Sustaining Emotional Resilience for School Leadership

Driven by the country's need to compete in a global economy, the UK government is imposing rapid and relentless educational change on schools. School leaders face the challenge of managing the impact of externally-driven change and supporting others' resilience while frequently paying scant attention to their own. Six semi-structured interviews with headteachers and a review of the literature provide an insight into complex relationships which underpin school leaders'emotional resilience. A model is proposed which suggests where attention should be focused to strengthen resilience. Recommendations are made affecting headteachers, school governors, authors of leadership development materials, and government policy-makers.

Keywords: school leadership; resilience; educational change; headteachers; governance

Introduction

The UK coalition government, elected in 2010, is on a mission to reform education. Its education white paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) promised: 'whole system reform [in order to make England] one of the world's top performers' (DfE 2010:4). The changes have come thick and fast. All schools are being encouraged to move away from local authority control. Local authorities with fewer schools have less money, and as a consequence are unable to provide the same level of support to schools as in times past. Exam regimes are changing; the national curriculum is changing; new tests have been introduced in primary schools; expectations on schools by the

government-funded school inspection service, Ofsted, have been raised; the pace of change is unremitting. In the secretary of state for education's own words, there is a 'a fierce urgency to our plans for reform' (DfE 2010:4)

Models of school leadership are changing: so-called 'executive' headteachers have responsibility for more than one school (Paterson 2006). Whatever the model, however, the role of the headteacher remains that of the 'lead professional' (DfES 2004). Headteachers are ultimately accountable for responding to changing government agendas while ensuring the needs of the school community are met (DfES 2004).   Relentless pressure on headteachers to maintain the focus on raising standards as the national educational context changes with changes in governments is taking its toll.

The findings of a survey commissioned by the National Association for Headteachers (NAHT) published in 2009 (French 2009) suggest that workload remains a significant issue for headteachers despite the 2003 Workload Agreement (ATL et al 2003) and the stated aim to improve well-being. A joint survey by the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* and Association of School and College Lecturers (ASCL) (TES/ASCL 2012) suggests that large numbers of school leaders are neither supportive of, nor feeling supported by, the government. Eighty-six percent of respondents felt that changes in the government's education policy would make senior leaders less likely to apply for a headship while 68% agreed that 'the government's attitude to the teaching profession has made me more likely to leave the education profession in the next five years' (TES/ASCL 2012). In 2011 the NAHT took the unprecedented step of staging a one-day strike over pension rights. Such behaviour signifies the frustration of members of a profession who have consistently co-operated (albeit sometimes reluctantly) with the demands of the national agenda, wishing to send a message that they will be pushed no further.

The impact of demographics on reducing headteacher numbers has long been recognised (Paterson 2006). Headteachers are experiencing stress and a number appear to be feeling unsupported, despite the government's intention to 'support strong and confident leadership for every school' (DfE 2010, 26). With the number of headteachers reducing through retirement and an apparent reluctance of headteachers to recommend the role to others (TES/ASCL 2012), other ways of supporting headteachers to make the job manageable must be sought urgently. There has recently been a call to school leaders to support teachers in developing resilience (Day et al. 2011). There appears to be an expectation that leaders can manage without such support. Eighty five percent of respondents to the NAHT 2009 survey claimed they had experienced work-related stress. Of those, 12% had taken time off work (ranging from 1 day to 18 weeks) due to stress (French 2009, 23). The thrust of the Workload Agreement (ATL et al. 2003) was that managing workload and achieving a better work-life balance in part help to alleviate stress. A strategy which has achieved less attention, however, is how to build emotional resilience in order to deal with the stress of leadership. The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) identifies 'resilience and emotional maturity' as competencies essential for effective headship (NCSL 2012, 31) but there is little guidance concerning what might get in the way of its development. The focus of the research, therefore, was to explore what it is that allows some headteachers to be able to withstand the pressure of long working hours and constant change in a climate of high accountability, while others find themselves overwhelmed and forced to take time out. What, in short, are the different characteristics of the 85% who reported work-related stress in the above-mentioned survey, the 15% who did not, and the 12% who took time off for stress? The purpose of this study is to examine individuals' emotional resilience in depth, in order to illuminate what has been called 'the internal story' (Steward 2011, 21-23). While we

may have little control over our environment, the way we experience it is influenced by the way we choose to interpret that environment.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to or undermine a school leader's capacity for emotional resilience, the research focused on the significance of upbringing as well as more commonly explored areas: well-being, stress, emotional intelligence and moral purpose. Hidden influences which contribute to resilience or its absence are explored and identified through six hour-long interviews with headteachers with a range of headship experience from 5 months to 27 years. Following the introduction, a review of the literature reveals connections between emotional resilience and (respectively) well-being, stress, burnout, self-management, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-efficacy and values. The methodology is explained before findings are reported. Conclusions and recommendations outline strategies which might be used to support leaders of the future to build their resilience to become part of the 'strong and confident leadership' (DfE 2010, 27) which the government has identified as being crucial in achieving its aims.

The study assesses 'emotional' rather than physical or mental resilience. While our decisions are driven by our cognitive brain, we remain in control. When a build-up of stress finally pushes us over the edge it signifies that our reactions are being controlled, not by reason, but by emotion. When emotions run high, it is the emotional brain that reacts first ('Is that a burglar I can hear?' – thumping heart) before reason cuts in ('no, it's the cat' – calming of heart-rate). Similarly, stories over the centuries have recognised that a state of high emotion can give rise to unprecedented physical strength. We need first to recognise and deal with the emotion of a situation before we can make rational decisions.

Literature Review

'Sustained effective leadership will be adversely affected by the power-stress aroused in the process of fulfilling the leadership role' (Boyatzis et al 2006, 9)

Leadership is stressful. School leadership calls for physical, emotional and intellectual energy.   (Harris 2007; West-Burnham 2009; Allen 2009). Flintham (2003a, 22) identifies the need for school leaders to have 'high levels of emotional resilience'. Definitions of resilience include references to persisting in the face of difficulty; maintaining hope against the odds; being optimistic; being courageous; having inner resourcefulness; showing the capacity to recover quickly from setbacks; having moral purpose. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) refer to the term resilience as being 'a convenient label to describe things that bounce back ' (2005, 1) and defines it as 'using your energy productively to emerge from adversity stronger than ever' (2005, 3). Barrett (2010, 399) describes resilience as 'the ability of an entity to withstand and bounce back from shocks that test its ability for continuous profitable functioning' adding that 'it is essential to invest in resilience'.   Although it is widely accepted that leadership development is synonymous with the development of the leader as a human being (Bennis 1997; Senge 2004; Harris 2007; West-Burnham 2009) much of the current literature on resilience for school leadership evaluates aspects of a school leader's role without evaluating the formative influences on individuals which may account for their different reactions to similar circumstances.

Well-being

 There is considerable agreement among headteachers concerning what impacts positively on their sense of well-being. A healthy work-life balance is frequently cited, along with pursuing other professional opportunities; time for reflection; and networking

with other headteachers (Flintham 2003a, 2003b, Pass, 2009, Patterson, 2006, Steward, 2011). These are all factors which can be regarded as 'activities' which require setting aside time for a particular purpose. Well-being is also influenced by attitude of mind, however. Having a sense of the significance of the role, appreciating the opportunity to make a difference to the lives of others and noticing and celebrating success (Pass 2009, Bristow 2010) are possible when individuals value their own work. When they also value themselves, they are in a stronger position to say 'no' and manage their own workload so that they are not at the beck and call of all stakeholders. The ability to set boundaries around their work helps them to put problems in perspective, rather than taking them personally. (Hartle et al 2010). Headteachers who are able to balance the need for the highest possible standards against the cost of excessive working to their own wellbeing are more likely to be able to settle for eighty percent perfect (Hartle, 2010) but this is clearly not easy to achieve in the climate of high accountability 'I am *sometimes* quite happy not having everything done perfectly' (Pass 2009, 9 – italics mine)

Management standards published by the UK's national Health and Safety executive (HSE 2011[online]) suggest promoting well-being is at least as valuable as avoiding stress. One of the aims of the Workforce Agreement made with the UK government in 2003 was to ensure well-being of the public sector workforce through better work-life balance. It includes headteachers' entitlement to 'dedicated headship time'. Over half of those who took part in the NAHT survey in 2008-09 did not take the dedicated headship time to which they were entitled (French 2009, 11). A survey of headteachers in two local authority areas showed a majority disagreeing with the statement 'I take care to look after my health and well-being'. (Steward 2011, 20) The same study found that, while 98% of headteachers considered emotional resilience important, 29% were able to identify strategies they used to support and develop their

own emotional resilience, which included retaining work/life balance. There appears to be a disconnect, then, between knowing what contributes to well-being, and taking positive action to support it.

Stress and burnout

Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize (2006) argue that the power stress associated with leadership adversely affects the leader's ability to sustain him or herself over time, and shows the benefits of coaching others as a means of maintaining compassion for self, which makes the role more sustainable.

If stress is inevitable, what is it that tips individuals into a state where they and/or others recognise that they cannot function effectively? Burnout is identified by Casserley and Megginson's (2009) as 'stress taken to the extreme of the long term resulting from being overwhelmed and exhausted by the pressure and volume of work' (2009, 16). The authors identify characteristics common to those who were able to cope with prolonged stress. They argue that it is not the situation that causes burnout, but how people choose to react, underlining the importance of mental attitude referred to above. Those who burned out were unable to stand back and reflect on what was happening to them. There was a sense of pride in working impossible hours and in belonging to a community of people who were living in the same way. Many of those researched were self-confessed perfectionists and had a strong need to prove something to themselves and others at work. They certainly would not have been happy to settle for the 'eighty percent perfect' model recommended by Hartle et al (2010). They felt their professional reputation was vulnerable and they were constantly worried about losing it. They seemed to lose their sense of self in the organisation, resulting in 'dysfunctional closeness' (Casserley and Megginson 2009, 77) which led them to agreeing to unreasonable demands. Burnout subjects had a strong need for accolades and they were willing to sacrifice their personal

life for the sake of satisfying that need. They had a fragile sense of self which relied heavily on external verification.   Their experience of failure was limited and they did not know how to deal with setbacks. They showed little of the 'compassion for self' which Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize (2006) refer to as ameliorating the impact of leadership stress.

Those who did not suffer from burnout were less concerned with recognition and more with the inherent challenge of their role. They had a sense of purpose which was not tied to their job. They were more able to adapt to changes in their surroundings; they were able to stand back and reflect on what was happening to them, they had a strong sense of internally referenced identity, and did not need to rely on external verification. They were proactive, investing energy in what was within their control – even if that was only their own behaviour.   The study focuses on middle managers in a commercial setting; what emerges is that reactions are character, rather than context specific.

Those who coped best with stress and avoided burnout had a greater degree of self-awareness and self-management than those who experienced burnout, suggesting a connection between these attributes (identified by Goleman (1998) as being essential for leadership) and resilience.

Self-management, Self-awareness, Self-confidence and Self-efficacy

The importance of self-management is highlighted in individuals' ability to deal with stress. Goleman (1998, 77-8) describes a series of experiments showing the impact of stress on the amygdala, which drives our emotional reactions and is generally controlled by the intervention of the part of the brain responsible for cognitive function.   Regular relaxation or meditation practice somehow appeared to re-calibrate the amygdala.

'This neural resetting gives us the ability to recover more quickly from amygdala hijacks while making us less prone to them in the first place. The net result is that we are susceptible to distress less often and our bouts are shorter' (Goleman 1998, 84).

Taking time away from the pressure of daily demands plays a role in sustaining leaders (Harris 2007; Casserley and Megginson 2009). If time-out is to be scheduled into the timetable of a busy headteacher, a degree of self-management is required to set up a virtuous cycle which promotes greater capacity for self-management.

Harris (2007) argues that the emotional competency model promoted by Goleman (1998) is not sufficient. We may learn emotionally intelligent ways to behave, but without what she calls 'deep inner awareness' (p5) our behaviour is an act, contrived to mask our shadow side. The 'act' may have a positive impact on the culture of the organisation, but there is a cost to the leader which increases with the increased discrepancy between what is actually felt and how the leader has learned to behave (Humphrey, 2012). Harris outlines the importance of gaining deep self-knowledge which involves embracing not just those aspects of our personality that are culturally acceptable, but also

'the more neglected aspects of self, such as the vulnerable self that is hidden behind learned defences and the shadow self (Jung and von Franz 1964) that is often denied until it erupts in protest at times of stress to damage self and others' (Harris 2007, 51).

Self-awareness has an impact on self-confidence, the absence of which, maintains Goleman (1998, 69) 'can manifest itself in feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and crippling self-doubt'. Real self-confidence (as distinct from brashness or arrogance) must be aligned with reality, which heightens the need for self-awareness. Self-

confidence is seen as being closely aligned with self-efficacy: '… we have to have belief in our skills in order to use them at their best' (Goleman1998, 70).

The importance of self-belief, linked to self-acceptance and efficacy is the basis of the work of Clarkson (1994), Kets de Vries (2006) and others in their acknowledgement of what is often called 'imposter syndrome', said to be the explanation for the number of high-performing individuals who find it difficult to accept their own competence. While resilience may be linked to moral purpose (Day and Schmidt, 2007) the capacity for resilience will be undermined if the person responsible for its realisation is constantly waiting to be discovered as an imposter. An individual's capacity to act is only as strong as s/he will allow it to be.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) identify personal efficacy as one of three key elements which underpin resilience in school leaders. The authors summarise 6 strengths of resilient school leaders. They

1. Accurately assess past and current reality
2. Are positive about future possibilities
3. Are clear about what matters most in the hierarchy of values
4. Maintain a strong sense of personal efficacy
5. Invest personal energy wisely
6. Act on the courage of personal convictions (Patterson and Kelleher 2005, 147)

These strengths demand that individuals to take control of their own reaction to events, underlining the importance of self-management.

Self-awareness combined with self-management allows leaders to invest their energy in the 'act' of emotional labour (Humphrey 2012) which allows them to behave in line with

the cultural norms of the system in which they are operating. At a deeper level, it is self-**acceptance** which allows them to recognise that they may not always be able to live up to their own ideals and to show self-compassion when they fail to do so. (Kets de Vries 2006, Harris 2007, Walker 2007). In common with all adults, leaders may be constrained by childhood 'conditions of worth' (Mearns and Thorne 1999: 8) Their capacity for resilience will be adversely affected if they do not recognise the unconscious injunctions which they have internalised and make a choice concerning whether to accept or reject them.

Values and Moral Purpose

Values play a key role in sustaining individuals in their work: when we have 'making a difference' as one of our core values, and our work allows us to do that, work is more satisfying (Bristow, Ireson and Coleman 2007; Goleman 1998; West-Burnham 2009) All interviewees in the Patterson and Kelleher (2005) study were clear that personal values were at the heart of dealing with adversity and coming out stronger. Values, the authors suggest, are 'the well-spring of spiritual energy' which contributes to resilience' (2005, 110). Describing schools as 'places for givers' (p117) they caution school leaders to 'guard against the debilitating effects of ceaseless energy expenditure without adequate recovery periods (2005, 131).

Barrett (1998) has more to say about the place of values in leadership. His seven-levels of leadership consciousness model (see Figure 1) has much to offer school leaders.

The highest levels of 'making a difference' and 'service' are surely the natural territory of school leaders, where 'moral purpose' resides. Moral purpose is sometimes seen as the foundation of, or even synonymous with, resilience (Day and Schmidt 2007)

and it is easy to see that having faith in the rightness of the cause will give individuals greater confidence and conviction to pursue their goals.

Human Needs	Personal Motivation	Seven Levels of Human Consciousness		
Spiritual	Service	Service	7	Common good
	Make a Difference	Make a Difference	6	
	Meaning	Meaning	5	
Mental	Personal Growth Achievement	Transformation	4	
Emotional	Self-esteem	Self-esteem	3	Self-interest
	Relationships	Relationship	2	
Physical	Health/Safety	Security	1	

Figure 1: Relationship of Human Needs and Personal Motivation to the Seven Levels of Human Consciousness. (Barrett 1998, 61 used with permission)

Barrett (1998), puts a counter argument. He suggests that there are two selves within each of us: the survival self and the soul self. The model aligns the survival self with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We focus our attention on these levels in order to ensure our survival. Only when we stop fearing that we will not survive are we able to focus fully on the demands of the soul self, which yearns to make a positive difference to humanity and the planet. Fear undermines our ability to give our whole self – our agency. As we leave fear behind we are more able to focus our attention on the self-actualisation needs of the soul self. Sustaining the survival self is necessary if we are to live out the values of the soul self. The unique contribution of Barrett's model is to legitimise focus on the self, often ignored by school leaders, in favour of focus on the school community:

'I sacrifice my happiness to what is good for the school. I am paid to get results.' (female secondary head, semi-rural context); 'To be honest, it's a huge guilt thing. You feel you

have such a huge responsibility in looking after the team' (female primary head, semi-rural context) (Pass 2009, 11).

Barrett suggests that we need to pay attention to all levels of consciousness; gaps in the lower levels may inhibit an individual's capacity to achieve at the higher levels. He further argues that aligning individual and organisational values allows individuals to work more productively within the organisation. When our survival needs (physical and emotional) are not met, we unconsciously act out of fear.

Understanding our deepest fears is seen by Harris (2007) as a moral imperative, if we are to lead others without our relationships being tainted by unmet needs of our childhood. Only when leaders have a deep understanding and acceptance of self can they act with authenticity, which allows them to move beyond the ego and fosters trust and authority (Covey 2006, Harris 2007). These attributes are in increasing demand as the UK education system moves towards a new model of leadership where leaders take responsibility for the education system beyond their own school to make a difference to the wider system (Hopkins 2007)

The idea of moving beyond ego (levels 1-3) to take an aerial overview of the school (levels 5-7: making a difference) exemplifies Barrett's model (Fig. 1). He sees our personalities as lying somewhere between the ego self (driven by fear) and the soul self (driven by love). When the needs of the ego self are satisfied, our attention can shift to the needs of the soul self, which is where real self-actualisation resides.

'The true test of how far you have progressed on your leadership journey is how you handle adversity. When adversity strikes, do you descend into fear and react with I-based behaviours or pause, consider what's best for the common good, and respond with understanding and compassion?' (Barrett 2010,138)

.'For us, therefore, there is a moral responsibility and an ethical imperative to know ourselves, not for our own benefit but for the benefit of our followers. And not only to know ourselves but to be free from our selves' (Walker 2007: 47).

Methodology

Casserley and Megginson (2009) and Patterson and Kelleher (2005) highlight the importance of interpretation of external factors in driving an individual's response. The degree to which an individual feels able to cope will determine his or her response to external factors. Emotional resilience can be judged only subjectively, thus there was a need to understand the impact of external factors from the viewpoint of different individuals. An initial online survey in three local authorities resulted in forty-nine responses. The results (Steward 2011) were used to inform the second stage of the research. Semi-structured hour-long interviews were carried out with six headteachers who were not part of the initial research (4 from schools for pupils up to the age of 11; and 2 from schools for pupils aged 11-16/11-18). Two interviewees were selected to coincide with each of the three sets of length-of-service criteria used in the previous survey. Their actual experience ranged from 5 months to 27 years.

Interviewees were slightly or well-known to the researcher, a positive move to accelerate rapport (McConell-Henry et al. 2010). Questionnaire and interview results allowed comparisons to be made between responses from more and less experienced headteachers. Interviews afforded the opportunity to probe beyond the surface issues raised by responses to questionnaires to explore further the internal story: what leads individuals to interpret an event as stressful and damaging or not, and what accounts for the variety of responses to these events. Full transcripts were made of each interview to

allow close scrutiny of language which may give an insight into unconscious thoughts and feelings.

Findings

For ease of reference, each headteacher is defined by a number. The characteristics associated with each headteacher and their school are set out below.

Table I: Key to headteacher references used in the text						
Head-teacher	Age	Time in current headship	No. of headships	M/F	Phase (age of pupils)	Last Ofsted judgement*
1	< 35	8 months	1	F	First School (5-8)	good
2	35-45	5 months	1	M	Secondary (11-16)	special measures
3	46-55	3+ years	1	F	Infant (4-7)	notice to improve
4	46-55	2+ years	2	F	Primary (5-11)	good
5	46-55	12 years	2	F	Primary (5-11)	outstanding
6	56-65	27 years	1	M	Secondary (11-18)	outstanding
Ofsted scale: low to high: special measures; notice to improve; satisfactory; good; outstanding						

Without doubt, headship demands emotional resilience: 98% of respondents to the survey which prefaced the interviews strongly agreed; all those interviewed felt it was vital; the literature underlines it; the stressful nature of the headship role is well documented. What I wanted to explore through interviews was the degree to which the personality, experience, behaviour and outlook of each headteacher has an impact on his or her resilience and how their beliefs about themselves and their world affects their ability to sustain the role.

Rather than providing my own definition of emotional resilience which was presented to interviewees, I asked each individual to define what they meant by emotional resilience so that I had an understanding of the concept from their perspective.

The language they used in the definition reveals differences in interviewees' standpoint. HTs 1,3, 5 and 6 all think of emotional resilience as something which allows them to maintain a course without malfunction. HT2's response suggests an element of defensiveness ('how tough you are – how hard') while the language of HT4 suggests she feels herself under attack

'… that ability to withstand the slings and arrows of misfortune – what armoury you have. Some people have really good armour and some people have good defensive systems, but it's really what works for you' (HT4)

This headteacher had had a recent period of absence from work through stress. Her rating of her own resilience on a ten point scale is lower than that of other headteachers, and the language she uses denotes a feeling of being under siege.

Actions and behaviour which support or undermine emotional resilience in school leaders

Interpretation of the role

All new leaders must establish credibility in order to gain the trust of those whom they would lead. Communities and individuals have different expectations of the behaviour of a credible headteacher. It was evident from the interviews that tuning-in to those expectations was an important part of gaining trust, and that there was a danger in colluding with unrealistic expectations.   Looking back on his early experiences, the longest-serving headteacher referred to being new in role and '… trying to establish their credibility … you try to be all things to all people and you are afraid people will see it as a sign of weakness if you haven't got certain skills. .. I've realised that the sensible people do not expect perfection' (HT6). After 12 years in her current school, HT5 was

aware of others' expectations and that these vary, depending on the context. She had learned consciously to adjust her behaviour and choose whether to meet those expectations. In a school she was supporting, which had recently been judged by inspectors as inadequate, parents were feeling let down and anxious and HT5 realised that – at this stage – she just had to fix a smile, go into the playground at the end of the first day and ask them to express their anxieties. In the initial stages the community needed a figure on which to project their anxieties in order not to blame themselves for sending their children to an inadequate school. Once trust was established, the headteacher experienced a more positive reaction from parents.

Ironically, credibility of others is at its most fragile when a headteacher can expect to feel least competent in the role. Some of the issues that emerged from the interviews as being a pressure at the beginning of a new headship were those which are associated with any new job in school: developing relationships, getting to know routines and understanding others' expectations, for example. Additional pressures associated exclusively with the leadership role were identified as

- evaluating the needs of the school, which in the case of both HTs 1 and 2, turned out to be different from their expectations
- learning who in the leadership team has the required skills to contribute effectively to the development of the school, so allowing appropriate delegation
- being ultimately and publicly accountable for the school's performance

It is clear from the stories they told, that first-time headteachers are potentially the most vulnerable: they face the same challenges of interacting with a new community as any headteacher does when new in post, but with the added pressure of finding themselves ultimately accountable for the first time and having no previous successful

headship to support their own and others' perceptions of their credibility. In the case of the current study, those newest in headship were also at similar stages of their lives, but their reactions to the demands of the new role differed. While trying to establish credibility, HT1 acknowledged the danger of overwork at the start of a new headship: 'when you want to make an impression, it's easy to drop into a real "work work work work" scenario' and of colluding inappropriately with others' expectations, which were frequently based on their experience of how the previous headteacher did or did not behave. HT2 was conscious of his term-time schedule taking its toll, but did not let-up, driven by the need to move the school out of special measures in a short space of time. All interviewees expressed moments of self-doubt. When headteachers do not feel themselves to be credible, it is easy for moments of self-doubt to gain more of a hold and impact negatively on their behaviour – which can then undermine their credibility.

Workload is an issue that is frequently identified as having a negative impact on resilience. It was cited by 70% of the 2011 survey respondents as a factor in undermining resilience as well as by all but the longest-serving headteacher interviewed. The fact that over half of those who took part in the NAHT survey in 2008-09 did not take advantage of 'dedicated headship time' which was a feature of the 2003 Workload Agreement suggests that for some reason headteachers do not perceive this as an entitlement which they are able/have a right to take advantage of. Awareness and the best of intentions do not secure outcomes which are in the long-term interests of the individual.

Emotional challenges identified by more than half of the interviewees which remain to a greater or lesser extent, regardless of time served, were

- public accountability (though the impact of this on individuals varied)

- dealing with personnel, safety or child protection issues (all interviewees)

- having responsibility without full control (i.e. working through others)

- isolation of the role (all interviewees)

- the need to be positive/resilient for others (HTs 1, 3, 5 and 6)

- being a target for the projection of others' anger or anxiety (HTs 1, 3, 5 and 6)

- workload (HTs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)

All interviewees felt that their emotional resilience had grown through the experience of doing the job, sometimes referring to particular skills which had developed, such as time-management and prioritising strategic issues.   It is clear from the interviews and the survey, however, that there is not a direct correlation between confidence and time-serving.   In the survey, a greater proportion of long-serving headteachers strongly agreed with the statement 'I worry I am not good enough' when compared with those who had been in headship for fewer than 10 years.

Well-being

Literature and research make a connection between well-being and managing stress. Several interviewees referred to taking action to ensure a healthy lifestyle as a feature of what supports their own emotional resilience.   HT2 was aware of the impact of tiredness on his own capability. Though he had had a health scare, the over-demanding pace of his work continued, albeit coupled with a resolution to go away with his family every other weekend.   HT3 had not always executed her plan for regular exercise and HT5's interview suggests that the need to pay attention to well-being may be something that simply slips out of consciousness.

Headteachers who are proactive in taking measures to support their own well-being are demonstrating two of the strengths of resilient leaders as defined by Patterson

and Kelleher (2005): they maintain a sense of personal efficacy and invest personal energy wisely.

What is it, then, that prevents all headteachers from behaving in this way? They know the theory of keeping themselves at their best: why not simply take those measures? Do they not care? Do they have an unconscious desire to self-destruct? Do they think themselves invincible?

Answers to these questions are complex. As human beings we are frequently capable of defeating our best long-term interests by serving our immediate needs even though we know that that may lead to difficulties in the future. For headteachers, looking after themselves may frequently seem like a distraction from looking after everybody else. HT2 was under additional pressure from being new to leading a school in special measures. HT3's school had been given 'notice to improve' (a rating one step above the 'failing school' judgement which necessitates special measures). After 3+ years in the role, her experience can hardly be compared with that of HT2; nevertheless, her account suggests a more balanced approach to success in the role. She had acknowledged at the outset the negative impact on the school if she overworked.

Self-awareness, self-management and self-confidence

From the literature review emerges the premise that the emotional intelligence attributes of self-awareness, self-management and self-confidence are important in leadership and play a part in sustaining emotional resilience; and that a deep sense of self-awareness as well as self-acceptance are necessary if leaders are to avoid putting themselves under unreasonable pressure. HT2 had learned to accept the 'possibility of failure' and saw new opportunities which such a situation would reveal. HT3 acknowledged that she might have misjudged her own capability and was able to accept that possibility, telling

herself 'if you can make a difference, that's brilliant, but equally, don't give yourself a life sentence' (HT3) She had realistic expectations of herself.   She was able to manage and prioritise her own needs, acknowledging the potential impact of absenteeism through stress: 'If I arrived full of vision and excitement and everyone thinks 'great' then I go off sick. That's the worst thing …' (HT3).   HT1, new in headship, was able to prioritise her own needs, acknowledging the potential impact of over-work 'if I go off sick, the whole school will be just like "what is going on?" and it's just the knock on effect, as well, on everybody else'.

The headteacher who had scored herself lowest on the scale of emotional resilience acknowledged later that she had not heeded the warning signs which preceded her panic attack. 'I was constantly tired .. lack of sleep during the week and spending the weekends sleeping. I think your body's saying: "you're exhausted; something's not right here"'. Her self-awareness and self-management had been low. In a school judged by Ofsted as good, she put herself under pressure with an expectation that she should be able to 'fix everything'.   Realistic self-awareness requires self-acceptance and an acknowledgement of what is possible.

Early influences

In an attempt to understand something of what had formed the self-image of these headteachers and their self-acceptance, I asked about their early experiences. HT1 paints a picture of a secure family background. 'I had loads of support from my family'. HT3 spoke movingly about the support she had from her family, and the impact of her father dying when she was 16. 'there was never a moment when I asked myself "am I loved? Am I not loved?" So cared for, wanted and supported and I think, looking at the nurture needs our children have, I think that's the key'. She judged herself to be 'more resilient

than average' and identified a 'lucky personality' and a nurturing accepting childhood as being two contributory factors, as well as strong support and the ability to keep things in perspective.

HT4's story revealed expectations in childhood of high standards of academic achievement, epitomised by moving from one country's education system to another in order find appropriate academic rigour. She was aware that she now focuses more on her failures than on her successes. Her inability to reduce the pressure on herself, even when she was exhausted, is easy to understand in the light of expectations in her early life. HT5 described her positivity as stemming from the role models in early childhood where there was a strong work ethic and 'we didn't do ill. Sometimes I don't know whether I'm a good role model to other people'. HT6 was born to a family living in social housing and attended one of the top selective schools in the region. This was an unusual achievement for its time and put him in a position of challenging the status quo, a role which he has adopted in adult life when he has felt it necessary. He identified the roots of his self-acceptance: 'In our family you never pretended to be what you weren't. We never denied who we were'.

The different degrees of self-acceptance which were evident in the interviewees are part of the human condition. Those who have not accepted their shadow-side (Harris 2007) will not be able to value those aspects which they want to remain hidden; they will hide those aspects even from themselves and use energy hiding them from others. Those who are unable to value themselves equally with others are not able to put their own needs first. Equally, in their leadership role, they will be leading those whose shadow-side must be kept from view. They may unconsciously pick up and carry the projections of others that resonate with their own worst fears. The less conscious we are of our own fears, the harder it is to avoid carrying the projections of others.

Values and moral purpose

The desire which most school leaders articulate to 'make a difference' and the knowledge that they are in a position to do so sustains them in the role. 'We have a mission to narrow this gap in attainment between them and everyone else and anything else that gets in the way of that is exactly that – it is IN THE WAY – and we have to plough on through' said HT3, sharing her long-standing commitment to social justice. More resilient headteachers remember to stand back and remind themselves of the benefits of the job. 'On one of my bad days, I'll go and sit in Reception for half an hour: that's all I need just to bring me back down to why I wanted to be a head' (HT1). A strong commitment to their educational values and core purpose can also so dominate a headteacher's thinking that his or her own needs slip out of sight. Combined with a lack of real self-awareness that includes self-acceptance, strong moral purpose can actually undermine resilience. Describing a lifestyle which included 4-5 hours of sleep a night, irregular or absent meals and little contact with his young daughter, HT2 acknowledged 'When you reflect on it, that isn't a fantastic life' but felt driven to behave in that way because the school was in special measures, progress had been almost non-existent before his arrival, and he was determined to make a success of the job. He, too, had taken time off because of ill-health: a suspected heart attack had led to hospitalisation. The cause was found to be an infection, which he felt was a result of a weakened immune system because of his lifestyle. It was still 'an underlying concern' which in turn he recognised was likely to have a negative impact on his emotional resilience.

Barrett (1998) argues that we all have a need to contribute to the lives of others, whether or not we are conscious of that need. His Seven Levels of Consciousness model (Fig. 1) also shows that we cannot fulfil our desire if we consistently fail to pay attention to our own needs. Two of the interviewees specifically commented on this connection.
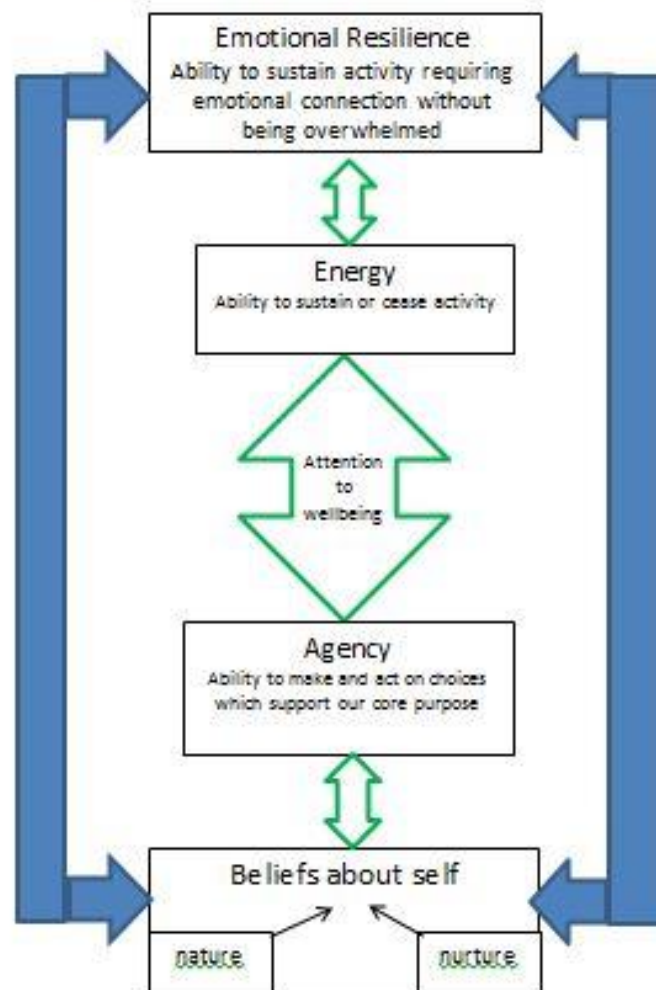
Conclusions and Recommendations

The building and sustaining of emotional resilience depends upon a complex web of inter-related experience, reflection and learning. My intention in conducting interviews was to explore what it is that enables some headteachers to ride the waves of the emotional ups and downs of the job while others go under. The literature review suggests that some headteachers might engage in self-defeating patterns of thought and behaviour and that this was a feature also of those suffering from burnout. My key findings relate to the beliefs that headteachers hold about themselves and the demands and rewards of headship, how these beliefs affect behaviour, and whether headteachers can choose to change.

The interviews revealed that headteachers have a variety of responses to their role. All are driven by a commitment to make a positive difference to the lives of others, which is often described as 'moral purpose'. All are subject to the demands of their community, the pressures of public accountability and constant messages from the UK government via the media that the education system is failing young people.

At its simplest, emotional resilience is the ability to sustain activity involving emotional connection without being overwhelmed. To sustain or cease activity requires energy. Energy alone is not sufficient: it must be purposefully directed, so a sense of agency is required to make choices which sustain energy. It is difficult to sustain a sense of agency without energy. Energy and agency are thus in a mutually supportive and strengthening relationship which in turn strengthen, and are strengthened by, emotional resilience. However our ability to make choices and stay true to ourselves is affected by our own knowledge and beliefs about ourselves: the extent to which we perceive ourselves as having value, for example. If we do not see ourselves as of equal value to others, we will find it hard to prioritise our own needs. If our ability to function in the

world depends on our believing in our own omnipotence, we will not acknowledge

anything which we regard as weakness in ourselves.   The extent to which we value

ourselves unconditionally depends in the first instance upon nature and nurture and on

our ability to reinforce or challenge our own sense of self-worth.   The degree to which

leaders' own behaviour supports or undermines their emotional resilience depends on

their ability to make and act on choices which contribute positively to their long-term

goals. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Inter-relations affecting emotional resilience: model by Steward (2012)

Emotional Resilience
Ability to sustain activity requiring emotional connection without being overwhelmed

Energy
Ability to sustain or cease activity

Attention to wellbeing

Agency
Ability to make and act on choices which support our core purpose

Beliefs about self

nature   nurture

There is nothing about this model that applies uniquely to headteachers: it reflects the human condition. As human beings we are both affected by and affect our environment. We need also to look at headteachers' context to gain the full picture.

Headteachers operate in a climate of high public accountability and relentless drive for improvement which, according to the Secretary of State, must be carried with 'fierce urgency' (DfE 2010, 4). Even the word 'fierce' implies aggression. If individuals can project their needs and anxieties on to others, so can society. What better vessel to contain the anxieties and insecurities of society concerning the prosperity of a nation which rests upon future generations, than the role of headteacher? The role may be the only figure of authority which is common to all lives. Headteachers are charged first and foremost with raising standards and ensuring the skills of tomorrow's workforce. There is hardly a whisper of the needs of headteachers to take care of themselves so that they are in a position to carry out their role. Headteachers who already have a belief that they may not be good enough - just like the standards in our schools - quickly pick up on the projections of others, thus confirming their own self-image. None of us exists in isolation; headteachers affect and are affected by the system in which they work. This needs to be acknowledged.

Recommendations

The Barrett model (Figure 1) highlights the consciousness of values driven by fear and values driven by love. Barrett also argues that aligning cultural and personal values leads to greater social capital. Individual headteachers, teachers and schools do their best to promote a climate where learning can take place, risks can be taken and mistakes made in a culture of safety and acceptance. At the same time, demands from the society and the voice of government promote a climate which is anything but safe and accepting. Not only do headteachers operate in this climate, many also take on responsibility for

shielding their school community from its effects. So strong is the culture of relentless drive for improvement, that many headteachers will find it difficult to accept my thesis: that what is required to sustain and strengthen strong and confident leadership is a change in the climate within which education operates, from one which is fiercely judgemental to one which acknowledges that the challenges of education cannot be isolated from the challenges of society, and provides the resources necessary to support headteachers in their relentless pursuit of providing the best education possible for every child.   In short, the government and society should create for all headteachers a climate which replicates that in the best schools.

Practical steps that should be taken are

- Raise the profile of emotional resilience and continue the debate: the term appears in government-sponsored literature without a clear definition of what is meant
- Pay greater attention to the importance of developing emotional resilience in leadership development programmes; make use of techniques such as meditation, mindfulness or awareness and where appropriate, learned optimism
- Involve governors in supporting headteachers to undertake a regular risk-analysis regarding their own emotional resilience, and in devising a plan to maintain it at times of greatest risk
- Develop a new approach to promoting well-being which goes beyond practical quick-fix solutions and acknowledges and addresses the challenge headteachers face in putting themselves first

- Continue to promote coaching for headteachers to provide a professional, non-judgemental, confidential environment in which they can take time out to reflect and express any feelings of vulnerability

- Agree a longer-term approach to education policy-making in order to guard against the impact of constant and rapid changes in policy with changing governments.   Policy-makers should give greater voice to the profession and to researchers in the field.

References

Allen, W. 2009. The Heart of the Head. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

ATL, DfES, GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NEOST, PAT, et al. 2003. "Raising Standards and Tackling Workload."

Barrett, R. 1998. Liberating the Corporate Soul. Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Barrett, R. 2010. The New Leadership Paradigm. US and UK: The Values Centre.

Bennis, W. J. 1997. Learning to Lead. London: Nicholas Brealey.

Boyatzis, R., R. Smith, and M. Blaize. 2006. "Developing Sustainable Leaders through Coaching and Compassion." Academy of Management Learning and Education 5 (1): 8–24.

Bristow, M., G. Ireson, and A. Coleman. 2007. A Life in the Day of a Headteacher. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

Casserley, T., and D. Megginson. 2009. Learning from Burnout. Oxford: Elsevier.

Clarkson, P. 1994. The Achilles Syndrome. Shaftesbury: Element.

Covey, S. 2006. The Speed of Trust. London: Simon & Schuster UK.

Day, C., A. Edwards, A. Griffiths, and Q. Gu. 2011. Beyond Survival: Teachers and Resilience. Economic and Social Research Council Seminar series. Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Day, C., and M. Schmidt. 2007. "Sustaining Resilience." In Developing Sustainable Leadership, edited by Brent Davies, 65–86. London: Sage.

Department for Education (DfE). 2010. The Importance of Teaching. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES). 2004. National Standards for Headteachers. London: HMSO.

Flintham, A. 2003a. Reservoirs of Hope. Nottingham: NCSL.

Flintham, A. 2003b. When Reservoirs Run Dry. Nottingham: NCSL.

French, S. 2009. "The NAHT Work-Life Balance Survey 2008–09."

Goleman, D. 1998. Working with Emotional Intelligence. London: Bloomsbury.

Harris, B. 2007. Supporting the Emotional Work of School Leaders. London: Sage.

Hartle, F., J. Stein, R. Hobby, and M. O'Sullivan. 2010. Retaining School Leaders. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE). 2011. "What Are Management Standards?"

Hopkins, D. 2007. "Sustaining Leaders for System Change." In Developing Sustainable Leadership, edited by Brent Davies, 154–174. London: Sage.

Humphrey, R. 2012. "How Do Leaders Use Emotional Labor?" Journal of Organizational

Behaviour 33 (5): 740–744. Kets de Vries, M. 2006. The Leader on the Couch. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

McConnell-Henry, T., A. James, Y. Chapman, and K. Francis. 2009–2010. "Researching with People You Know." Contemporary Nurse 34 (1): 2–9.

Mearns, D., and B. Thorne. 1999. Person Centred Counselling in Action. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL). 2010. Executive Heads. Nottingham: NCSL.

Pass, J. 2009. It's Life, but Not as We Know it. Nottingham: NCSL.

Patterson, F. 2006. New Models of Headship. Nottingham: NCSL.

Patterson, J. L., and P. Kelleher. 2005. Resilient School Leaders: Strategies for Turning Adversity
into Achievement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Senge, P., P. Scharmer, J. Jaworski, and B. Flowers. 2004. Presence. Cambridge, MA: Society of Organisational Learning.

Steward, J. 2011. "Sustaining and Developing Emotional Resilience for School Leadership." Unpublished postgraduate diploma essay, College of St Mark and St John.

Steward, J. 2012. "Sustaining and Developing Emotional Resilience for School Leadership." Masters diss., University of Plymouth, College of St Mark and St John.

TES/ASCL. 2012. "Climate of Fear Eats the Soul." TES, March 23.

Walker, R. 2007. Leading Out of Who You Are. Carlisle: Piquant Editions.

West-Burnham, J. 2009. Rethinking Educational Leadership. London: Continuum International.