research in practice

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SWORD workbook:

KFP 1 Secure Base

Dartington

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.

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)
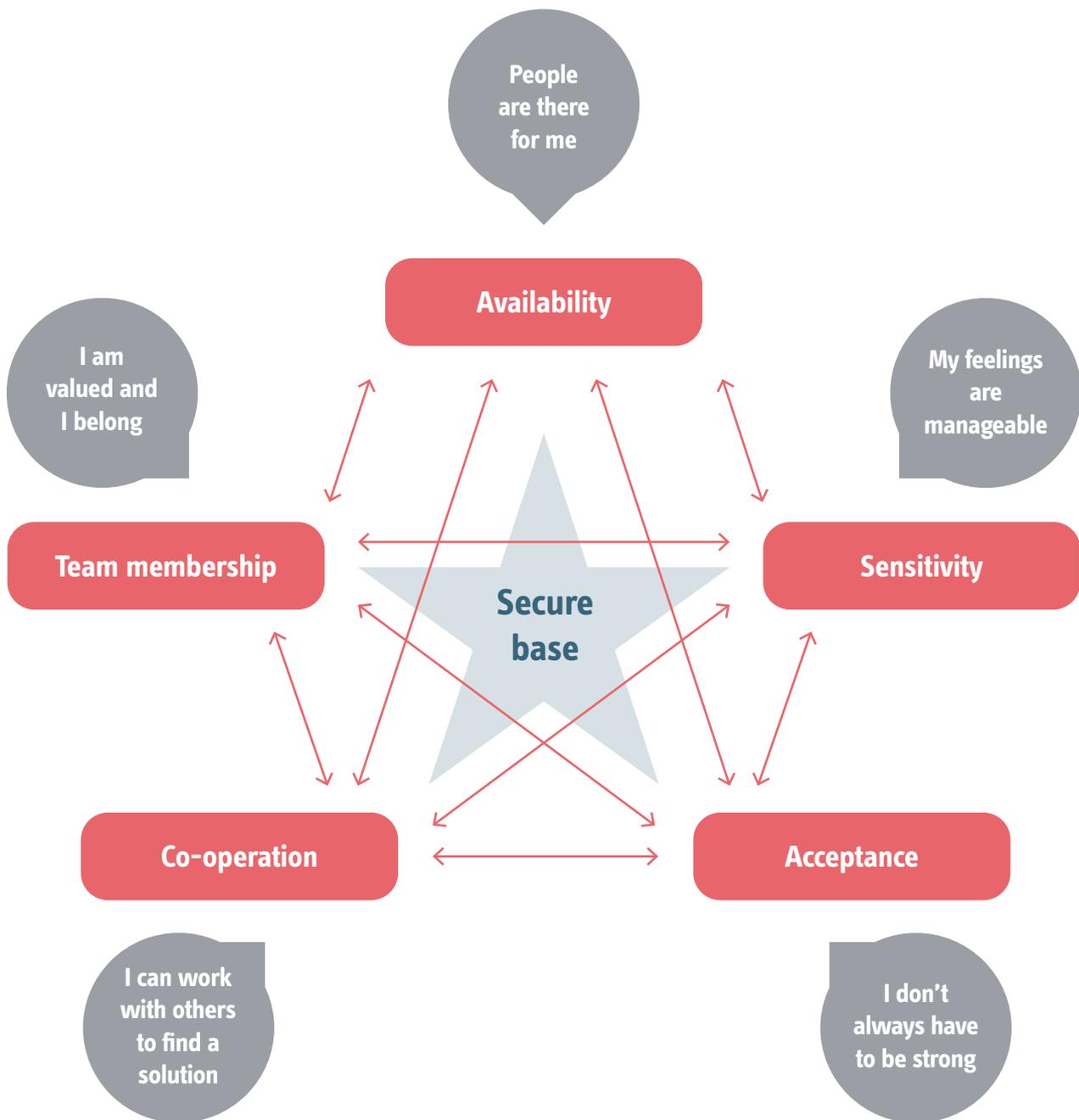
Knowing yourself: enhancing emotional literacy as a leadership trait

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.

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 boundaried 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 (Trougakos & 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.

Take stock of the main sources of workplace pressure

Where is the stress / burnout risks?

Where is the positive energy coming from?

What is the impact of your own style?

What is the impact of personal resilience?

What actions can be taken to strengthen team resilience?

Confidence Collective confidence in leaders and team

Purpose Shared sense of purpose and values

Adaptability Team as a unit equipped to respond in an adaptable way

Social support Mutual giving and receiving of social support with the team

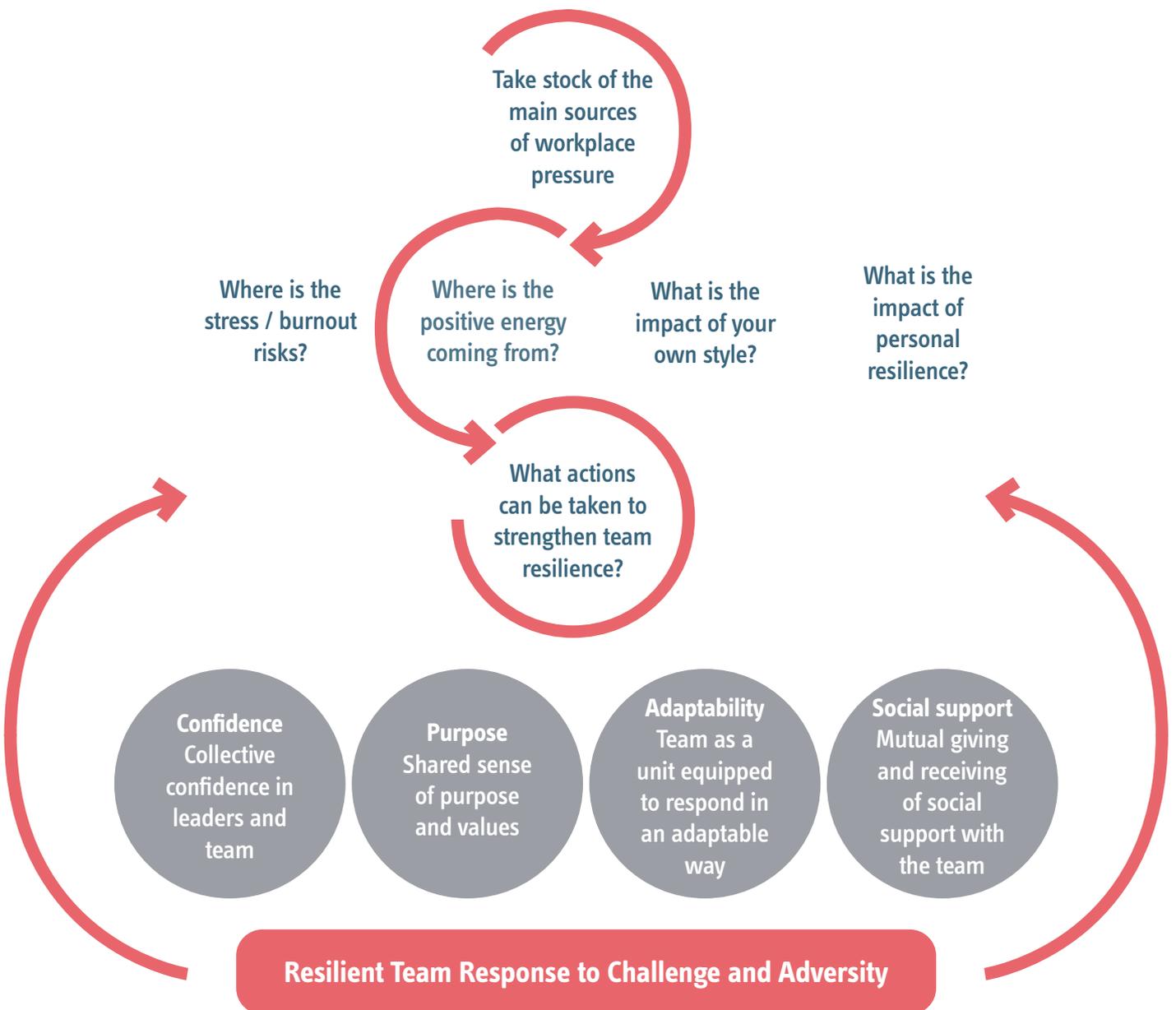**Resilient Team Response to Challenge and Adversity**

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.