

Leaves

- > What brings you energy in your work?
- > Who and what helps keep you going when things get tough?
- > What brings you energy outside of work and are good things to focus on?

Feedback

Once people have done this individually or in their groups, ask them to share and discuss with the wider group. Facilitators have found that asking people to put their trees on the walls around the room is particularly effective. Describe this as a forest; remind people that an individual tree is more susceptible to storms, while a forest is far more resilient.

Storms and challenges ahead

Invite the group to think about the challenges or storms that are on the horizon:

- > What storms and hazards do you face?
- > What is the likely impact of the storms?
- > Are there ways of weathering the storms that will allow you to hold onto your values?
- > How can we use our collective strengths, visualised by the trees, to weather the storms?

One-page profiles

KFP1 Secure Base emphasises the importance of workers feeling appreciated as individuals if they are to feel they truly belong in an organisation. But managers often find learning more about individual practitioners a challenge. Some people prefer to keep their personal lives private, while others are all too happy to share such details. One-page profiles are often used by health and social care professionals to provide person-centred care, but they can also be a useful team-building exercise and a way of getting to know people. These brief profiles allow people to understand each other better and to appreciate individuals' skills and talents. One-page profiles can also be used to gain insight into people's preferences, likes and dislikes – from simple issues to more complex ones.

One-page profiles offer several potential benefits:

Profiles can help us see people as rounded individuals, rather than just as someone who does a job. So, we can recognise and celebrate each other's unique gifts and talents.

Knowing people's preferences means we're better able to support each other, so teams will work more effectively.

Understanding potential barriers in communication can improve relationships between individuals and teams.

Profiles enable better matching of colleagues to mentors in order to support the development of their skills and wellbeing.

People can feel better understood; this in turn makes them feel they belong in that environment.

Figure 2.2 shows an example of what a one-page profile could look like, although they can be customised for your own purposes. Profile templates that are co-produced with practitioners are likely to be particularly effective. These could be completed by pairs of colleagues, in supervision, in team meetings or in longer workshops.

More information on one-page profiles can be found [here](#).

Figure 2.2: Example of a one-page profile

My one page profile

My name

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.....

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My photo

What people appreciate about me

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How to support me

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.....

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What is important to me

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Sparkling Moments

As outlined in KFP1 Secure Base, a psychologically safe organisation encourages practitioners to discuss their errors openly in order to consider how practice can be improved. But it's also crucial to learn from what we do well and to celebrate success. Sharing success stories not only helps others solve similar problems, it can also inspire them to excel. And showing respect for another person's achievement will boost their self-esteem and engagement and strengthen working relationships.

Nonetheless, while people are often open about their perceived failures, they can be reluctant to disclose their achievements for fear of appearing arrogant or boastful. Social workers are rarely encouraged to celebrate their successes and can find it difficult to share their accomplishments. This can lead practitioners to focus on things that have gone wrong, rather than those that have gone well. This is not only demotivating, but means we are also restricted to learning from errors rather than success.

'Sparkling' (or 'peak') moments is a technique that helps social workers share their success stories.

Sparkling Moments

Sparkling Moments are times when you felt your best self. For example, you may have achieved something at work that you thought made things better for someone and enabled progress. Or you may have conquered a fear of public speaking by presenting in court. Identifying Sparkling Moments is a very effective way to recognise the individual skills and strengths that underpin such achievements, and how these can be used to improve outcomes in the future.

The Sparkling Moments technique is described in Box 2.5.

Box 2.5: Celebrating success:

The Sparkling Moments technique

One person (A) asks the other person (B) a series of questions:

- > What did you do when you were you 'at your best'?
- > What skills, knowledge and attributes did you use?
- > How did you feel?

Person A listens carefully and notes down the skills, knowledge and attributes that Person B describes, as well as any key themes or behaviours that emerge from their description.

When Person B has finished speaking, Person A should provide feedback on the specific skills and attributes that have emerged. They then ask Person B:

- > What have you learnt about your key skills?
- > How could you use these to manage a problem you are experiencing right now?
- > What steps could you take to maximise the opportunity for more experiences like this?

Participants then swap roles, and Person B asks the same questions of Person A.

Grant and Kinman have used the Sparkling Moments technique extensively in training sessions to identify times when practitioners have shone, and found it is particularly effective in peer coaching (see KFP 3 Learning Organisation). It can also be useful in team meetings and during supervision to encourage people to talk about their strengths, and how these can be utilised to face new challenges. Quick Win 2.2 highlights another strategy that can be used to celebrate success. KFP3 Learning Organisation considers how Serious Success Reviews can be used to recognise achievement at an organisational level.

Quick win 2.2: Celebrating success in team meetings

Sharing personal success stories in team meetings is a good way of celebrating achievements and embedding the learning. To do this successfully, it might help to ask social workers to send details of their achievements to team leaders by email, as people are often reluctant to speak up in public – especially about their success. Asking team members to record examples of inspirational practice that they have observed in their teams can also motivate others and encourage learning and personal growth. In time, celebrating achievements should become embedded in the team culture. It's also worth thinking about celebrating non-work achievements; this can also help people feel valued.

Being grateful

Practising gratitude means appreciating the good things that others bring to our everyday lives. Gratitude has a positive impact on wellbeing – it has been found to reduce stress, enhance physical and mental health, improve sleep and increase vitality (Wood et al., 2010). Grateful people also tend to be more empathic, optimistic and emotionally resilient, and are better able to meet personal and professional goals. Gratitude is also beneficial at the collective level; organisational cultures that are built on a foundation of gratitude are not only more satisfying to work in, but more efficient and creative (Fehr et al., 2017; Waters, 2012).

As emphasised throughout this workbook, it's crucial for managers to express their appreciation for what practitioners do and to make them feel valued. A culture of gratitude will strengthen relationships between individuals and enhance trust and respect. However, it is important to adapt your style of recognition; some practitioners may find a public display of gratitude embarrassing and prefer to be acknowledged privately. Expressions of gratitude from colleagues are especially effective, so consider introducing recognition programmes that allow people to recognise peers.

Evidence suggests that keeping a gratitude journal (where people write down the positive things in their lives), or focusing on three things to be grateful for before going to sleep, can have wide-ranging benefits. Learning about employees as individuals (for example, through an open-door policy and walking the floor) can build a gratitude-rich culture. Quick Win 2.3 outlines a number of ways for managers to show their gratitude.

Quick win 2.3: Ways to show your gratitude

Here are some ideas that can encourage a culture of gratitude to develop. It is important to recognise that what is rewarding for one team may not necessarily be so for another, so teams should be encouraged to set up their own 'menu' of ways to express their gratitude and celebrate achievements. Ideas that are 'imposed' can seem inauthentic or patronising.

- > There is evidence that a simple 'thank you' from a line manager can boost feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy among practitioners. A hand-written note of thanks or a card, can further demonstrate genuine regard and make a big difference. Always make sure you're clear what you are saying thank you for.
- > A box of chocolates (or even a home-made trophy) for somebody who needs cheering up, or has done something well, can be effective.
- > One option is to use a 'Jar of Joys' – as suggested by Catherine Watkins (2017) – where team members write down their small successes on slips of paper and put them into a jar. Eventually the good work that people do will fill up the jar.
- > Celebrate birthdays, but make sure not to set a precedent that may cause discomfort for some people. For examples, buying cakes for the whole team can be expensive and can be excluding.
- > End the week with a team gathering or celebration (or a Fika session – see KFP1 Secure Base). But make sure these events are inclusive; so, avoid visits to the pub or 'get togethers' at the end of the day, which may exclude people with caring responsibilities.

SWORD workbook:

KFP 3 Learning Organisation



Introduction

To be resilient, an organisation needs to ensure that learning and development is at the heart of all that they do. Developing a learning organisation is the third Key Foundational Principle. A learning organisation is one in which:

Beliefs, goals and objectives are shared and underpinned by social work values.

Individuals, teams and the organisation itself reflect and learn from experience.

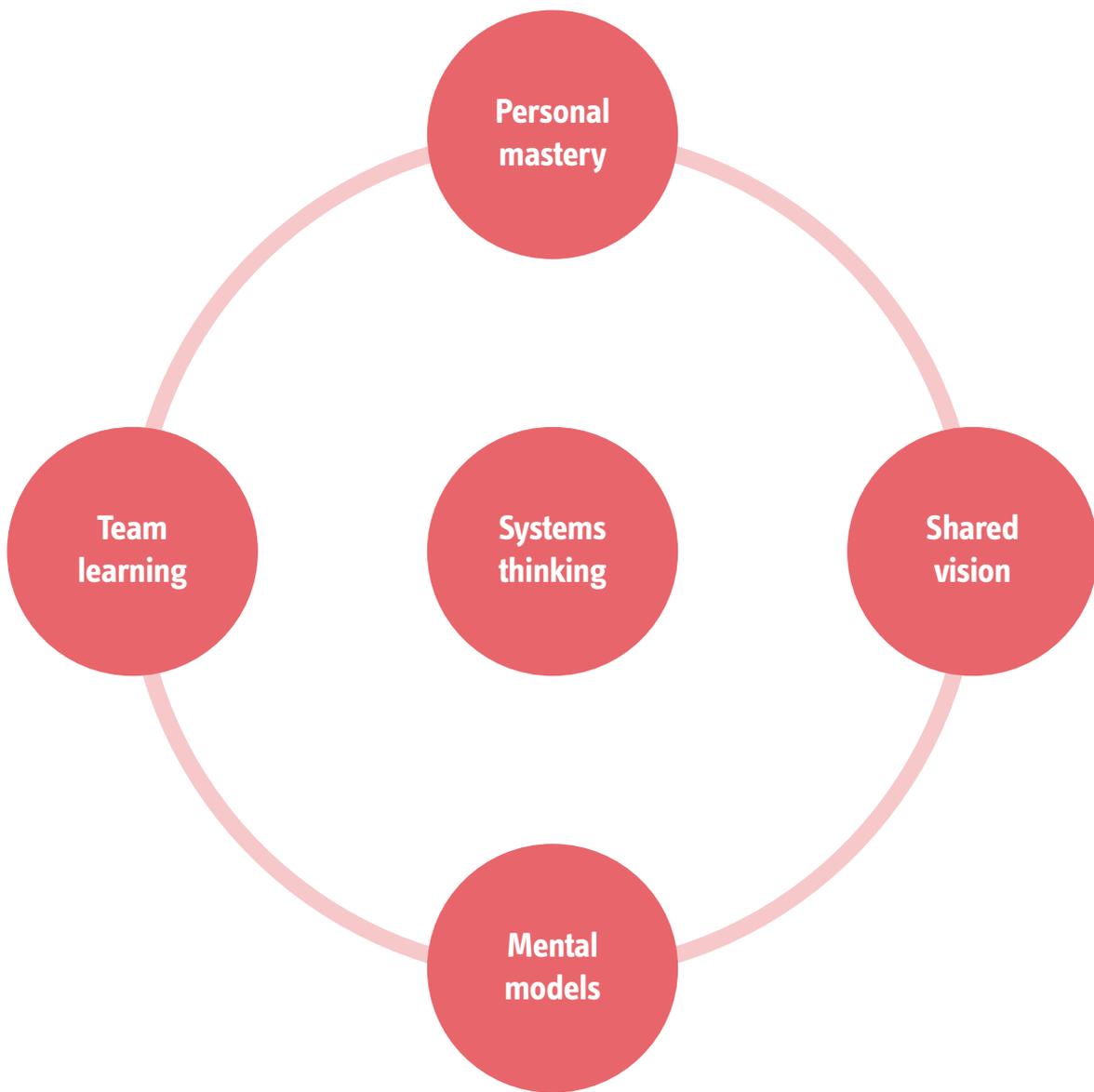
An evidence-informed approach to improving practice and managing change, with input from practitioners, is actively encouraged.

Problems provide learning opportunities rather than individual blame or scapegoating.

Learning from experience and adapting to new challenges and opportunities underpin healthy and successful organisations. A learning organisation has been defined as:

... a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole (reality) together. (Senge, 1992)

Figure 3.1: Dimensions of a learning organisation



According to Senge, learning organisations have five inter-related dimensions (see Figure 3.1).

1. Systems thinking: seeing the forest as well as the trees

People see the 'big picture' rather than focus on individual components. Awareness of the complexity of the organisation allows them to identify patterns of cause and effect. People are then able to work towards long-term solutions to problems by addressing the underlying causes, rather than implementing superficial quick fixes.

2. Personal mastery: an orientation towards personal growth and learning

People have a strong sense of purpose that underpins their personal goals. They work with change not against it. They feel connected to others rather than alienated from them and are engaged in a continual cycle of reflection and learning.

3. Mental models: revealing our hidden assumptions and beliefs

People are reflective, and their thinking and mental models are not fixed or embedded in entrenched beliefs and assumptions. Rather, people are sufficiently flexible to adapt their mental model through current experience, learning and reflection.

4. Building a shared vision: being bound together by a common aspiration

People have a common vision that underpins the organisation's focus and energy for learning. Building a shared vision and ensuring that their own vision is aligned with that of others, is a key aspect of leaders' work.

5. Team learning: working in synchrony

Although team learning stems from personal mastery, people use their individual talents, knowledge and experiences to work collaboratively towards a common goal. Knowledge is shared, communication is open and honest, and there is a free flow of ideas, even when some of those may be in conflict.

Although the five dimensions offer guidance on the features of a learning organisation, it is important to remember that one size doesn't fit all. The optimum environment for reflection and learning is one that is precisely aligned to the organisation's goals, but sufficiently flexible to accommodate change. The Social Care Institute for Excellence has produced a self-assessment resource pack for organisations to assess the extent to which they are a learning organisation (SCIE, 2008); this can be accessed [here](#).

Reflective leadership: making time to talk and space to listen

Reflective learning is a fundamental to how any learning organisation operates but is particularly important in social work. Although managers may believe they provide reflective opportunities for practitioners, all too often supervision is driven by task management and an agenda focused on compliance. There is evidence that the supervision social workers receive is of variable quality and does not consistently or adequately meet their emotional needs (Wilkins et al., 2017). Truly reflective organisations recognise the importance of critical thinking, learning and growth, and provide opportunities for practitioners to unpack the complex emotional demands of social work practice and learning.

Social workers often attempt to cope with anxiety engendered by complex practice by focusing on tasks and targets, rather than exploring also their emotional reactions. So it is vital to create 'reflective spaces' where practitioners are able to critically explore their practice. Failing to acknowledge the emotional demands placed upon them can have a profound impact on social workers: it can impair decision-making abilities, inhibit motivation and job satisfaction, increase the risk of compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion, and contribute to negative outcomes for children, families and adults (Grant & Kinman, 2014). A lack of opportunity for reflection can also encourage a false sense of security. For example, without an opportunity to reflect, a worker may be tempted to send a flurry of emails highlighting the tasks they have accomplished, rather than offer a more balanced and comprehensive assessment of achievement that also addresses any underlying concerns that may require further attention.

Reflective learning must be deeply embedded in social work organisations. And managers should ensure it is happening in practice, not just in theory. Opportunities for reflective learning will be maximised in a culture where the value of learning is emphasised, blaming and scapegoating are avoided, and there is an appreciation that mistakes, near misses and poor or limited outcomes are opportunities for learning.

Modelling reflective leadership is crucial for successful organisations. Leaders and managers need to model reflective practice personally, as well as encourage it through supervision. Only reflective leaders can foster a learning organisation, as they will draw upon the collective expertise of the teams around them to make decisions. Reflective leaders:

Are flexible

Regularly step out of their routine and familiar environment to think, explore and learn

Question others for alternative points of view, and make sure they consider a wide range of options before taking action (see the section on 'walking the floor' in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation).

You may be thinking: 'This describes me very well; I am just like that.' But we can easily become defensive or reluctant to consider different perspectives. This can lead us to become stuck or fixated on a decision or pattern of behaviour. The iceberg model (Box 3.1) is a useful analogy to help you think through why you have come to a particular decision, and to check out what might 'lie beneath'.

Box 3.1: 'Using the iceberg model to support reflective leadership and practice'

Do you ever wonder why you (or others) have reached a standpoint on a key issue and become stuck? When colleagues are intransigent, do you see them as stubborn? Or do you seek to understand the reasons that might underpin their behaviour? The iceberg model can help an individual or group detect the 'mental models' and patterns of behaviour that underlie a particular interpretation of an event.

Drawing on Freud's theory of the human mind, the model recognises that the larger part of what we believe is hidden under the surface, yet that is what helps us understand ourselves and those we work with more effectively. Just like an iceberg, what we see on the surface is only an event or behaviour. But identifying what lies beneath can only be accomplished when practitioners feel safe, and leaders have the emotional literacy to engage in honest, reflective conversations.



Research in Practice has an excellent range of resources, and a summary of research evidence, to support critical thinking and reflective analysis in both group and one-to-one supervision sessions. These will help practitioners explore beneath the surface and help develop organisational, team and individual resilience. The tools are available [here](#).

Reflection is often seen as an individual activity, but Intervision (Staempfli & Fairtlough, 2019) is a peer-led method of reflection in which participants follow a specified process to discuss professional practice issues. This technique, which encourages a learning organisational culture, is rarely found in the UK but widely used by social workers in other European countries. There is some evidence that Intervision is supportive, can enhance professional development and can also offer opportunities for emotional containment (Staempfli & Fairtlough, 2019). For more information on Intervision see [here](#).

As a leader, you must also ensure that you have reflective space for yourself. Leadership can be isolating, so it is crucial to create opportunities for support. Quick Win 3.1 describes how creating a Personal Board of Directors can enable you, as a leader, to get the support you need to create an environment for personal reflection and learning.

Quick Win 3.1: Creating your own Personal Board of Directors (PBOD)

A successful organisation will have an effective Board of Directors, usually comprising people from different walks of life with diverse backgrounds and a range of skills and talents. They offer committed and ongoing support for the organisation, but also a critique and different perspectives on problems.

Being a leader in a social work organisation can be lonely. Leaders may have few people around who can provide support. So, creating your own *Personal* Board of Directors (PBOD) can help – a group of individuals (from in and outside the workplace) who can act as a sounding board and help you when you face a dilemma, work issue, when you need affirmation, or to challenge you if you are stuck.

Your PBOD will probably need to include people with one or more of the following qualities:

Someone who is a major support for you personally and professionally	Someone who can help you be creative	Someone who's good at coming up with practical solutions	Someone who has years of experience and accumulated wisdom
Someone you find it easy to accept criticism from	Someone who knows you better than you know yourself	Someone with directly relevant skills and expertise – i.e. they've done a job very similar to yours	Someone who is a role model for you.

Remember this is an honorary, unpaid role! So, you may need to find ways of reciprocating or showing thanks to the members of your PBOD.

Serious Success Reviews: learning from what goes well, not only from mistakes

It is widely acknowledged that learning from any errors in practice is crucial to enhancing practice and implementing change. While it is natural to wish to hide any embarrassment or anxiety associated with failure, mistakes can be a stepping-stone to better things. Serious Case Reviews, Safeguarding Adults Reviews, independent investigations into homicides (mental health homicide reviews) and inquests following suicide are key mechanisms for learning how to improve health and social work practice, both individually and collectively. Reflective leadership is crucial to this process. Leaders and managers must recognise that mistakes are both inevitable and learning opportunities, and so not react defensively or by attributing blame.

Social work can become overly focused on what has gone wrong rather than things that go right, however, developing a learning culture is not just about learning from errors. Learning from what went well also enables better outcomes for children, families and adults. Organisations are more effective when they can recognise, learn from and build on good practice – see Box 3.2. As a profession, we need to identify what ‘good looks like’ so it can guide us when things go awry.

Box 3.2: Serious Case Reviews: Using positive outcomes to reflect on practice

Recent research by Forrester and colleagues (2019) explored the relationship between key social work skills and outcomes in child and family work. They asked social workers how they recognise what ‘good’ looks like. Responses highlighted the importance of the use of good authority and relationship-building skills, as well as having the space to reflect on how they might be enhanced.

Similarly, social work with adults is increasingly moving toward a strengths-based approach, which has a focus on relationship-building. Practitioners work in a person-centred way to engage people with care and support needs in identifying their personal skills and assets, which can inform the way in which care is accessed. Good practice is collaborative and facilitates maximum independence for people receiving care and support (Department of Health, 2017).

Bexley Council have introduced the idea of Serious Success Reviews to identify the features of good social work practice (as well as what works less well) – see Stevenson (2017) available [here](#). This approach is likely to be more effective in ensuring fitness for purpose than simply ‘tweaking’ an existing process or procedure. Social work leaders and managers could use Appreciative Inquiry (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation) and other consultative approaches to explore what constitutes good practice in their organisation.

Schwartz Rounds

Schwartz Rounds are named after Kenneth Schwartz, an American attorney who recognised the importance of compassionate care and acts of kindness while undergoing treatment for cancer. His experiences inspired the introduction of Schwartz Rounds, which provide an opportunity for healthcare practitioners to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings on issues arising from patients' individual cases. This not only helps practitioners to improve the quality of their personal connections, with both patients and colleagues, but also to gain more insight into their own responses and feelings.

Schwartz Rounds now run in many acute and community-based healthcare organisations and in several countries. For practitioners, identified benefits include improved personal relationships, wellbeing and job performance (Robert et al., 2017). Participation has also been found to aid reflection, compassion and collaboration, and to increase trust, reduce isolation and enhance a sense of shared purpose (Reed et al., 2015).

Cullen (2016) suggests Schwartz Rounds may be effective for social workers, as social workers also provide care and protection, and are themselves at risk of distress and burnout. Schwartz Rounds can help build a learning organisation by providing a structured forum for multi-disciplinary groups to discuss the emotional and social aspects of their work. At the time of writing (November, 2019) a project is underway to evaluate the effects of Schwartz Rounds on the mental health of practitioners working in six local authority children's social care services in England; for more information, see [here](#). More information on Schwartz Rounds, including resources, can be found on The Point of Care Foundation's website [here](#).

Learning from critical incidents and managing organisational shock

Critical incidents are not uncommon in social work organisations, and they can have serious implications for social workers' wellbeing and practice. However good we are at managing and learning from critical incidents, a crisis (such as criticism or blame after a child's death or the exposure of abuse of an adult with a learning disability) can sometimes send shock waves through an organisation. This can lead to a 'perfect storm': a combination of events or circumstances that has the potential to bring adversity to an organisation.

If not managed effectively, such situations can cause widespread damage – to individuals, the organisation and the profession. An organisation's initial response to shock may be paralysis or panic, neither of which will help people on the ground continue to work effectively. According to Mellor:

Staff at all levels can feel bewildered and overwhelmed by a genuine sense of loss, fear of change and potential loss of job security. When a shock event happens, leaders need to be able to access emergency support that provides calm and expert advice on dealing with the practicalities and emotional impact of the immediate situation and those most closely affected by it. (Mellor, undated)

Moreover, statutory and legal processes and investigations may continue for some time, possibly years. So organisational shocks may continue and it is important to acknowledge that the impact will vary. For some, the stress may be long lasting. Leaders should be aware that, like any personally upsetting event, an organisation's reaction to a critical incident may be one, or all, of the following:

Shock

Fear

Anger

Shame and guilt

A sense of injustice.

Initially, communicating the news clearly, internally and externally, and making space for managing the crisis are crucial. Mellor identifies three stages for managing a major event (more information can be found [here](#)):

Response

Resolution, and

Recovery.

Organisations that ignore the impact of a difficult or traumatic event, and try to carry on as normal, are often working on an adrenaline-fuelled stress response, instead of considering the need for an alternative approach or re-grouping. Under the *Health and Social Care Act 2008*, organisations have a duty of candour to provide specific information when things go wrong. There should be mechanisms in place to help them recognise what has happened, how to respond, how to resolve the issue, and how to ensure there is space for recovery. Treisman (2018) provides useful guidance and practical tips on helping organisations become more ‘culturally, adversity and trauma-informed’, and warns against the risks of simplistic and tokenistic initiatives to promote trauma-informed and responsive practice; for more information see [here](#).

Emotionally literate leadership is crucial for a considered and effective response to a shock or crisis, which means leaders must be able to recognise and manage their own emotions. There are frameworks that can help them process and articulate their feelings. For example, the following questions (derived from Linsley & Horner, 2012) are a useful way to scaffold thoughts and feelings.

- Here is what we are facing (assessment)
- Here is what I think we should do (option appraisal)
- Here is why (evidence base).

Box 3.3 provides a framework that can be used when analysing critical incidents in general in order to enable learning and reflection.

Box 3.3: Critical incident technique

Critical incident analysis is a structured form of learning and reflection. It involves:

Describing a difficult or serious incident that was particularly challenging
Suggesting an explanation, given the immediate context

Asking questions to find different explanations for the dilemma, exploring theories, values, assumptions and defensive mechanisms and biases

Considering the implication for future practice.

(adapted from Tripp, 2011)

Peer coaching

Setting up a peer coaching system is an effective and low-cost way to help organisations move from a problem-focused culture to a strengths-based and solution-focused orientation. Peer coaching is a relationship between two people of equal status that facilitates the achievement of specific goals. It can also be a source of professional development more generally and used to share ideas, develop skills and improve support.

Peer coaching aims to:

Provide a structured approach to helping

Enable someone to generate specific, measurable goals that are realistic but stretching

Help them identify how they are going to achieve those goals

Provide objective, non-evaluative feedback about how they are progressing

Offer support and encouragement when they need it.

Box 3.4: How does peer coaching work?

Peer coaching is a relationship in which colleagues pair up as coach and 'coachee' (i.e. the person being coached). This is often, not always, reciprocal.

It draws on intrinsic values and beliefs.

It uses the GROW model as a framework:

- > The coachee identifies the GOAL they wish to achieve
- > The coach helps them reflect on how REALISTIC the goal is, based on their commitments and the time and resources available
- > Both parties work together to help the coachee generate a range of creative OPTIONS for meeting the goal
- > The coachee develops the WILL to meet the goal by making an action plan and a commitment to making changes or taking action.

It utilises SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely).

It provides non-evaluative, specific feedback based on an objective observation, or reflecting back what is heard. This gives the coachee the encouragement to move forward.

Box 3.4: How does peer coaching work? (continued)

There are some practical considerations that must be considered when setting up a peer coaching relationship:

Trust between partners is essential, because the process requires self-disclosure.

Partners should be well matched in their working styles and expectations.

Peer coaching can be done face-to-face, via Skype or on the phone. But regular and formal contact (by any of these methods) is essential to ensure the coachee maintains focus on their goals.

Venting is important, but the coach should help the coachee move beyond this to enable them to provide solutions.

The coach needs to keep the conversation on track. It is easy to drift.

Active listening and open/probing questions are required.

The benefits of solution-focused coaching include enhanced goal-setting and stress management skills, as well as improved wellbeing and job satisfaction (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2006). There is also evidence that peer coaching protects mental health during times of high stress (Short et al., 2010). And being a peer coach can help develop key interpersonal skills such as active listening, building rapport, trust, empathy, reflection and awareness raising, which can be used to enhance social workers' relationships with children and families. Peer coaching techniques can also be used effectively in supervision.

Guidance on how to move from focusing only on problems to focusing on solutions is set out in Box 3.5. This technique can also be used as an exercise, working in pairs.

Box 3.5: Moving from a problem-focus to a solution-focus in a peer coaching session

Being problem-focused Use the questions below to talk, for about five minutes, about a recent situation that has caused you difficulty. Person A describes the situation. Person B directs the conversation with the following questions.	Being solution-focused Use the questions below and talk, for about five minutes, about a problem that you have. When using a solution-focused approach, it is essential to help the coachee 'reframe' their 'intractable' problem into a more manageable one. Use the following questions:
'So, what is the problem?'	'So, how would you like the situation to be?'
'What happened?'	'What will it take to get what you want?'
'What do you think is the cause of the problem?'	'What resources do you need?'
'Who is to blame?'	'What resources do you already have?'
'What have you tried in order to fix it?'	'What two small steps could you take to help fix the situation?'
'Why is this still a problem?'	
'How can you stop this happening again?'	'How far have you come already? Are there times when the solution is present, at least partly?'

Sparkling Moments (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation) can also be used in a peer coaching situation. They can help people move to a generally more positive mindset and identify external and personal resources (such as support and skills) that can help reach a solution.

It is important to remember, however, that while peer coaching can be effective, it is not counselling. Coaches must remain within their competencies. If a coachee has deep-seated personal problems, professional help will be required. For more information on setting up a peer coaching initiative in social work organisations, see Baker and Jones (2014).

Working with strengths

When trying to resolve problems, we often focus on our weaknesses and think of ways to address them. This can be stressful and draining. A learning organisation will be aware of its practitioners' strengths and how they can best be used. As social workers, we know that working with strengths identifies the things people do well, that energise them and that they find enjoyable. However, we don't always apply these ideas to ourselves, focusing instead on areas for improvement rather than the assets we have at our disposal.

Strengths are often confused with skills that people can perform well, but skills are learned behaviours that may become ingrained and automatic over time. It's easy to mistake skills for strengths because people are good at them, but skills do not energise or engage people in the same way. Strengths are not static; a person can build, grow, adapt and develop their strengths to help themselves in different situations. People who use their strengths are more likely to achieve their goals, experience less stress, and have more self-esteem and confidence; they also tend to be happier and more resilient.

Being aware of strengths

When developing organisational resilience, it is crucial to work with strengths. As role models, leaders should be aware of their own strengths and those of other people. Three Quick Wins (3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) provide some techniques to raise awareness of personal strengths in the self and in others. As well as role-modelling 'strengths-spotting', share these exercises widely in your organisation. They can be used in various settings such as meetings and supervision.

Quick Win 3.2: Strengths-spotting

Spotting your personal strengths

Ask yourself the following questions:

Deep roots: What do you still do now that you did as a child?

Motivation: What activities do you do just because you love doing them?

Voice: When does the tone of your voice indicate enjoyment and energy?

Energy: What activities do you do that give you energy?

Rapid learning: What things do you pick up effortlessly and quickly?

Authenticity: When do you feel like 'the real me'?

Attention: Where do you naturally pay attention?

Ease: What activities come easily to you?

Spotting the strengths of others

Build a language of character strengths:

Develop an understanding of the different personal strengths to improve your ability to spot them in others; see the list of character strengths here.

Develop your observation and listening skills:

Enhance your awareness of what strengths look like in action, based on: a) verbal cues (listen for a more assertive voice, improved vocabulary and clarity of speech, and use of specific strengths words); and b) nonverbal cues (look for improved posture and eye contact, smiling and laughing, greater use of gestures signifying excitement and passion).

Label and explain character-strength behaviours:

Show people that you notice when they show their strengths by: a) identifying the specific strength demonstrated; b) explaining how you spotted it; c) showing that this strength is appreciated.

Make strengths-spotting a habit: Build your skills by practicing observing character strengths in people in different situations.

Quick win 3.3: Spotting character strengths in meetings

Go into meetings wearing your ‘strengths goggles’: i.e. a mindset that identifies strengths as they happen. After you spot strengths in people, point out the strength that you observed, tell them the reason for your observation and express your appreciation.

Quick win 3.4: Using character strengths to improve relationships

Spotting character strengths can help us improve relationships with people who we find challenging. Focusing on things that irritate us about others can often blind us to noticing their strong points. Looking for the strengths in other people enhances feelings of empathy where we can respect diversity and value and appreciate their talents.

Increasing flexibility: doing things differently

Flexibility is an important characteristic of learning organisations and those who lead them. Psychological flexibility means adapting successfully to changing situational demands; it can help people adapt their mental resources and behaviours in response to change. People who are flexible are better able to balance competing needs and life domains, while remaining committed to their goals and values. Grant and Kinman have found that social workers who are more flexible tend to be more resilient; this in turn protects them from work-related stress and burnout. Flexibility also enables people to think about problems and tasks in more creative ways. Our habits can undermine our ability to meet new challenges; changing unproductive behaviours can help us feel less stressed, happier and more in control (Fletcher & Pine, 2012).

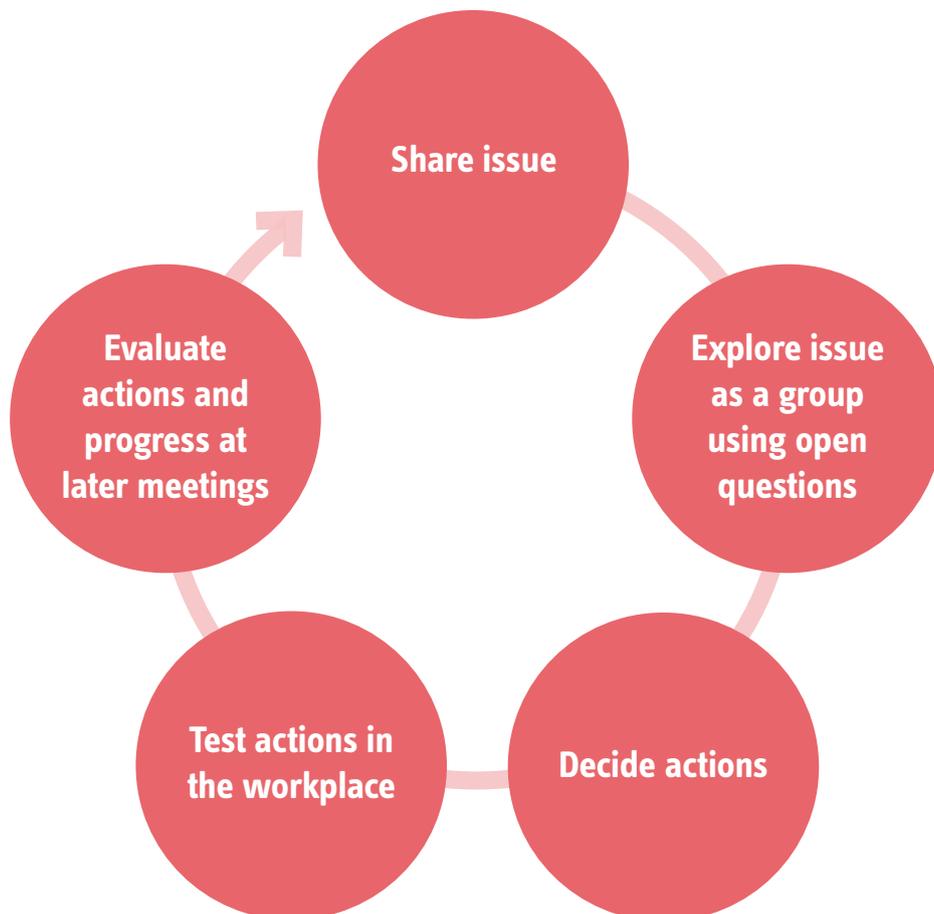
Although we each have a toolkit of useful behaviours, people tend to over-use the same tools, regardless of whether they are appropriate for the situation. Small actions can break habits and lead to changes in behaviour; maintaining these changes can give you the confidence to take on new challenges. Changing something about your work routine and reflecting on the outcomes can be effective. For example, eat your lunch somewhere different and see if your mind is clearer. Keeping a list of things that you have accomplished throughout the day (and encouraging those you manage to do so also) can be particularly helpful in making lasting change. KFP4 Mission and Vision offers some guidance on making ‘I did’ lists and how these (and other techniques) can be used to improve your productivity.

Using Action Learning Sets for group learning

Action learning is an approach to the development of people in organisations which takes the task as the vehicle for learning. It is based on the premise that there is no learning without action and no sober and deliberate action without learning. (Pedler, 1991)

Action Learning Sets are opportunities for workers, managers and leaders to meet regularly to explore solutions to problems and decide on the action they wish to take. They are particularly useful for helping participants consider complex problems where there is no simple answer. If structured properly (see Boxes 3.6 and 3.7), an Action Learning Set will promote curiosity, inquiry, reflection and – ultimately – learning, which can be applied to action planning (as outlined in Figure 3.2; this will be familiar as it draws on the reflective learning cycle).

Figure 3.2: The action learning cycle



Box 3.6: An Action Learning Set in action

An Action Learning Set usually comprises between six and eight participants who are committed to meeting on a regular basis to learn from each other in a safe reflective space. The more diverse the participants are, in terms of their background and experience, the better.

Participants take it in turns to be the presenter. This involves describing a situation or problem they face (around 5 minutes).

A period of open reflective questioning follows (around 5-10 minutes) in which the presenter answers openly, honestly and reflectively; no advice is given at this stage.

The group can then spend some time discussing the problem, as they see it, with the presenter merely listening – as if they were a ‘fly on the wall’ (around 5-10 minutes).

The penultimate stage is where the presenter reflects on the insights gained and the ideas for implementation that have been generated (around 10 minutes).

For the final stage, the whole group discusses the learning gained and helps the presenter to action plan, if that is requested (around 5-10 minutes). Actions are then tried out in the workplace and the group discusses the learning gained next time they meet, with the process repeated.

Box 3.7: Effective questions for action learning

Using reflective open questions is crucial to running a successful Action Learning Set. Here are some examples of questions that can encourage learning.

Questions to identify the issue and the desired outcome

- > What are you hoping to achieve?
- > What is the difference between how you see things now, and how you would like them to be in future?
- > Who might help you accomplish change?
- > What obstacles do you anticipate?

Questions to explore below the surface

- > What happened? Can you provide an example?
- > How did you feel about that?
- > What assumptions might you be making?
- > What do you think might happen in future?
- > How might this decision affect others?

Questions to encourage learning

- > What opportunities are there in the situation?
- > What would success look like?
- > What metaphor could you use to describe the situation?
- > What have you tried in the past? Why did/didn't it work?
- > Who could you approach for advice and support?

Questions to explore options

- > What if ...?
- > What do you think about ...?
- > How do you feel about ...?
- > What would happen if you did nothing?

Questions to identify next steps

- > How do you plan to move this forward?
- > Where could you get more information?
- > What actions are you going to take before the next meeting?
- > How can we help you make progress?

Further questions can be found [here](#).

SWORD workbook:

KFP 4 Mission and Vision



Introduction

A resilient organisation knows the direction that it is travelling in. Its mission and vision are clearly defined and communicated to the workforce, engendering a sense of collective ownership and belonging. A mission defines an organisation's aims and objectives and how it approaches them, while a vision sets out the organisation's desired future. Co-producing and communicating a clear mission and vision is the fourth Key Foundational Principle; this is where:

Leaders are committed to a clear mission and vision and use their communication skills to consult with and motivate others.

Leaders are optimistic but realistic and focus on continuous improvement, inspiring practitioners to identify what 'good' looks like and how this can be achieved.

Change is managed sensitively and effectively, and time for consolidation and stability is prioritised.

Leaders of social work organisations should be able to articulate what their organisation hopes to achieve, and why. The mission may seem obvious, but everyday 'busyness' means a sense of purpose can easily become lost or overlooked.

A clear mission helps employees understand how their individual contributions fit into the organisation's objectives; a clear vision articulates the long-term goals and aspirations. A well-defined mission and vision will inspire and motivate workers and enable managers to feel confident that their planned strategies and actions align with the organisation's goals. A resilient organisation should also be able to articulate its aspirations for the future in terms of the people's lives it touches: for example, its hopes for young people in care, how it plans to support older people, or how it aims to engage communities around enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

Mission and vision statements must be constructed carefully and with input from stakeholders. If the mission and vision are expressed in lofty and idealistic terms, workers may typically respond with cynicism and distrust, whereas identifying an aspirational but achievable goal can inspire people to work together to meet it. Co-producing an organisation's vision, and communicating this clearly and consistently alongside careful and emotionally literate change management, is critical for resilient organisations.

Managing change effectively

The only thing that is constant is change.
(Heraclitus, 500 BC)

Having experienced extensive change over the last few years – in response to political, economic, social and environmental imperatives – social workers will recognise the truth in this statement. Although some degree of change is essential to avoid stagnation and ensure improvement, people also need predictability and order. The Labour Force Survey (Health and Safety Executive, 2019) identifies change as a major source of work-related stress. People often react

to change with feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and fear, and their motivation and engagement can be impaired (Oreg et al., 2011). Managing and communicating proposals for change effectively is therefore integral to a resilient organisation.

Leaders and managers will be familiar with Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (see Figure 4.1), which sets out key principles for the effective management of change; more information on its use can be found [here](#). However, Kotter's approach may not fully capture the complexities of managing change in social work or health organisations, where several change processes may be occurring simultaneously.

Figure 4.1: The 8-Step Change Model



As outlined in Quick Win 4.2, for any change initiative to succeed, it is crucial to manage the whole organisational system. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides guidance to help organisations manage and communicate change, as summarised below (see [here](#) for more information).

- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals.
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, they are given training to support this.
- Employees are aware of timetables for change.
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

The HSE’s approach to managing work-related stress recognises the importance of measuring workers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of change management. HSE also provides guidance on the competencies that leaders need to manage change successfully (see KFP5 Wellbeing for more information).

Although HSE guidance can help leaders implement organisational change effectively, it is important to consider the specific needs of different types of organisation. Social work leaders and managers may find the tips in Quick Win 4.1 (adapted from a resource provided by the Scottish Social Services Council) particularly useful when planning change initiatives.

Quick Win 4.1: Achieving effective change

Develop a communication strategy that enables workers to understand why the change is necessary, and how this will benefit teams and services.

Communicate clearly and transparently the motivation for change and inspire commitment to the reasons and potential benefits of the change.

Identify how others may receive the change; consider carefully the impact of feelings of loss, uncertainty and anxiety, and manage this in an emotionally sensitive but constructive way.

Focus on sustaining personal resilience in the face of anxiety, conflict or hostility from others.

Be self-reflective when reacting to the concerns of others, tolerating uncertainty while supporting innovative, creative thinking.

Ensure that the organisation retains a clear focus on meeting the needs of people accessing services, while adapting to the change agenda.

Create communication channels that enable people to provide feedback on the change and its impact.

Identify potential risks posed by the change and mitigate any that are likely to have a negative impact on the children, families and adults who use services.

For more information see [here](#).

The pace of change in the public sector can seem relentless. When managed well, change can have enormous benefits, but leaders should be aware of the risk of change fatigue (see below) and how to manage the fallout from poor change initiatives. Change can be managed effectively by applying the principles set out above, but the following tips may also be useful.

 <p>Recognise your own biases and assumptions. Consider whether the change is important for the service, or just for yourself. Remember that employees will be able to spot a vanity project.</p>	 <p>Make sure that the change is adequately resourced.</p>
 <p>Take time out to consider the consequences of the change, and how it will disrupt the service. Being able to evaluate the potential risks and ensure that the impact of the change will be beneficial, will encourage you and your staff to persevere during times of difficulty or when you are faced with resistance.</p>	 <p>Communicate the difference. People can feel overwhelmed with the change agenda and fail to see how it will benefit them or their practice. Filter the information you provide; make it specific to each area of the service.</p>

The need for leaders to consider the whole environment when planning organisational change is considered in Quick Win 2.

Quick win 4.2: Pay attention to the fish tank, not just the fish

Tate (2013) argues that it is important to consider an organisation's health as a whole system, rather than look only at its constituent parts (i.e. individuals, leaders and managers). An organisation is an integrated system, so we need to understand the 'glue' that binds people together and makes them want to work there. Any plans for change must, therefore, consider the whole environment and not focus on a single action or event.

Using the metaphor of a fish tank, Tate observes that many organisations just focus on putting a new leader (or fish) into an environment that is toxic. They may then look after the health of individuals (or fish) without paying attention to the system (or fish tank) in which they live. This means no one can thrive.

It is crucial to understand the organisation (the fish tank) as an ecological system, and cleaning the tank should be prioritised. Systemic leaders are able to recognise negative working practices (or toxins) in the environment (or tank) and provide appropriate nutrients to enable people to thrive. Having a clear mission and vision helps people understand what is expected of them. But without systemic leadership and an organisational culture that is open, reflective and committed to the whole system, success cannot be achieved.

More information on managing leadership from a systemic perspective can be found [here](#).

Change fatigue

Change fatigue has been defined as a general sense of apathy or passive resignation (on the part of individuals and teams) towards organisational changes. When too many changes occur simultaneously, employees may find it difficult to align their thoughts and actions to accommodate the change, and experience a strong sense of powerlessness (Kinman, 2017). They may then resist, reject or even sabotage the process in order to regain a sense of control and stability.

There are several reasons why change fatigue can disrupt attempts to build a resilient organisational culture. It can impair practitioners' wellbeing by increasing the risk of stress and burnout, reducing job satisfaction and encouraging absenteeism and thoughts of leaving (McMillan & Perron, 2013). And it can reduce motivation and compromise performance by depleting energy levels and feelings of self-efficacy. The cynicism that is synonymous with change fatigue is also likely to foster a general atmosphere of negativity within an organisation. See Box 4.1 for guidance on how to spot and manage change fatigue.

Box 4.1: How to prevent or respond to change fatigue in your organisation

Be aware of the risk of change fatigue and how it can manifest itself.	Communicate the reasons for change and provide regular updates on progress.
Formulate long-term strategic plans, not short-term reactive solutions.	Wherever possible, limit the number of changes implemented over a period of time; focus on small improvements, rather than large-scale transformations.
Give people details of previous change initiatives that have led to improvements.	Identify any unintended consequences of changes that might be introduced.
Changes are disruptive and typically require extra work; accept that a short-term reduction in performance may be the cost of ensuring long-term gain.	Involve workers in the process of change. Their suggestions may be more realistic and acceptable to the workforce. Listen to their concerns and take them seriously.
Remember, change also places a burden on managers and team leaders, who are required to 'sell' the new initiatives enthusiastically.	Train managers on how to better support people through the process of change (see the guidance in KFP5 Wellbeing).
Remember, it may take a while before changes show any benefits. A period of consolidation is required to consolidate the change.	Evaluate the long-term effectiveness of any change by getting feedback from people at each level in the organisation.

Adapted from Kinman (2017)

Co-producing and communicating organisational direction

This workbook does not offer a step-by-step guide on how to generate a clear mission and vision, but it does set out some key principles to help social work leaders ensure any strategy is co-created.

Co-production refers to ways in which stakeholders can come together to decide future direction or improve performance. It involves drawing on the knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences of people at all levels in the organisation. A fundamental principle is having respect for all opinions and the equality of ideas. If people are able to contribute ideas through a process of genuine collaboration, they will feel more invested in the resulting mission, vision and strategy. If not, they may feel policies have been imposed by leaders, and see them as tokenistic or lacking in integrity.

Appreciative Inquiry is highlighted in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation as an effective way to co-produce change initiatives and other interventions. World Café is another approach that can be used to generate creative ideas to address problem areas and inform change (see Box 4.2). It's a technique that can be used in any area where co-produced solutions would be helpful.

Box 4.2: The World Café approach

The World Café approach is based on the belief that people have good ideas, and these can be mobilised to generate options for change and help deliver strategic goals. It encourages diverse perspectives and enables the generation and exploration of ideas that may have not been considered previously.

The format is flexible and can be adapted to different contexts. Set up a room with café-style tables and paper tablecloths that can be written on (or use Post-it notes) to capture ideas. Coloured pens should also be provided. A facilitator (or host) is needed for each table to guide the process and record the findings. Participants spend a specified amount of time (say 15-20 minutes) on each table having a conversation about a key issue (this is known as a 'round') before moving on to the next table.

The environment should feel conducive to learning, and the facilitators must be committed to using the ideas and information generated. The following steps will help you create a productive World Café:

✓ There should be no more than four or five chairs at each table.

✓ Make sure people understand why they have been brought together, and the aim of the exercise.

✓ Articulate the context clearly and identify the broad themes you want people to address.

✓ Create a list of questions for each table that capture real-life concerns facing the organisation.

✓ Table hosts should welcome each group, guide the first round and then summarise the contributions from previous rounds to each new group.

✓ Make sure everyone has a chance to articulate their views, in writing or verbally.

Make sure you have a way of capturing the ideas and themes emerging from the rounds, and schedule time at the end of your World Café to synthesise ideas and feed back to the group about how ideas will be used in any service improvement or change process.

More information on the World Café approach can be found [here](#).

The importance of clear communication

Effective communication should avoid buzzwords and ‘management speak’. Practitioners are likely to be sceptical of terms borrowed from the corporate world and will want to see social work values and ethics at the forefront of any change process. So, talk of *swim lanes*, *bandwidth*, *drilling down*, *getting our ducks in a row*, *deliverables*, or *mission critical* are more likely to meet with suspicion or cynicism than respect and approval.

It is also crucial that leaders commit to regular updates; leaders sometimes involve people in the change process and keep them informed about progress early on, but communication falters over time.

As emphasised above, helping practitioners and teams to see how they can contribute to the change process will increase their commitment to the organisation’s mission and vision, and ensure that goals are met. The ‘Tell Me’ exercise in Quick Win 4.3 can help teams identify their common values and skills and explore how they could be used more effectively.

Quick Win 4.3: ‘Tell Me’ exercise

The goal of this exercise is to use guided conversation to define a common set of values and aims for a team or an organisation. Tell Me can help develop working agreements, resolve hidden conflicts, or be used as a team-building activity to enhance mutual understanding. The exercise is suitable for groups of between 8 and 16 people. Some initial planning is needed, as you need to divide the group into pairs.

Each pair spends three minutes talking about their skills in turn (as teller and listener) and what they feel the team or organisation could improve upon. It’s important to ensure listeners realise this is not a conversation, but an opportunity to pay attention to what tellers are saying.

A strong timekeeper is needed to ensure people swap to the next pairing at the end of each six-minute period (after each pair has had a turn at being teller and listener).

Listeners’ questions should be simple and specific. Listeners don’t need to say anything else other than ‘thank you’ after the teller’s response. For example:

‘Tell me a skill you have that you think the team can benefit from?’

‘Tell me one core thing we need to improve on in order to develop excellent practice?’

‘Tell me how you think we could be working together more effectively to achieve the goal?’

At the end of all the rounds, feedback on themes and skills should be shared with the whole group.

Succession planning

Improving the retention of high-quality workers helps social work organisations achieve their mission and vision. Low turnover is a feature of a resilient organisation; in turn, resilient organisations encourage loyalty among their practitioners. Both practitioners and managers are likely to flourish in a stable community of practice where learning is developed and sustained through interaction and peer support. Children, families and adults also lose out when practitioner turnover is high, as it thwarts relationship-based practice (Buckley et al., 2008). Research has identified qualitative differences between the casework of experienced and novice social workers (Forrester, 2000), with experienced practitioners delivering better social work practice. These are all good reasons to retain experienced practitioners and build talent from within.

An organisation that provides clear career development pathways is more likely to retain experienced practitioners (Burns, 2010) and enable succession planning. Having only one tier of competent, skilled leaders is a risky strategy for any organisation; they may leave, or you may be reluctant to promote them because of the adverse consequences for the rest of the organisation.

Developing a talent pipeline requires a shift from reactive recruiting to proactively future-proofing your organisation. So, leaders should be spotting talent and implementing specific, targeted support to nurture and develop people throughout their professional journey.

Succession planning has many benefits: it saves on recruitment costs, shows that the organisation is committed to professional development, and indicates that it is worth staying as there are opportunities for promotion. Moreover, people who are promoted internally are already clear about the organisation's mission and vision and can quickly start implementing plans for successful strategic delivery of its priorities. If people are to be successful in their career aspirations, however, they must be supported and trained appropriately, and there should be adequate opportunities for mentoring and shadowing existing members of staff.

Box 4.3 provides some tips to help you develop an effective succession plan.

Box 4.3: Effective succession planning

✓ Know your organisation

Where are the key risks? Are there critical people who would create a hole in the organisational fabric if they left? How could you future-proof this part of the service?

✓ Look for talent

With careful planning, supervision and appraisal can identify people with skills and potential who can be nurtured and developed. Performance reviews can also feed into this process.

✓ Create a development plan

Investing in your workforce is an important part of organisational resilience. Looking at your overall strategic direction, what key skills are missing in the workforce and how could these gaps be filled?

✓ Review

Make sure you are sensitive to potential changes in the organisation and think about how talent can be grown at all levels. Manage the fears of others who may be concerned you are developing people to 'take over' their roles.

More information on succession planning is available from the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) [here](#).

Culturally competent leadership

Equality is being invited into the room, diversity is getting a seat at the table, inclusion is sharing your views and being heard. Inclusive leadership enables all of this to happen. (Sweeney & Bothwick, 2016)

Creating culturally sensitive leadership is crucial to ensure a resilient organisation. It is one of the 'golden threads' of organisational resilience. Encouraging different voices and perspectives is crucial not only to ensure equity, but also for organisational learning. According to Kohli and colleagues:

Cultural competence engages the development of abilities and skills to respect differences and effectively interact with individuals from different backgrounds. This involves awareness of one's biases or prejudices and is rooted in respect, validation, and openness toward differences among people. Cultural competence begins with an awareness of one's own cultural beliefs and practices, and the recognition that others believe in different truths/realities than one's own. It also implies that there is more than one way of doing the same thing in a right manner. (Kohli et al., 2010, p. 257)

As leaders, we must recognise unconscious bias in our practice, and reflect in particular on our approach to recruitment, appraisal, promotion and discipline in order to ensure we deal fairly and considerately with people from different backgrounds. Social workers can experience racism, discrimination, exclusion, homophobia and stereotyping (in their practice and their team); such experiences will compound the stress of the job itself and compromise their resilience. (Cultural sensitivity is a key element of organisational justice, which is explored later in KFP4).

Research findings suggest bullying is all too common in social work. In 2010, a survey by *Community Care* found a third of 750 respondents thought their current manager used bullying tactics (Carson, 2010). Bullying is common when job demands are high, resources are low and work is insecure (van den Broeck et al., 2011). All social work employers should have policies in place to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination. A zero-tolerance approach is essential.

When devising and implementing policies to tackle discrimination, leaders should enable workers who have experienced discrimination to have a voice at the table. Emotionally literate leadership also requires leaders to recognise that workers may express distress, and signal their need for support, in different ways.

Box 4.4: Tips for becoming a culturally competent leader

Spend time getting to know your colleagues. Don't rush meetings. Consider how you can more effectively engage people who are different from you.

Remember your social work values, and check your frustrations are not biasing you when listening to people's perspectives; be open if you have made an assumption.

Listen to people. Remember that they are experts in their own lives and experience, so be ready to listen and learn.

Practise self-awareness; remember your own values and beliefs may not be shared by others. Check that you are not 'norm referencing' your own cultural experiences or background.

Don't make assumptions about people who come from a similar background to you.

Think about the power you hold and the language you use. Language can empower people or leave them feeling hurt; this may not be intentional, but it can have a damaging effect.

More information on the role of cultural competence in promoting leadership and organisational change can be found [here](#).

The Health and Safety Executive Indicator Tool (see KFP5 Wellbeing) includes questions on bullying and harassment. ACAS also produces a range of guidance to help employers and managers tackle discrimination in the workplace, including on tackling bullying and harassment (for more information see [here](#)). Tedam and O'Hagan (2018) provide some tools to help social workers develop culturally competent practice. Some tips for leaders and managers are set out in Box 4.4.

Pay attention to your shadow side

Unfortunately, there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less [aware of it he is], the blacker and denser it is. (Carl Jung)

In *The Leadership Shadow*, de Haan and Kasozi (2014) observe that 21st-century leaders are often expected to be single-minded in their pursuit of improvement and driving a vision. This may encourage some leaders to be always open to new ideas. But a narrow focus can also lead to stubbornness, inflexibility and an inability to communicate effectively. We may read that description and think: 'That doesn't describe me, but it does describe someone I worked with in the past.' The reality is that most of us will go to considerable effort to protect our self-image from anything unflattering or that puts us in a bad light. We're often reluctant to acknowledge aspects of ourselves that we're not proud of (or would like to disown), and reluctant to acknowledge that we have thoughts we don't want others to know about and feelings we try to hide.

Social work leaders aim to give their very best. They want to use their strengths and skills in a positive way, and to make people feel respected and cared for. However, we all have a 'shadow side': a darker aspect of our personality that we do not want to admit to. The shadow side consists primarily of instinctual and negative emotions, like selfishness, greed and envy, but also contains anything about us that we deny or disown because we think it unacceptable, inferior or unpleasant. Unfortunately, this means we often repress, or cut ourselves off entirely from, many of our good qualities and they become part of the shadow self.

Discovering our shadow self can be challenging, but can lead to greater authenticity, energy and creativity. Try the simple exercise below in Box 4.5 to discover your shadow self.

Box 4.5: Discover your shadow side

Write down the leadership strengths that you hope your colleagues see you as having (i.e. the good and positive stuff). Then consider how others could perceive those same characteristics less favourably (the less good and negative stuff) – in other words, your shadow (how you might be seen by others).

The Shadow I Cast / How I am Seen / My Impression? (the good / positive stuff)

1.
.....
.....

2.
.....
.....

3.
.....
.....

4.
.....
.....

The Shadow I Cast / How I am Seen / My Impression? (the less good / negative stuff)

1.
.....
.....

2.
.....
.....

3.
.....
.....

4.
.....
.....

What impact might this have on others around me, and what might I want to change about this?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....



Here is a completed example



Box 4.5: Discover your shadow side

Write down the leadership strengths that you hope your colleagues see you as having (i.e. the good and positive stuff). Then consider how others could perceive those same characteristics less favourably (the less good and negative stuff) – in other words, your shadow (how you might be seen by others).

The Shadow I Cast / How I am Seen / My Impression? (the good / positive stuff)

The Shadow I Cast / How I am Seen / My Impression? (the less good / negative stuff)

- 1. Totally committed to improving outcomes for social work practice.
Conscientious and hardworking.

- 1. Works late; impatient for improvement; doesn't always delegate or trust others.

What impact might this have on others around me, and what might I want to change about this?

Always stays late and preaches about work-life balance, but then doesn't go home on time or have lunch-breaks. Others might think that I am encouraging a culture that expects people to overwork, and that I think I'm the only person who is able to do things properly.

What I need to change

- ✓ Be more patient and allow change to occur.
- ✓ Delegate more, so other people can see I trust them.
- ✓ Practise better work-life balance: don't just tell everyone around me to go home on time, do so myself.
- ✓ Take a lunch break, and use this as an opportunity to get to know my staff.

More information on discovering and managing your shadow side can be found [here](#).

If we remain unaware of our shadow side, it will impact not only on ourselves but also those around us. So, we need to be able to reflect on why we behave as we do, and how other people may perceive our actions. A helpful technique is to consider the last time you became defensive: what led to this? Was it your attempt to keep your shadow side at bay? de Haan and Kasozi (2014) provide guidance on different personal leadership profiles and the shadow side that can derail them. They also offer the following advice to avoid your shadow side being what other people see most of the time.

Be open to upwards feedback, however painful this may be.

Be open to feedback from your own shadow side, although this will sometimes be painful.

Nurture positive, honest relationships.

Don't just lead in the abstract or indirectly, but in the here and now.

Engage in active and honest (self-) reflection.

360 Degree Feedback

Even the most reflective person needs honest feedback from others to boost their self-understanding. Your Personal Board of Directors (see KFP3 Learning Organisation) can provide a candid assessment of your personal traits and behaviours, which will help you become aware of your shadow side. Another useful technique is 360 Degree Feedback, in which people receive anonymous observations about their behaviour from those who interact with them regularly (e.g. line manager, co-workers and direct reports). This can increase self-awareness, enhance skill development and foster a collaborative organisational culture (Richardson, 2010). It can be particularly helpful in providing insight into how individuals are fulfilling their organisation's mission and vision and living its values.

The 360-degree tool can be integrated into a wider performance management system and help identify priority areas for personal development. However, it is crucial to ensure the process is carefully aligned with the strategic aims of the organisation and the competencies required. Training is also needed to help people understand their feedback and develop action plans for improvement. The CIPD has produced a factsheet on 360 Degree Feedback; see [here](#).

Organisational justice

Organisational justice refers to the extent to which people consider that their organisation allocates resources, makes decisions and distributes rewards and punishments fairly (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2005). Its roots are in equity theory, whereby employees expect a fair balance between the amount they believe they contribute (the input) and what they get in return (the output). Inputs encompass hard work, skills, motivation, etc.; outputs include respect and recognition, as well as more tangible rewards such as salary and opportunities for advancement. Making sure that practitioners and other employees perceive their workplace as fair will help to build a strong, collective sense of mission and vision.

Box 4.6: Employees' perceptions of organisational justice

Employees' perceptions of justice generally fall into one of three categories:

Distributive justice

Where outcomes are in proportion to inputs. For example, salary, promotion and career opportunities should be relative to people's training, experience and effort and not awarded through favouritism.

Procedural justice

Where processes that lead to outcomes are transparent. For example, practitioners have opportunities to contribute to decision-making. Activities outlined in this workbook (e.g. open-door policies, 'walking the floor', and Appreciative Inquiry) can all enhance employees' feelings of being consulted. Another important aspect of procedural justice is that decisions and resource allocations are made consistently, neutrally, accurately and ethically.

Interactional justice

Where perceptions of interpersonal interactions and treatment are equitable. For example, the degree to which people in an organisation are treated with respect when procedures are implemented. Leaders should ensure information is presented:

- > truthfully (realistically, accurately and openly)
- > respectfully (workers should be treated with dignity and courtesy), and
- > with propriety (without prejudice such as racism or sexism).

Involving practitioners in shaping communications and gaining feedback before distributing more widely will help increase a sense of interactional justice in an organisation.

Perceptions of organisational justice and fairness are linked to increased job satisfaction, commitment and trust (Colquitt et al., 2001). Employees who see their organisation as equitable also tend to be more physically and mentally healthy and to have a better work-life balance (Robbins et al., 2012). Research has found strong links between perceptions of organisational justice and employee mental health; Ndjaboué and colleagues (2012) found that a sense of workplace equity helped workers to manage anxiety and reduce the negative effect of long-term role stress. Conversely, injustice is a major source of work-related stress and burnout. A sense of unfairness can also be highly contagious, with major implications for wellbeing and performance throughout the organisation. Feelings of injustice can encourage 'retaliation' behaviours against the organisation such as gossip, bullying, reduced effort and minor theft (Robbins et al., 2012).

Although fairness and equity are central to social work, there has been little research on organisational justice in this context. Studies in other countries suggest feelings of injustice can reduce social workers' job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and encourage thoughts of leaving (Kim et al., 2012; Lambert et al., 2005). Engstrom (2013) applied organisational justice principles to child and family social work, based on interviews with social workers in two Scottish local authorities. She identified some ways to promote a sense of organisational justice: these include better recognition of roles and responsibilities, and more appreciation of the skills required and the high risk of stress and burnout. She also emphasised the importance to social workers of feeling respected and valued and having an input into decisions relevant to their role, as well as having an open and transparent organisational culture. Positive relationships with peers, the availability of emotional support (formal and informal) and feeling trusted by managers were commonly thought to be features of a 'just' organisation.

Employee voice

It is clearly important for social work leaders to be vigilant for signs of injustice in their organisation and to encourage people to report any violations. Policies and procedures should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are equitable and do not disadvantage any groups or individuals. If a perceived injustice has occurred, providing justification (an explanation or apology) at an early stage can reduce or eliminate any anger or frustration generated. Providing employees with an accessible, responsive and non-adversarial means to gain support and resolution is also crucial. The importance of employee 'voice' is highlighted throughout KFP4, so making sure people have opportunities to suggest ways to promote organisational justice will be particularly beneficial. This might involve incorporating employees' views into performance appraisal systems, disciplinary procedures, conflict resolution processes, and selection and promotion criteria, as well any plans for organisational change. KFP5 Wellbeing also considers ways to work with groups of employees to identify sources of reward that can offset the demands workers experience.

For helpful guidance from the CIPD on the benefits 'employee voice' and influence can bring to an organisation, see [here](#).

Staying on track

As a manager or leader, you will probably have a never-ending 'to do' list – it goes with the territory. Potentially, this can be demoralising and may make you feel you are making no progress towards achieving your goals. So, it is crucial to stay on track and avoid task paralysis. Although 'to do' lists help set priorities and ensure important tasks are not forgotten, people rarely achieve their overly optimistic ambitions; new tasks are also usually added throughout the day. An 'I did' list, on the other hand, highlights your achievements. This not only encourages a more positive outlook, but also enhances feelings of self-efficacy. Greer (2016) suggests a process and structure for maintaining an 'I did' list (Quick Win 4.4).

Quick win 4.4: Keep an 'I did' list

At the end of the working day, put aside some time to focus on your key achievements and answer the following questions:

What did I do?	What was this action in response to?
Was this action planned or unplanned?	What did the action achieve today?
How has the action contributed to more substantial or longer-term goals?	How do I feel about achieving this goal?

A table, such as the one shown below, could help.

What I did	What did the action achieve?	How has this contributed to the overall strategic goal I am working towards?
.....
.....
.....
.....

The 'I did' technique can help you identify what you've been doing, and whether those tasks are the most effective use of your time and energy. It can also help you see how much you're able to anticipate and control your work. To what extent were actions planned or unplanned? Focusing on the unplanned entries can enable you to pre-empt some tasks in the future and so manage your time more effectively. Moreover, after a challenging day, in which you may believe you have not accomplished anything worthwhile, keeping a record of what you have completed, and the steps you're taking towards achieving a larger task, will help you feel more productive.

Avoiding procrastination

Another common reason why people fail to make progress with key tasks is because they procrastinate. This often involves ignoring an unpleasant (usually important) task in favour of one that is low priority but more enjoyable. Procrastination may also mean delaying a decision that needs to be made. Typical procrastination behaviours are leaving items on to-do lists for a long time, starting high-priority tasks and then moving on to other things, or waiting until you feel in the 'right mood' to do something. Checking emails is a common procrastination technique; this can give the illusion of productivity while swallowing up hours of your time each day. Procrastination is damaging; people not only fail to meet their goals, but feel unproductive, guilty and ashamed.

The first step in avoiding procrastination is to recognise that you're doing it and to identify why. One of the most common reasons is that the task seems daunting, or we fear we will fail. People also use procrastination unconsciously as a form of rebellion, or a way of 'getting back' at others. In order to overcome procrastination, it's important to set simple and achievable goals (rather than vague plans) and, wherever possible, to eliminate distractions. Quick Win 4.5 shows how the Japanese technique of Kanban can help.

Quick win 4.5: Using Kanban

Kanban, a Japanese term meaning billboard or signboard, is a production management system that aims to minimise waste and maximise efficiency. Benson and DeMaria Barry (2011) have translated Kanban into a personal scheduling system that restricts work-in-progress in order to enhance productivity and avoid burnout.

Put simply, Kanban involves limiting (say to three or four) the number of tasks you're working on at any one time. When you have completed one task, you can introduce another – and so on.

Use Post-it notes and a whiteboard with three columns – 'To do', 'Doing', 'Done' – and move each task along as it progresses. You can also add a 'Waiting' column for future tasks (or, if urgent, allocate them to other people). Larger tasks can be broken down into manageable chunks. Ideally, finishing one task before completing another will become a habit.

For more information, see [here](#).

Box 3.7: Effective questions for action learning

Using reflective open questions is crucial to running a successful Action Learning Set. Here are some examples of questions that can encourage learning.

Questions to identify the issue and the desired outcome

- > What are you hoping to achieve?
- > What is the difference between how you see things now, and how you would like them to be in future?
- > Who might help you accomplish change?
- > What obstacles do you anticipate?

Questions to explore below the surface

- > What happened? Can you provide an example?
- > How did you feel about that?
- > What assumptions might you be making?
- > What do you think might happen in future?
- > How might this decision affect others?

Questions to encourage learning

- > What opportunities are there in the situation?
- > What would success look like?
- > What metaphor could you use to describe the situation?
- > What have you tried in the past? Why did/didn't it work?
- > Who could you approach for advice and support?

Questions to explore options

- > What if ...?
- > What do you think about ...?
- > How do you feel about ...?
- > What would happen if you did nothing?

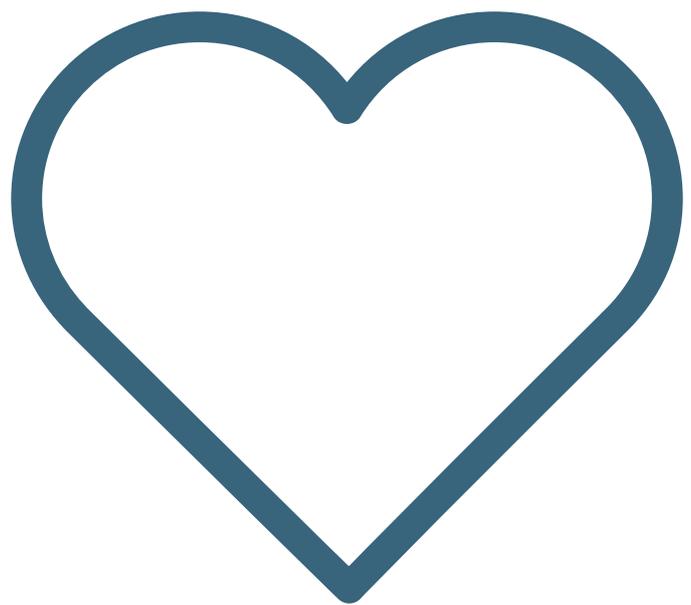
Questions to identify next steps

- > How do you plan to move this forward?
- > Where could you get more information?
- > What actions are you going to take before the next meeting?
- > How can we help you make progress?

Further questions can be found [here](#).

SWORD workbook:

KFP 5 Wellbeing



Introduction

A resilient organisation prioritises the wellbeing of its workforce and takes a systemic approach to reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. The KFP Wellbeing is defined as where:

Practitioners perceive a deep commitment to their wellbeing – wherever possible, stress is reduced at source and working conditions improved.

Practitioners feel able to thrive in a job that is rewarding and manageable, and feel able to make a difference to the lives of the children, families and adults they work with.

For these reasons, people are committed to the organisation and their role within it.

Under the law, all employers have a duty of care to their employees; this means employers should take all reasonable steps to ensure their employees' health, safety and wellbeing. This is particularly important in a profession such as social work where the risk of stress and burnout is high. This workbook highlights the need for evidence-informed, multi-level, systemic interventions in order to support the wellbeing of workers. Interventions are needed at organisation, team and individual level. This final section describes a range of initiatives to tackle stress in your organisation and make it a happier and healthier one.

The term 'wellbeing' covers a range of factors, such as how satisfied people are with their lives, whether they feel what they do is worthwhile, their everyday emotional experiences, and the state of their general mental health. A sense of wellbeing depends also on the extent to which people feel in control of important areas in their life, and whether they feel supported by others. Work is a major source of wellbeing and satisfaction for many people; but it can also be highly stressful and a serious threat to health.

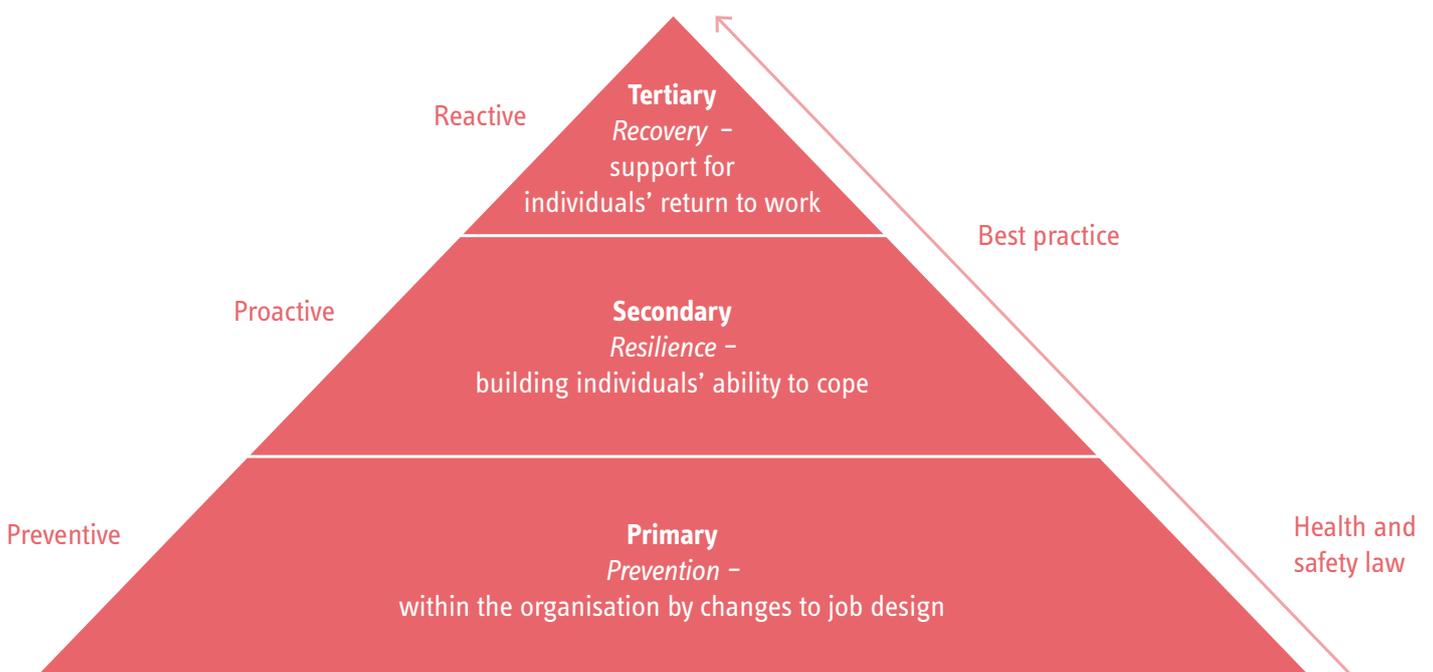
Stress/wellbeing policies

Making sure you have a safety policy that directly addresses stress or wellbeing in the workplace is the first step. The policy should be clear and accessible, and developed after consultation between practitioners, management and trade unions, preferably through a process of co-production. It should begin with a statement of intent and responsibility, setting out the organisation’s commitment to developing a working environment that supports the health and wellbeing of staff. Guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on formulating a stress policy (or checking an existing policy is fit for purpose) can be found [here](#); and an example policy [here](#).

An effective stress policy should emphasise commitment to managing stress at three levels (Figure 5.1):

<p>1. Removing or minimising stress at source (primary management – i.e. preventative)</p>	<p>2. Improving employees’ responses to stress (secondary management – i.e. proactive)</p>	<p>3. Addressing the symptoms and consequences of stress (tertiary management – i.e. reactive).</p>
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Figure 5.1: Examples of completed trees using the Tree of Life exercise



A three tier approach to managing work related stress

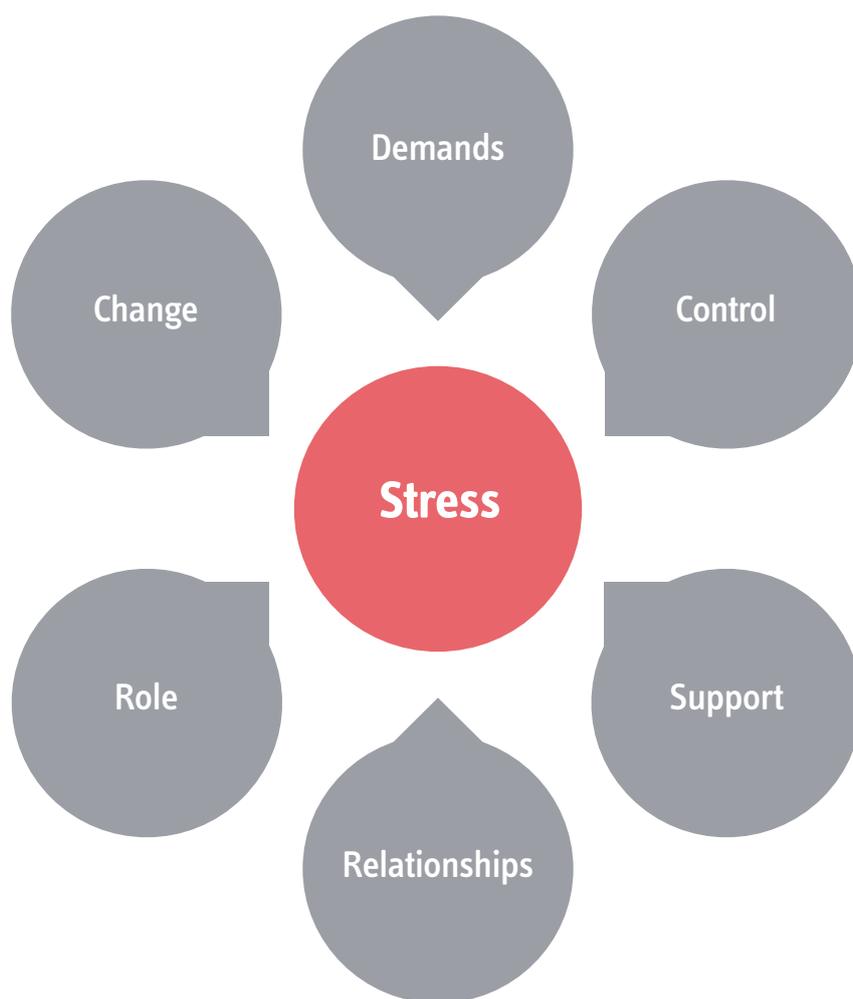
A stress policy will not be effective unless it contains a clear action plan setting out the strategies that have been (or will be) implemented. The framework in Figure 5.1 will help leaders plan multi-level interventions, and KFP5 provides examples of initiatives that are likely to be helpful. It highlights the need to manage the psychosocial risks in your organisation and offers guidance on conducting risk assessments to diagnose and manage the sources of stress.

Using the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) resources to manage psychosocial risks

The HSE has developed a risk-assessment process (with a set of accompanying resources) that helps employers to manage work-related wellbeing among their workforce. The HSE's approach is centred around a set of benchmarks – the HSE Management Standards – for measuring good management practice across six key areas of work, which, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and higher rates of sickness absence.

The six key areas (see Figure 5.2 and Box 5.1) – demands, control, social support (from managers and peers), interpersonal relationships, clarity of role, and involvement in organisational change – represent potential psychosocial hazards for the workforce.

Figure 5.2: The six areas covered by the HSE Management Standards



The HSE approach is an effective and widely used way to identify the most stressful aspects of work for any particular workforce. For social work organisations in particular, the approach has strong potential to help manage workforce stress and build a culture that supports resilience. It helps employers assess how well they are managing each potential ‘hazard’ and to target interventions more effectively. The process, which is illustrated in Figure 5.3, involves:

1. Identifying risk factors

Identify the risk factors using the [HSE’s Management Standards Indicator Tool](#) (i.e. the questionnaire – see Box 5.1); this is usually administered via an online survey. Care must be taken to assure people of anonymity and confidentiality.

2. Who can be harmed and how?

Analyse the data using the HSE’s [Analysis Tool](#) and [Indicator Tool User Manual](#). A ‘traffic light’ system is used to identify priority areas for attention (e.g. demands, control or support, or change management).

3. Evaluate the risks

Identify whether any groups of employees (e.g. job type, sex or mode of employment) are at greater or lesser risk than others.

4. Develop and implement interventions

A comprehensive [workbook](#) developed by the HSE provides guidance on how to shape interventions to address each of the hazards.

5. Monitor and review

Re-administer the survey to assess the effectiveness of the interventions.

The full range of resources and tools developed by the HSE as part of its Management Standards approach can be found [here](#).

Figure 5.3: The HSE risk assessment process



Every type of professional workforce has its own stressors, so the HSE approach can be supplemented with questions that are particularly relevant to specific working contexts. Research findings suggest that the emotional demands of social work are a particular source of stress, as is working within a ‘blame culture’ (Ravalier, 2018; Travis et al., 2016). These findings are likely applicable to other professional groups working in demanding health and social care contexts. Setting up a steering group can highlight the more job-specific sources of stress that practitioners experience and which might otherwise be overlooked when using a generic approach. Steering groups and/or focus groups that are chaired by an independent facilitator in an informal environment, are particularly effective in encouraging people to contribute. The HSE resources include advice on setting up a wellbeing [focus group](#) or [steering group](#).

Box 5.1: Identifying psychosocial risk factors using the HSE Indicator Tool (staff questionnaire)

HSE has developed a self-report questionnaire – the HSE Indicator Tool – to help employers measure levels of risk across each of the six key work areas or potential hazards.

The questionnaire comprises 35 statements (e.g. 'I have unachievable deadlines'); practitioners are asked to tick one of five options to indicate the extent to which each statement applies to them. The work areas, or hazards, are:

1. Demands

Workload, pace of work and working hours

2. Control

Levels of autonomy over working methods, pacing and timing

3. Support

Peer support: assistance and respect received from colleagues

Managerial support: supportive behaviours from line managers and the organisation itself, including encouragement and the availability of feedback

4. Relationships

Interpersonal conflict at work, including bullying and harassment

5. Role

Role clarity and the extent to which employees believe that their work fits into the overall aims of the organisation

6. Change

How well organisational changes are managed and communicated.

The HSE's guidance on administering and scoring the questionnaire can be found [here](#).

Box 5.2: Co-producing interventions with the workforce

Interventions developed with input from members of staff can be especially effective in improving wellbeing. The HSE resources include a series of case studies, which highlight a range of benefits that co-produced solutions can offer. For example:

Earlier reporting of stress, due to increased awareness of the signs and symptoms	Reduced sickness absence
Greater ownership of change	Improved communication, particularly between managers and workers
Increased recognition of the need to encourage peer support	Better understanding among managers of the importance of listening without judgment.

Box 5.3 provides guidance on using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach in focus groups, drawing on key frameworks of work-related stress. As AI is an iterative process, several meetings will be required to generate options for interventions and evaluate their success.

Box 5.3: Using AI approaches to develop stress management interventions

KFP2 Sense of Appreciation describes the features of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and highlights its potential to generate options for self-determined change. The four stages of AI can be used in focus groups to identify simple but effective strategies to reduce stress and improve wellbeing. That process might involve:

Finding examples of current activities that work well (Discovering)	Using them as a basis for envisioning possibilities for change (Dreaming)
Identifying potential interventions (Designing), and	Implementing those interventions (Delivering).

Work-related stress is often perceived as an ‘imbalance’ between key aspects of the working environment and individual capacities and needs. The three models of stress described below offer potentially useful frameworks to help practitioners generate options for change.

1. The Job Demands-Resources model

(Demerouti et al., 2001) recognises the importance of resources in helping employees meet the demands of their work and remain healthy. *Demands* are aspects of the job – such as workload pressure, interpersonal conflict and insecurity – that require physical or mental effort, and so have the potential to drain energy. *Resources* are factors that: a) help people meet their work goals; b) reduce demands and the associated costs to wellbeing; c) facilitate personal growth. Key resources include the availability of support, control and feedback at work, as well as personal resilience-building attributes, such as self-efficacy and optimism. This simple model could be used via AI to identify resources that may help social workers meet the demands of their work more effectively and enhance their personal development.

2. The Conservation of Resources model

(Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) also recognises the value of resources in protecting workers against the negative effects of job demands. It is based on the premise that people are motivated to gain and protect things they value; stress occurs when they are threatened with resource loss or fail to gain resources despite considerable effort. The model specifies four types of resource:

- a) objects (physical entities such as work equipment)
- b) conditions (social circumstances such as status and respect)
- c) personal (skills and attributes such as self-efficacy)
- d) energies (such as knowledge).

People use their existing resources to help them manage stress and to generate further resources to sustain them in future. Those with more resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more capable of resource gain. This model could be used in focus groups to identify resources that might help buffer the effects of stress and create individual and collective 'resource reservoirs' (such as resilience) to offset the risks of future resource loss and build collective strength.

3. The Effort-Reward Imbalance model

(Siegrist, 2002) maintains that strain (such as mental and physical health problems) stems from an imbalance between the amount of effort people believe they put into their work and the rewards they gain. Efforts are things that make work more demanding, such as heavy workload and frequent interruptions; rewards are gained from three potential sources: a) money (salary); b) esteem (respect and support) and c) security/career opportunities (promotion prospects and job security). This framework could be useful in helping practitioners generate options for change by identifying the wider features of social work (e.g. meaningfulness and a sense of belonging) that help them feel rewarded, and therefore could restore their feelings of equity.

Enhancing management competencies

Not only must managers be *aware* of their duty of care to protect the wellbeing of staff, they must also have the *capacity* to offer support. Several frameworks can help managers develop the knowledge and skills they need. First of all, managers must be able to recognise that an employee needs help. Managers can use the checklist in Box 5.4 to help them discern any changes in behaviour that suggest an employee may be struggling and in need of support.

Reassuringly, research suggests that the ‘signs of struggle’ managers identify tend to correlate well with employees’ self-reported wellbeing (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). Social workers who are experiencing chronic and severe stress should inform their employer, but they are often reluctant to do so because of the stigma around mental health difficulties. The checklist can help managers to spot signs at an early stage and use supervision to explore problems, identify potential solutions, agree an action plan and review progress. However, if any practitioner is exhibiting extreme signs of stress they should be referred for professional support.

Box 5.4: Five signs of struggle

Expressions of distress

e.g. reports feeling stressed; emotional outbursts, such as irritability or tearfulness.

Social withdrawal

e.g. not participating in social activities; failing to engage in prosocial behaviours.

Extreme behaviours

e.g. being impaired by alcohol or drugs; expressing desire to self-harm.

Attendance

e.g. lateness or increased absenteeism

Performance

e.g. a noticeable decrease in the employee’s quality/quantity of work; failure to meet goals or deadlines.

Employees often identify management behaviour as a major factor in any work-related stress. So managers need to think about their own behaviour, and whether it is adding to or helping to alleviate any stress that practitioners may be experiencing. The HSE (in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Investors in People) has developed a set of competencies (see Box 5.5) to help managers assess whether they have the behaviours known to be effective for preventing and reducing stress at work (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2011).

The HSE process enables managers to reflect on their behaviour and management style and to identify areas for development. There are three related tools (see [here](#)):

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. A self-assessment tool for managers | 2. A tool that also requires input from the manager's staff (180 degree) | 3. And a tool that requires input from staff, senior managers and colleagues (360 degree). |
|--|--|--|

Many organisations use this framework to help them manage stress proactively by guiding management recruitment, selection and training. It will help leaders identify the behaviours that are likely to support wellbeing and build a culture of resilience. (There is more information on the use of 360 Degree Feedback in KFP4 Mission and Vision.)

Box 5.5: Management competencies for preventing or reducing work-related stress

The framework comprises four broad managerial behavioural areas (and 12 specific behaviours) that have been identified as important for preventing and reducing stress.

1. Managing emotions and having integrity

- > Managing emotions (e.g. approaches deadlines or crises calmly; doesn't pass their own stress on to the team)
- > Integrity (e.g. is a good role model; is honest and consistent)
- > Considerate approach (e.g. shows respect; prioritises people's work-life balance).

2. Managing and communicating workload

- > Proactive work management (e.g. communicates objectives clearly; manages current and future workloads to minimise stress)
- > Problem-solving (e.g. deals rationally with difficulties; is decisive)
- > Participative/empowering (e.g. delegates work fairly; involves team members in decision-making).

3. Managing the individual within the team

- > Personally accessible (e.g. communicates in person rather than by email; responds to requests promptly)
- > Sociable (e.g. is friendly and has a sense of humour)
- > Empathic engagement (e.g. a good listener; shows an interest in others and concern for their problems).

4. Reasoning/managing difficult situations

- > Managing conflict (e.g. remains objective; deals with conflict promptly)
- > Use of organisational resources (e.g. seeks advice and support from others to resolve difficulties)
- > Taking responsibility for resolving issues (e.g. tackles bullying; follows up conflicts after resolution).

For more information and to download the tools, see [here](#).

Stress, depression and anxiety related to work are common reasons for sickness absence among social workers. Some may struggle to return after a long-term absence; others may not return at all. Managers' behaviours are crucial in supporting employees back to work. Munir and colleagues (2012) have identified the specific line management behaviours that are associated with successful returns after long-term sick leave:

<p>Communication and support during sick leave:</p> <p>e.g. communicates regularly, in a supportive (not intrusive) way; expresses concern for wellbeing; emphasises continued support.</p>	<p>Inclusive behaviour on initial return to work:</p> <p>e.g. offers a phased return; explains any changes to role and responsibilities; makes themselves available on first day back.</p>	<p>General proactive support:</p> <p>managing the team (e.g. asks employee's permission to keep colleagues informed about progress); has an open and sensitive approach (e.g. listens to concerns and takes responsibility for rehabilitation); has strong legal and procedural knowledge (e.g. is aware of legal responsibilities and the need for reasonable adjustments).emphasises continued support.</p>
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'Presenteeism'

Sickness absence can be high in social work organisations, frequently caused or exacerbated by work-related stress and pressure. While it is crucial to reduce unnecessary absence, leaders must also be aware of the risks to health and performance posed by 'presenteeism'. Presenteeism is when people continue to work despite feeling sufficiently unwell to take sick leave or return to work too soon after a period of sickness. Admasachew and Dawson (2011) highlighted the negative implications of presenteeism among NHS staff, whereby pressure to be present at work when unwell reduced engagement and had a

consequent negative effect on outcomes for people being supported by health services. There is also evidence that presenteeism is common among social workers. A survey by Ravalier and Boichat (2018) found 43% of child and family social workers had worked while unwell between two and five times in the previous year; a further 26% had done so more than five times. The incidence of presenteeism in this group had increased by 5% a year. High demands and low support are key causes of presenteeism among social workers, but more insight is needed into the organisational, team and individual factors that encourage this behaviour in order to inform interventions.

Managing conflict

It has been estimated that managers spend up to 60% of their time trying to resolve workplace conflict. While some degree of conflict is unavoidable, and can even enhance individual and group effectiveness, it can have a major impact on wellbeing and job performance. Interpersonal conflict at work is more negative, enduring and pervasive than other types of stress, so it must be carefully managed. Quick Win 5.1 offers some useful ways to help manage conflict. More information (from ACAS) on resolving conflict at work for managers can be found [here](#).

Quick Win 5.1: Six steps to managing conflict

Step 1: Consider how to achieve a mutually desirable outcome

Be aware that one party 'losing' to the other is likely to escalate conflict rather than resolve it. Perceived loss encourages people to try to re-establish fairness through competition, criticism or disengagement.

Step 2: Encourage people to communicate human-to-human

Recognise that conflict compromises people's fundamental need for respect, competence, autonomy and social status. Encouraging one party to see that the other party is 'just like them' tends to encourage trust and the use of positive language and behaviour.

Step 3: Anticipate people's potential reactions and rehearse your responses to them

Before having a difficult conversation, thinking through how the other party might react to what you say can expose weaknesses in your argument. It can also help ensure your message will be received in the way intended, and stop the other person becoming defensive.

Step 4: Substitute blame and criticism with curiosity

Blame will escalate conflict, encourage defensiveness and lead to disengagement, whereas adopting a learning mindset will encourage people to explore potential solutions where both parties can win.

Step 5: Ask for feedback on how you managed the conflict situation

Showing fallibility can disarm opponents, as this is a quality that inspires trust in leaders. Ask people how you could have handled the situation more effectively.

Step 6: Assess psychological safety in your organisation

Conflict is much less likely if people feel able to make mistakes without fear of criticism or retribution. A psychologically safe environment (see KFP1 Secure Base and 'Using HSE resources to manage psychosocial risks' above) that encourages moderate risk-taking and curiosity will make conflict resolution easier for all.

Adapted from Delizonna (2017)

Promoting a healthy working environment: Mental Health First Aid, and Wellbeing Champions

A recent survey found that among the general workforce, fewer than one in six (16%) employees felt able to disclose a mental health issue to their manager (Business in the Community, 2018).

Training people in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) (see Box 5.6) and appointing Wellbeing Champions (see Box 5.7) are popular and effective way to help reduce stigma and support a culture of wellbeing at work.

If you are considering introducing MHFA or a Wellbeing Champion programme, you must make sure that people taking on those roles have the time and resources to fulfil them effectively. It's also crucial to provide volunteers with support for their own wellbeing and to make sure appropriate boundaries are in place (Narayanasamy et al., 2018). And it's important to remember that these initiatives cannot in themselves provide solutions to mental health difficulties in the workplace; they should be implemented alongside the other structural interventions described in KFP5.

Box 5.6: Mental Health First Aid

MHFA England provides volunteers with training in critical areas of mental health first aid, such as the signs and symptoms of common mental health difficulties, and providing 'crisis' first aid for depression, panic attacks and acute stress reactions. Mental health first aiders can provide support by engaging in an initial conversation with someone in distress and, if needed, helping them access appropriate support.

Evaluations of MHFA training suggest it can increase participants' knowledge of mental health, reduce negative attitudes among the workforce, and enhance supportive behaviours towards people with mental health difficulties (Brandling & McKenna, 2010; MHFA, 2019).

Information on MHFA training and resources can be found [here](#).

Box 5.7: Wellbeing Champions

Appointing Wellbeing Champions or Ambassadors can play a valuable role in helping to build a culture of wellbeing in your organisation. Champions can drive the wellbeing agenda (e.g. by being part of a wellbeing steering group), raise awareness of new initiatives and encourage colleagues to participate. Champions are often better placed than managers to encourage reluctant colleagues to engage.

Time To Change provides a range of resources for the workplace, including support for running a Champions programme, and practical tips on starting conversations about wellbeing and signposting support. For more information see [here](#).

Work-life balance

Resilient organisations encourage a healthy work-life balance among their workforce. There is growing awareness that working long hours can damage health and family relationships and reduce satisfaction with work and life in general. Worrying about work can make it hard to ‘switch off’ and can stop people replenishing their mental and physical energy. Practitioners in the helping professions may find it especially hard to balance the demands of their work and personal lives. A study of social workers by Kalliath and colleagues (2012) found a high level of work-life conflict, which was linked to depression, anxiety and social dysfunction. Negative emotional reactions to work were particularly damaging to mental health. Work-life conflict has serious implications for workforce retention; the number of NHS-based professionals who cited poor work-life balance as their main reason for leaving the service tripled between 2010 and 2018 (Buchan et al., 2019). Similarly, a recent survey of 1,118 social workers also identified poor work-life balance as one of five main reasons for wanting to leave the profession (Cooper, 2019).

It is crucial, therefore, to make a clear and strong commitment to supporting work-life balance among your workforce, and to provide practical strategies at both organisational and individual level. Leaders might consider developing a policy for helping practitioners to achieve an effective work-life balance. Box 5.8 lists some issues that could be covered in such a policy. Some practical tips for achieving work-life balance are in Quick Win 5.2.

Box 5.8: Making a commitment to work-life balance

An organisation that is committed to maintaining a healthy work-life balance places this high on its list of priorities. Such an organisation:

Acknowledges that individuals are healthier, happier and more productive when they have a 'healthy' balance between their work and their personal life	Recognises that supporting work-life balance will benefit the organisation as well as its employees	Asks employees for their views on how best to support work-life balance
Adopts a flexible approach (people's work-life balance needs change over time), and offers a range of flexible working strategies and encourages their uptake	Ensures that work-life balance initiatives are equitable and don't support only working parents	Acknowledges that work-life balance is not just about ensuring people go home on time; strategies are also needed to help practitioners 'switch off' emotionally from work
Encourages practitioners to work efficiently and productively, and measures performance by output (not hours worked)	Encourages joint responsibility between individuals and their line managers to implement effective work-life balance solutions	Regularly reviews workloads to ensure duties are achievable in 'normal' working hours
Is vigilant for signs of over-commitment and over-involvement among employees	Encourages managers to lead by example by prioritising their own work-life balance	Ensures that employees who take up flexible working options are not disadvantaged in terms of promotion or progression
Makes sure employees take their full annual leave entitlement	Is aware of up-to-date innovations in promoting work-life balance	Evaluates the success of any strategies implemented to support work-life balance.

Quick Win 5.2: Tips to improve your work-life balance

Have regular breaks away from your desk

This will help reduce the intensity of work and get you in the habit of switching off.

Identify a corridor between work and home

People who do emotionally demanding work often need to 'decompress' before moving into their personal life. Consider how you can transition between work and home, physically and mentally: change your clothes, have a shower, cook a meal, or go for a run. Mindful walking can be a good way to switch off. It helps you become more aware of your bodily sensations and encourages you to tune into your environment as you walk. (See [here](#) for some guidance from Headspace.)

Use your diary to schedule activities that you enjoy

Planning your leisure time well in advance will help make sure you do get opportunities to switch off.

Establish an unwinding ritual

For the last 30 minutes of your working day, only start jobs that you can complete easily. Alternatively, spend time clearing your desk.

Find a restorative place

Spend 15 to 20 minutes somewhere you feel happy and relaxed. This could be a favourite chair or a place in the garden.

When you think about work after the working day, are you are problem-solving or ruminating?

Problem-solving can provide solutions and insights; ruminating will drain your mental and physical energy. So, try to make sure any thoughts about work are restricted to the former.

Disconnect

Disconnecting yourself from the outside world for a while will help you switch off and recoup your energies.

Write a daily exit list

Jotting down what you need to do the next day will help clear your mind and provide a sense of control and resolution. Mentally prepare yourself as you review your activities for the following day.

Switch off when you commute home

Try not to see commuting as extra work time; read a book or talk to a fellow passenger if you're on public transport, or listen to music in the car.

Do something different:

It is particularly replenishing to use a totally different skillset during leisure time. So, for example, join a choir, or learn a foreign language.

Get another perspective

Regular input and advice from a mentor or a coach can be liberating. Anticipating opportunities to talk about concerns with a trusted person can help people contain difficult emotions and to switch off.

As discussed in KFP1 Secure Base, many social workers now work remotely for at least part of the time. And while there may be benefits, people who work offsite can feel isolated from their colleagues and may struggle with work-life balance. So it's important to give people information on how to manage their wellbeing when working remotely (see ACAS's guidance [here](#)).

Managing email

Engaging with email has become one of the most stressful activities in the workplace. People spend a high proportion of their working time on email (Hearn, 2019). As email use increases, productivity worsens, and the risk of burnout and disengagement rises. There is also growing awareness that failing to switch off from email during evenings, weekends and holidays can be a major threat to employees' work-life balance and wellbeing. Many organisations now offer guidelines on managing emails in a healthy way. Quick Win 5.3 has examples of strategies that can be implemented at the organisational and personal level.

Quick Win 5.3: How to be 'e-resilient'		
Develop an organisational policy on email use and etiquette, with input from staff.	Remember that email is a key part of the job, so should be included in job descriptions and when estimating workload.	Lead by example: managers are powerful role models for email behaviour. Unless it's an emergency, don't send emails out of hours (or else use the delay function).
Consider limiting (or even banning) the use of the 'reply all' function.	Limit the use of 'OK' and 'thank you' emails – instead use 'thank you in advance'.	Encourage people to review their email strategies – are they purposeful and efficient, or reactive and habitual?
Process and clear an email whenever you check it.	Switch off email notifications – they can cause stress and anxiety.	Be aware that 'switching' between email and other types of work can add up to two hours to your working day.
Use blocks, filters and folders and keep up with digital housekeeping (e.g. maintaining folders, deleting files, etc.).	Manage other people's expectations: an 'out of office' notification means just that.	Consider picking up the phone if emails are more than 3 paragraphs, or if messages fill the screen.
Remove email from your phone and other personal devices.	Develop 'rules of engagement': set boundaries and decide when you will read emails and when you will switch off.	Take email vacations – disconnect for half a day a week, or even longer.

An individual toolbox of wellbeing skills

As well as tackling stress at source, organisations should ensure that practitioners are provided with guidance to develop their personal skills in managing stress and building resilience. It is crucial to offer a range of strategies and to encourage people to try something new – this will encourage flexibility and broaden their skill set (see KFP3 Learning Organisation). Our research found that multi-modal training (including mindfulness, cognitive behavioural skills, peer coaching, reflective supervision and goal setting) can enhance the personal characteristics that underpin resilience and improve wellbeing in early-career social workers (Grant & Kinman, 2014). When planning interventions, however, it is important to recognise that people are often attracted to training that strengthens (or validates) the skills they already possess; for example, more action-oriented people may seek out training in time management and goal-setting, rather than the relaxation techniques that would help them switch off from work. Similarly, the findings of our recent evaluation of a mindfulness intervention (Kinman et al., 2019) suggest that it tends to attract social workers who are more ‘naturally’ reflective.

Strategies that could be included in your toolbox have been outlined throughout this workbook. Some of these are likely to be particularly helpful in managing stress and enhancing wellbeing. Peer coaching techniques (see KFP3 Learning Organisation) can provide social workers with opportunities to give and receive support and identify solutions to stressful problems. Reflective supervision will help practitioners to manage challenging practice situations and explore and resolve uncomfortable emotions. It is important to note that while many managers contend that they provide supervision that is reflective, this is not necessarily the case; they may need support and reminding that their supervisory practice needs proper attention to ensure it is sufficiently reflective. In the next section, we highlight

the importance of self-compassion and self-care in underpinning a resilient organisational culture. Particular focus is placed on developing cognitive behaviour skills, as they can be an effective way to protect wellbeing and may be used individually, in teams and/or during supervision. We also provide some quick wins to help you fill your toolbox. More information on these strategies can be found in our book (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

Building a culture of self-compassion

For practitioners whose work is emotionally demanding, self-compassion and self-care are essential. Workers gain considerable satisfaction from supporting others, but the emotional demands of the job can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Research by Kinman and Grant (in press) has found that maintaining compassion towards the self can protect practitioners against these negative effects.

Compassion towards the self can improve coping abilities and protect us from stress and burnout. Self-compassion is also one of the most powerful sources of resilience, helping us not only to survive adversity but to flourish. And because self-compassion can enhance empathy and improve interpersonal relationships, there are likely to be benefits for people who use services also.

Neff (2016) identifies three elements of self-compassion:

Self-kindness:

being warm, patient and understanding towards ourselves when we suffer, fail or feel inadequate, rather than being self-critical and hostile.

Common humanity:

recognising that personal suffering and inadequacy are part of the human condition, and not something that differentiates us from others.

Mindfulness:

taking a balanced and accepting approach to our negative emotions, so feelings are neither avoided nor exaggerated.

It is therefore vital to develop interventions to encourage compassionate feelings towards the self and healthy self-care strategies among workers early in their career, as this can be more challenging for those who have spent longer in the job. Kinman and Grant have found that social care practitioners often see themselves as self-compassionate, but may be reluctant to prioritise their own wellbeing.

Leaders can build a culture that supports self-compassion by role modelling self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, and encouraging practitioners to accept that, like everyone, they are imperfect. But in seeking to develop such a culture, leaders must pay attention to working conditions; a heavy workload, understaffing and lack of appropriate supervision will thwart any attempts to improve self-compassion and self-care.

At an individual level, compassion-focused expressive writing can help people overcome self-criticism and develop the self-reflection that underpins self-compassion (see Quick Win 5.4). Other strategies, some of which are outlined in this workbook, can also help:

Reflective supervision can foster self-compassion and encourage practitioners to prioritise self-care – see Research in Practice’s Reflective Supervision Resource Pack (Earle et al., 2017), available here.

Peer coaching (see KFP3 Learning Organisation), and group approaches such as World Café (see KFP4 Mission and Vision) and Appreciative Inquiry (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation), will help identify and share best practice among co-workers to improve self-care.

Mindfulness techniques (see Quick Win 5.5) can help us maintain personal boundaries and enhance awareness of the self and the need to care for it.

Cognitive behavioural strategies (outlined below) can also help us relate to ourselves in a more compassionate, friendly and forgiving way.

More information about self-compassion and some resources can be found [here](#).

Quick Win 5.4: Expressive writing

Research suggests people who regularly engage in expressive writing tend to feel happier and more satisfied. Writing about negative feelings and life experiences can help us reduce stress, depression and anxiety, and discourage unhealthy rumination; it can even improve immune system functioning and physical health. There is also evidence that writing about positive experiences can be beneficial for wellbeing.

Research with social work students (Grant et al., 2014) has found that writing in diary form about their emotional reactions to practice significantly improves students' reflective ability and empathy, and reduces feelings of distress. Several mechanisms are thought to underlie the benefits of expressive writing. Because it involves thinking about experiences as well as expressing emotions, writing helps people process their thoughts and give meaning to their experiences. There is also evidence that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation skills, which is a key aspect of resilience for practitioners.

In order to get maximum benefit, people should write every day, but this doesn't need to take up much time. Studies suggest that expressing emotions in writing for only two minutes a day can improve wellbeing (Burton & King, 2008). There is no one 'correct' way to do this, but these tips may help:

Try writing in the third person to give you some distance, and even a new perspective.

Write about your emotional responses to specific situations: i.e. those that evoked negative feelings (e.g. fear, confusion, embarrassment or frustration) and those that were positive (e.g. satisfaction, pride or a sense of meaning).

Make a note of what you were doing and who you were with; this can help you identify patterns to your emotional reactions to different situations and individuals, and can encourage a more in-depth understanding of your emotions.

Writing about emotions can be helpful, but it may not be effective for people who are experiencing ongoing or serious mental health challenges. Any personal reflections on emotional reactions to work experiences should always be kept in a secure location.

Mindfulness

‘Mindfulness is the basic ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us.’
(Mindful.org, 2014)

Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of mindfulness. Research by Kinman et al. (2019) found wide-ranging benefits for the wellbeing and resilience of social workers. An eight-week mindfulness training course increased emotional self-efficacy and reduced compassion fatigue and distress. Interviews with participants revealed that mindfulness can benefit many aspects of wellbeing. In particular, it enhances work-life balance by helping people ‘switch off’ from work concerns and enabling them to replenish their energy and motivation.

Kinman et al. (2019) found mindfulness can help improve job performance:

When experiencing pressure, we are more aware of the options we have available to manage it

We are able to sharpen our focus and prioritising skills

We become more adept at identifying what we can and cannot control in high-stakes situations

We carry more energy, by reducing wasted effort and enhancing recovery processes

We are less judgmental towards others and ourselves, more patient, and trust in our intuition and authority.

Quick Win 5.5: Learning to be mindful

Several apps are available that introduce people to mindfulness principles and offer guided meditations; these can be customised to individual needs and contexts. For example, 'one-minute mindfulness' exercises can help people recover after difficult meetings and switch off from work when they get home. Grant and Kinman recommend:

[Buddhify](#)

[Headspace](#)

Both require subscriptions, but others are available free of charge.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT): challenging thinking errors

Thinking errors are cognitive distortions based on erroneous beliefs about ourselves or about the world. Everyone experiences thinking errors; but when those errors are extreme, they can impair personal functioning, relationships and wellbeing. An understanding of the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) provides insight into how cognitive distortions can be replaced by more helpful thoughts, feelings and actions. Examples of different types of thinking errors are outlined in Box 5.9. Techniques are also included to help managers track the thinking patterns and understanding of practitioners, helping them identify and challenge unhelpful thinking errors when they occur. How CBT can be used to manage stress and support emotional resilience is also considered.

Box 5.9: Thinking errors

Magnification and minimisation:

recognising only the negative aspects of a situation and ignoring or downplaying the positive. 'My personal achievements are insignificant, but my mistakes are very important.'

Catastrophising:

ruminating about irrational worst-case scenarios and impending disaster. 'I couldn't get in touch with this family before the weekend – I just know something awful will happen to them.'

Over-generalising:

making broad interpretations from a single incident or a single piece of evidence. 'I made a mistake with this family, so I am an incompetent social worker and a bad person.'

All or nothing thinking:

over-generalising and seeing things in extremes. 'I never do a good enough job – I am always going to fail.'

Dogmatic demands:

believing that things should be a certain way can cause guilt and expectations of punishment if our rules are violated. 'I should do this/I shouldn't do that.'

Emotional reasoning:

the assumption that our unhealthy emotions reflect reality. 'I feel guilty, so I must have done something bad.'

Magical thinking:

a belief that one's acts will influence unrelated situations. 'I am a good person so bad things shouldn't happen to me.' (Or vice versa.)

Personalisation:

the belief that one is responsible for events outside of one's control. 'This person I'm supporting is upset. It's my fault; I haven't done enough to help her.'

Jumping to conclusions:

interpreting the meaning of a situation despite having little or no evidence. This has two strands: a) mind-reading: interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without evidence ('I wouldn't get promotion, as I am stupid'), and b) fortune-telling: believing that future events are pre-ordained ('Things will turn out badly, so why bother?').

Box 5.9: Thinking errors (continued)

Control fallacy:

beliefs about being in control of every situation in one's life. If we feel externally controlled, we are helpless and a victim of fate or chance: 'I did a bad job as I was given the wrong advice'); if we feel internally controlled, we assume responsibility for the wellbeing and distress of everybody: 'Why are you angry, what did I do to upset you?'

Global labelling:

generalising one or two personal characteristics into a negative global judgement about oneself or others. 'I'm such a loser'; 'He is such an idiot'; 'People always let you down.'

'Just world' fallacy:

the belief that the world is a fair place – good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. 'Nobody has that much bad luck. She must have done something to bring it on.'

Heaven's reward fallacy:

the belief that self-sacrifice and self-denial will eventually pay off. 'If I work hard enough, people will notice, and I will be rewarded.'

Thinking errors have implications for practitioners' wellbeing and professional functioning. 'Personalisation' and the 'heaven's reward fallacy' might encourage over-commitment to the job and a reluctance to prioritise self-care; 'global labelling', on the other hand, could compromise positive outcomes for children and families. We may fail to see the person behind the label and filter out any information that does not fit with our belief. So, the 'just world fallacy' may encourage us to blame 'victims' in the belief that people who are experiencing challenging circumstances must somehow have brought it on themselves. 'All or nothing thinking' is a distortion often found in those who are anxious, perfectionist or have low self-esteem. This can also be damaging for children, families and adults with care needs; a tendency to believe that 'everything is right, or it is wrong' may lead a practitioner to 'over-generalise' from one perceived 'failure' and so overlook improvements in other areas.

Box 5.10: Identifying thinking errors in meetings and supervision

Active listening – based on warmth, genuineness and unconditional positive regard – is necessary to enable formation of a trusting relationship.

Conversations should be collaborative and should involve feedback and reflection. Notice how people use words that might signify thinking errors. For example, most people exaggerate at times, but chronic ‘all or nothing’ thinking can make us see the world and other people in over-simplified terms and encourage pessimism and feelings of helplessness. Listen out for and challenge words such as ‘always’, ‘never’, ‘everything’, ‘totally’, ‘everyone’ or ‘no one’.

A more structured approach can be used to examine specific incidents (i.e. activating events) where thinking errors have been used. By focusing on the following issues during supervision, managers can gain insight into how unhelpful behaviours and mood states are triggered – and maintained:

Situational: the environmental factors that were present	Behavioural: what the person did	Cognitive: the thoughts that were present at the time
Affective: the emotional reactions that occurred	Interpersonal: who else was present	Physiological: the bodily reaction that occurred.

Cognitive behavioural techniques for stress management and resilience

The cognitive behavioural techniques discussed in Box 5.10 can be incorporated into supervision or a peer coaching session in which options for change are explored. Identifying thinking errors that underpin self-criticism, poor self-care, inflexibility and feelings of isolation will be particularly helpful. Cognitive behavioural techniques are an effective stress management tool for individuals. They can provide a fresh perspective on a situation, and help people reduce the physical and emotional symptoms of stress and regain a sense of control.

There is evidence that stress management training based on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is more effective than many other methods (Bhui et al., 2012). Grant and Kinman's (2016) research found that CBT also has the potential to enhance wellbeing and many of the qualities that underpin resilience. Computerised CBT programmes can be as beneficial as face-to-face training for reducing stress and improving mental health (Proudfoot et al., 2003), and are more cost effective. CBT principles can also be applied to teams and organisations. Spotting and challenging individual and collective thinking errors has clear potential for enhancing group problem-solving and guiding systemic change.

The importance of self-care for managers

Leaders play a key role in preventing and reducing work-related stress and are expected to be role models for 'healthy' behaviour. This is a major responsibility, especially if you are struggling to maintain your own work-life balance and protect your own wellbeing.

What you can realistically achieve may feel constrained by the need to manage teams with large caseloads or having day-to-day responsibility for the functioning of an entire service. And you might work within an organisational culture that stigmatises (albeit unconsciously) stress and help-seeking, encourages long working hours and presenteeism, and overlooks the adverse implications for the wellbeing and performance of its workforce.

Protecting your own wellbeing will be challenging under such conditions; but if you are not able to take care of yourself, then you will not be able to support your team. Remember, the strategies in this workbook apply to you as much as to members of your team or workforce. Self-care is not a luxury for leaders and managers; it is a core competency. So, it is crucial that you develop your own 'toolbox of strategies' to sustain your resilience and are as compassionate towards yourself as you are to others.

SWORD workbook: **References**

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