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SCHOOL CULTURE, SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

From the Deputy Executive Director

Culture is becoming an increasingly important focus for Australian companies and not-for-profit organisations. In an address[1] to a luncheon in Melbourne this year Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) Chairman Greg Medcraft reflected on the importance of culture in building and maintaining trust. He defined culture as "…a set of shared values and assumptions within an organisation. It reflects the underlying 'mindset of an organisation', the 'unwritten rules' for how things really work. It works silently in the background to direct how an organisation and its staff think, make decisions and actually behave."

Medcraft went on to affirm the critical nature of culture in the changing landscape organisations are operating in. He told the audience: "Creating a sustainable business today is not only about the quality of the product or service that is delivered. It is also about the quality of a firm's conduct, both internally and externally. If the culture and values of a business are not aligned with customer outcomes, it is easy to see how a trust deficit will emerge, and this will impact its long-term sustainability."

Culture is an area of emerging importance in Australia's corporate governance landscape. It's easy to understand why when the media regularly feature stories about the failure of corporate culture and the impact this has on consumer and investor confidence and corporate organisational performance.

But culture is not only a focus for profit-making businesses. It's also of critical significance to the work of not-for-profits (NFPs). Organisational culture is explored in some depth in the Australian Institute of Company Director's (AICD) 2017 NFP Governance and Performance Study[2]. NFP directors were asked to "rate their organisation's emphasis on culture and to evaluate their performance in managing it within their organisations."

The findings are insightful. The study found that while "directors believe their organisations have positive cultures"

more than half of those surveyed said "culture at their organisation is not being monitored well and only one third say their board is actively overseeing culture."

In the independent schooling sector, a school's culture, or its "feel", can play an important role in parental decision-making. According to Independent Schools Queensland's (ISQ) *What Parents Want*[3] 2015 survey report findings the most compelling factors that influence school choice by parents include good discipline and high quality teachers. But the report also noted that "equally less tangible factors may be influential" with parents "often reported as saying the school just 'felt right.'"

Culture should be a standing item on the agenda for school governing bodies. It has never been more important for schools to be clear about their mission and values, particularly as they seek to chart a course of sustainability in a world where the challenges of competition, funding, technology and success intersect with the changing world landscape.

In the ISQ commissioned research paper *Board effectiveness and school success: where do the twain meet?*[4] governance authority Elizabeth Jameson says "it is widely understood that in all organisations in the not-for-profit sector, boards are responsible for setting the overarching vision and strategy and for determining

1. http://asic.gov.au/about-asic/media-centre/speeches/the-importance-of-corporate-culture-gilbert-plus-tobin-board-luncheon/
2. https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/advocacy/research/2017-nfp-governance-and-performance-study
3. https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_ReportsSurveys/WhatparentswantkeyfindingsPrint2015.pdf
4. https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_GovernanceReports/15_BoardEffectivenessSchoolSuccess.pdf

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The principal is both the keeper of culture and the driver of success at the operational level.

appropriate performance measures linked to it."

This is echoed in the AICD publication *Good Governance Principles and Guidance for Not-for-Profit Organisations*[5], which states in its principles that boards are responsible for setting the vision, strategy, culture and ethics of their organisations.

If we accept that "culture is how people behave when no one is looking", how does a school board go about setting the tone for its school and the behaviour of its leaders and employees? And how does this play out in how the board determines and monitors school success and the ongoing sustainability of the school?

The ISQ commissioned report series *Exploring Effective School Governance*[6] examined the role and importance of effective school governance and the contribution it makes to supporting and sustaining a healthy independent school. The central assumption of the research was that "an effective school board implementing effective school governance, will lead to a successful school." The fundamental question for boards then becomes "do boards accept and believe that ultimately, they are responsible for school success?" If so, what mechanisms and processes must be in place to ensure "school success", and how does these incorporate and "live" the culture of the school?

Schools will often have aspirational vision and mission statements that reflect their view of "success" and their commitment to improving the future lives of their students. But as Jameson asks in the paper *Board effectiveness and school success: where do the twain meet?*[4] "how do schools ensure that they deliver on their promises, and how do they satisfy themselves of their school's 'success' when measured against such promises?"

Jameson developed five questions to assist boards in determining their school's success in delivering on their commitments:

1. **Is there an articulated picture of school success that is agreed by board and principal?**

2. **Does the board have a clear and agreed view of the attributes or components of success, and explicit strategies for achieving their view of success?**

3. **Has the board agreed and articulated how it will evaluate "success" in terms of academic, co-curricular, school culture, financial performance and any other agreed aspects of success?**

4. **Has the board developed a clear communication strategy for engaging (both listening to and keeping informed) the communities of interest associated with their school?**

5. **Does the board have independent avenues for verifying and checking whether its understanding of the success of the school and that of the principal, matches that of the key communities of interest associated with the school?**

The link between the board and the "success" of the school lies with the role of the principal. As the key, and often the only, employee of the board, the principal is both the keeper of culture and the driver of success at the operational level. But that doesn't mean the board is a passive participant. According to Jameson, quite the opposite is true: "The board is responsible for appointing and keeping the principal, and then working with the principal to articulate the goals and ethos of the school, indeed it is true that ultimately school success depends on how well the board does its job."

As Jameson summarises in the paper, it comes down to the school board reaching a clear understanding of the meaning of school "success" for its school, taking responsibility to set and evaluate progress against the goals that will drive the achievement of school success and working to populate the board table with the right mix of people to help achieve these goals.

To support boards to fulfil these core responsibilities, ISQ worked with Jameson to develop the Good School Governance Pledge (see page 3) which details eight key "promises" that boards may adopt as a self-regulatory code of good school governance. The Pledge identifies critical characteristics and key deliverables of "effective boards". These include cultural custodianship, being accountable for school success and being responsible, transparent, informed and answerable to the school community the board serves. As Jameson states, the Pledge does not pretend to do the "heavy lifting" for a school board. Board members still

5. http://www.companydirectors.com.au/~/media/cd2/resources/director-resources/nfp/pdf/nfp-principles-and-guidance-131015.ashx
6. https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_GovernanceReports/15_ExploringEffectiveSchoolGovernance.pdf

Good School Governance Pledge

The Good School Governance Pledge guides clear actions that the school board can take to give its school community confidence that the board is taking an active part in striving for the success of the school.

1   **The board is cultural custodian:** The school board proactively strives to incorporate the cultural and ethical components of the agreed ideals of school success in their own behaviour – board conduct and behaviour models and is in line with what is expected of staff, students and families of the school.

2   **The board is custodian of school success:** The board takes steps to proactively inform itself of the expectations of the school community on a continuous basis and retains open lines of two-way communication to ensure that it invites and can receive unfiltered perspectives from key stakeholders. The board reaches its own view on the agreed ideals of school success which are published and communicated effectively amongst the school community.

3   **The board evaluates school success, including culturally:** The school board has developed and implemented a means of evaluating, at least annually, the extent to which the agreed ideals of school success are achieved – including the incorporation of the valued culture of the school – enabling them to identify strategies for improving school success over time.

4   **The board's role and responsibilities are clear:** Drawing on a range of accepted sources, and having regard to the agreed and published ideals of school success, the school board has adopted a charter that sets out its role, and specifically that of its chair and other office holders, vis-à-vis the principal and what it regards as its responsibilities to staff, parents, students and other stakeholders. It makes this available to the school community on the school's website.

5   **Board members take their responsibilities seriously:** Board members prepare well, attend and participate actively in board meetings with a view to ensuring that the school strives to deliver on its agreed and published ideals of school success and is protected from identified risks. The board regards itself as accountable to the school community for these responsibilities.

6   **The board/principal relationship is paramount:** The board regards itself as the primary source of holding the principal accountable to deliver the agreed and published ideals of school success. It does this by ensuring that the principal's employment conditions and role are clear, by setting annually the board's expectations of the principal against the agreed ideals, and by conducting rigorous performance reviews of the principal, calling periodically on external help for this purpose.

7   **The chair is held to account:** The board chair is the servant leader of the board. S/he holds office only by the authority of those who are empowered to elect or appoint the chair and regards her/himself as accountable to them and so accounts on a regular basis to the board for her/his conduct in the role.

8   **Board composition driven by ideals of school success:** The manner in which the appointment or election of individuals to the board occurs includes explicit consideration of the needs of the school in light of the agreed ideals of school success and also includes conscious and transparent consideration of the need for board diversity and continuous renewal, having regard to the tenure of individuals within the board and their continued contributions to the work of the board.

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School boards as cultural custodians are responsible for maintaining the "trust" ledger with their school communities.

face the "inconvenient truth" that being on a school board is hard work. It is however, intended to provide a set of guiding principles to support boards in taking responsibility for school success, however they define it for their school community.

Culture sets the scene in the Pledge. The first commitment boards are asked to make is to be the cultural custodian of their school.

Pledge 1: The school board proactively strives to incorporate the cultural and ethical components of the agreed ideals of school success in their own behaviour – board conduct and behaviour models and is in line with what is expected of staff, students and families of the school.

In the ISQ-commissioned research paper, Jameson goes on to elaborate that "the school board that does not operate according to the culture and the ethos that it demands or expects of others within its own community has little chance of fostering or protecting such a culture or ethos, whether it is primarily a faith-based ethos or based on other agreed principles."

Culture and the success of the school are intrinsically linked. Therefore, the second key promise is about the board's role as custodian of the school's success.

Pledge 2: The board takes steps to proactively inform itself of the expectations of the school community on a continuous basis and retains open lines of two-way communication to ensure that it invites and can receive unfiltered perspectives from key stakeholders. The board reaches its own view on the agreed ideals of school success which are published and communicated effectively amongst the school community.

According to Jameson, it's the board's responsibility to "decide on the ideals of school success, as stakeholders' views will vary, sometimes greatly, but it is critical input to the board's decision. The articulation and publication of these ideals is important because unless it has been agreed, it is not feasible that a school board can ever be confident whether it has achieved its ideals of success and how to do so."

The promise in Pledge 3 links the setting of culture with the ongoing success and sustainability of the school.

Pledge 3: The school board has developed and implemented a means of evaluating, at least annually, the extent to which the agreed ideals of school success are achieved – including the incorporation of the valued culture of the school - enabling them to identify strategies for improving school success over time.

Jameson concludes that "it is of little or no value to school families to know the ideals of school success that have been set by a school board if they are not also confident that the school board has a means of evaluating the school's success in achieving them."

The remaining five promises in the Pledge focus on the composition of the board and the role of each of the board members individually as they hold themselves accountable for the success of the school.

As school boards work to ensure the future sustainability of their schools, the Good School Governance Pledge provides a platform for discussion and a benchmark for good governance. It also provides a checklist against which boards can review themselves and report back to their school communities on their efforts to optimise school success within the agreed school culture.

Like governing boards in all sectors, school boards are not immune from increased scrutiny and heightened community expectations that they are successfully discharging their duties. School boards as cultural custodians are responsible for maintaining the "trust" ledger with their school communities. Sustaining this trust and confidence requires the board to "walk the talk" and be vigilant and diligent in its oversight of the school's culture and performance.

HELEN COYER
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Independent Schools Queensland
governance service offerings

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This series of four practical, information-rich short courses will provide governors with information and tools to improve decision making, financial oversight, strategic planning, risk management, stakeholder engagement and board effectiveness in the independent school sector.

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Review

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ISQ supports school boards to establish a framework for success through its strategic planning process. Experienced consultants will lead your board through a process of reflection on past performance, agreement on future directions and establishment of measurable goals.

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ISQ supports school boards to establish a robust framework for identifying, assessing and prioritising strategic risk.

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ISQ's bank of templates, tools and checklists provides a starting point for your board to develop your own policies aligned to current legislation.

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ISQ networking events are an opportunity for independent school governors to connect with sector influencers, build relationships with peers and stay on top of industry trends.

Contact us

ISQ encourages school governors and school leaders to talk to a member of our Governance Services team to work out how we can best structure a program that meets your board's needs.

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WELLBEING AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

JOSEPHINE WISE
Director (Education Services)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community" (beyondblue, 2017).

Wellbeing matters

According to an Australian Psychological Society Stress and Wellbeing Survey, most Australians (72 percent) feel stress is having at least some impact on their physical health while 64 percent believe it is having an impact on their mental health (Australian Psychological Society, 2015).

Of those experiencing stress, four in 10 Australians believe it is having a moderate to very strong impact on their physical health (3 percent) and mental health (37 percent). This is consistent with research that indicates that stress has a deleterious effect on both physical and mental health (Australian Psychological Society, 2016).

Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. In Australia, it's estimated that 45 percent of people will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime (ABS, 2008).

Stress continues to affect the mental and physical health of Australians.

Why should this matter to school leaders? How should it influence their approach to leadership?

On economic grounds alone it is estimated that "absenteeism, reduced productivity and compensation claims cost Australian workplaces approximately $11 billion per year." (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014, p. 1).

However, a return on investment analysis on creating mentally healthy workplaces also found that through the successful implementation of effective actions, an organisation, on average, can expect a positive return on investment (ROI) of $2.30 for every dollar invested. These benefits typically take the form of improved productivity, via reduced absenteeism and presenteeism (reduced productivity at work), and lower numbers of compensation claims (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014).

Schools as workplaces already demand intensive commitment from teachers and leaders. A recent *School Staff Workload Study* of Victorian state school teachers found that the average working week of teachers was between 55 and 60 hours and included significant work on weekends and leave periods. The principals in the study estimated a 60 to 65-hour average working week, with equal demands on time that may be regarded by others as 'personal' (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016).

Employers are bound by legislation to do whatever is reasonably practicable to eliminate risks to workers' mental and physical health. Workplace health and safety legislation requires workplaces to be, as far as is reasonably practicable, physically and mentally safe and healthy for all employees. Steps must be taken to ensure that the working environment does not actively harm mental health or worsen an employee's existing condition (Heads Up, n.d.).

While legislation acknowledges that employees have a responsibility for their own health and safety, research is clear that school leaders influence

the culture, sense of autonomy and agency, and workload demands which impact on the wellbeing of employees.

Educational employers, like other industries, are managing increasing numbers of injury claims from employees related to stress and wellbeing. WorkCover Queensland (2016) has identified a steady rise in the number of psychological/psychiatric injury claims. In 2016-17, 12 percent of Queensland work cover claims in education were related to mental stress. To not address the cultural norms and practices in the workplace that contribute to these increases may put a school leader and their employees at risk.

Links between leader's wellbeing and organisational outcomes

Communities have high expectations of school leaders. Employees expect them to model emotional intelligence, facilitate distributed and collaborative teams and make effective decisions.

Leaders are required to interact openly and professionally with parents, inspire and guide students and practice the highest ethical and compassionate standards within their communities.

School leadership is experienced through technology that enables and demands constant availability and connectedness. This relatively recent context of being constantly available and 'on' 24 hours a day places new demands on leaders, their teams, their students and their families.

A comprehensive literature review from Swedish researchers into mental health and wellbeing at work found that "leadership seems to be paramount for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing at work." (Lindberg et al., 2017). They also found that not only is a leader's wellbeing key, but how a leader promotes wellbeing is key to a healthy, productive and engaged workforce.

Leadership behaviour, specifically a leader's support, consideration and empowerment of employees, can impact on employees' levels of stress and their overall wellbeing.

Their research was clear that whilst every individual is responsible in part for their own wellness, the leader sets the culture that supports and encourages behaviours and structures that enhance wellbeing and care for people though periods of mental and physical ill health. A key finding of their research was that effective leadership serves to prevent "small negative behavioural incidences from developing into unsafe cultural norms" (Lindberg et al., 2017).

The researchers found that leadership behaviour, specifically a leader's support, consideration and empowerment of employees, as well as the quality of the relationships they have with employees, can impact on employees' levels of stress and their overall wellbeing.

UK based organisational psychologists, Ferris Psychologists (n.d.), state that if a leader is unable to maintain their own mental health, their ability to intentionally and effectively lead others is compromised. "[A] leader's own levels of stress and wellbeing are positively correlated with employees' stress and wellbeing. Further research suggests that trust from Leaders promotes perceptions of fairness and equity in the workplace and also has a positive impact on employee wellbeing" (para. 5).

Preparation programs for educational leaders rarely teach explicit strategies to deal with the demanding emotional aspects of the role. "In other professions, such as psychology and social work, where highly charged emotional interactions occur, high levels of professional support and debriefing are standard procedure. This is not so in education. As a result, the...

wellbeing survey scores [of an average educational leader] are lower than the average citizen" (Riley, 2016, p. 16).

A German study into the supportive or destructive behaviours of leaders and their impact on the health and wellbeing of their staff identified pathways between leadership behaviour and employee health.

For example, if an employee is stressed their leader can offer them material, cognitive or emotional support. If their workload is too high the supervisor can reduce or assist them to prioritise this. At the same time, the supervisor may also not engage in these actions or can engage in the opposite forms of behaviour (e.g. withdrawing support, increasing workload) or else initiate other destructive actions (e.g. involving hostility, aggression or humiliation) all of which generally serve to compromise employees' health (Wegge et al., 2014).

Employee assistance programs are another proactive way to provide confidential support for staff and leaders who may be feeling overwhelmed by workplace or personal stress.

Strategies for improving the wellbeing of leaders

School leaders are not necessarily prepared for managing the stressors of leadership, and enhancing the wellbeing of staff and community. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in their publication *New role, new relationships* name health and wellbeing as a priority for school leaders.

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The publication is explicit about the physical and emotional challenges and toll school leadership can take on a personal wellbeing, "[t]aking care of personal wellbeing as well as that of staff is essential. Maintaining your own physical and emotional health supports effective decision making and good judgement and enables sustained effort. At an organisation level, leaders who are healthy are perceived by others as more capable and engaged, and rate higher on various leadership indices." (AITSL, 2016, p. 13)

The publication lists strategies school leaders should consider. These include:

- acknowledging stressors through self-awareness, understanding stress triggers and personal stress symptoms

- identifying when stress levels are rising

- modifying behaviours to reduce the stress

- communicating concerns to others to seek support and gain assistance.

Effective support and communication

Who do school leaders communicate their concerns to and seek assistance from? The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing survey indicates that most principals identify their family as the primary source of emotional support. However, the survey also indicates that "work-family conflict occurs at approximately double the rate for the population generally" (Riley, 2016, p. 17).

Just as teachers benefit from a mentally healthy leader, school leaders benefit from the support of an effective employer, particularly a supportive Board Chair. The survey indicated those leaders with strong support from a Board Chair or other employer/supervisor will have greater chance of coping with the job demands of the role (Riley, 2016).

The Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) stresses the importance of the relationship between Board Chair and CEO/Principal. The relationship needs to be a relationship where "professional and personal trust and respect is paramount and where the chair can act as a mentor/sounding board to the CEO. At the same time, it should be a relationship of frankness and candour (behind the scenes) and unity and mutual support (in public)" (AICD, 2016, p. 3).

In Independent Schools Queensland's leadership and school autonomy research, case study leaders were clear that the relationship to the Board Chair was key to their perception of personal and professional satisfaction and success. As one leader put it, "the relationship with the Chair is a good one... It is characterised by trust and openness" (Independent Schools Queensland, 2016, p. 16).

Leaders who proactively seek a better relationship with their Chair, and Chairs who actively support and develop their leadership team, can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the whole school.

Mindfulness to acknowledge and reduce stress

Another approach to enhance wellbeing in educational leadership is mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is "self-observation without judgment with a focus on our minds and inner voices. Mindful practices can include daily meditation, prayer, journaling, or jogging alone. In a fast-paced world, mindfulness enables you to clear your mind of clutter, focus on what is important, and be creative" (George, 2016, para. 3).
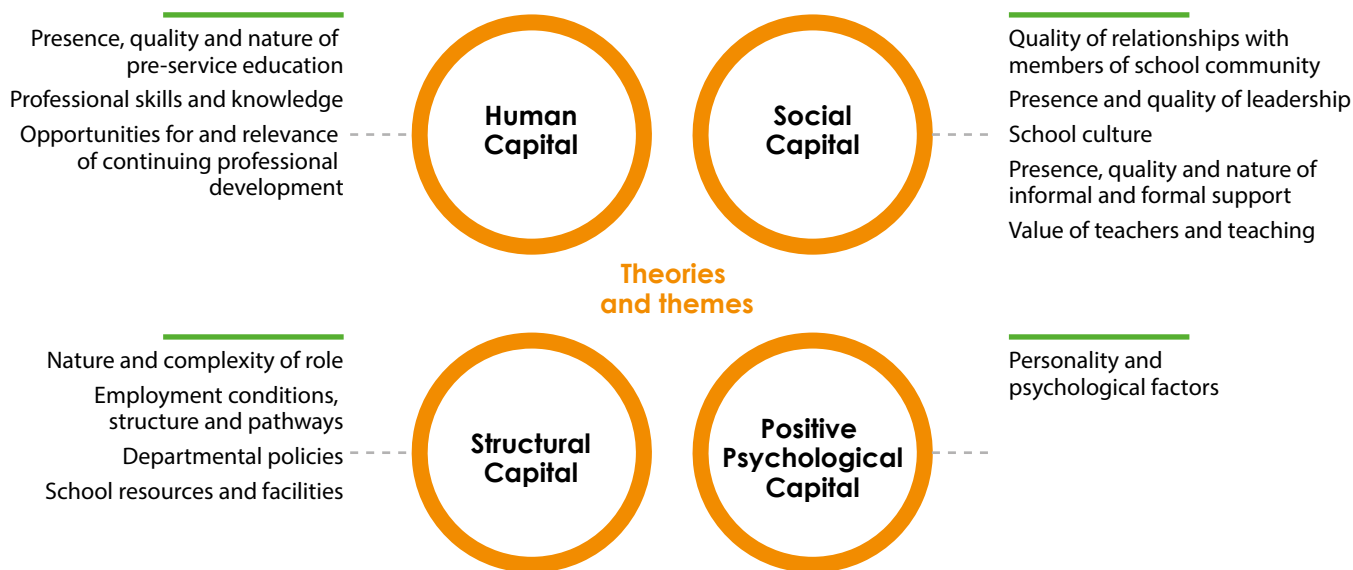
The positive impact of mindfulness to improve leadership is gaining credibility in business. The AICD recommends mindfulness activities to improve Directors' decision making in board rooms. AICD Director training recognises the limits of human concentration and encourages Chairs to call for quiet, self-reflective breaks before major decisions are made.

Mindfulness for leaders is best described as reflective, private practice that assists a leader to remain in the present and respond with awareness to each situation. At its most simple form, mindfulness is taking time to focus on breathing, to relax by lowering the heart rate and focusing the mind. Wearable fitness technology has "gamified" mindfulness through prompts to maintain two minutes of focused deep breathing, a simple strategy to re-focus and relax.

Companies are promoting mindful practices to improve the health and decision-making of their leaders. Google, under the tutelage of Chade-Meng Tan, trains 2,000 engineers in meditation each year. Leading financial services firms like Blackrock and Goldman Sachs offer mindfulness courses for their employees (George, 2016).

An understanding that mindfulness is a personal practice that affects wellbeing has been recorded in

Figure 1: Thirteen themes impacting on teacher attrition or retention and their relationship to four established theories of non-economic capital

Presence, quality and nature of pre-service education

Professional skills and knowledge

Opportunities for and relevance of continuing professional development

Quality of relationships with members of school community

Presence and quality of leadership

School culture

Presence, quality and nature of informal and formal support

Value of teachers and teaching

Human Capital

Social Capital

Theories and themes

Nature and complexity of role

Employment conditions, structure and pathways

Departmental policies

School resources and facilities

Structural Capital

Positive Psychological Capital

Personality and psychological factors

Adapted from Mason and Matas (2015).

general surveys regarding the general populations' wellbeing. The 26 percent of Australians who report that they often or always engage in relaxation or mindfulness activities such as yoga, listening to music or meditation have higher wellbeing scores. The 39 percent of Australians that rarely participate in relaxation and mindfulness activities scored lower on most domains of wellbeing. (Australian Psychological Society, 2016)

Elizabeth Nakayiza (2016) in her book *Mindfulness for Educational Leadership in the 21st Century* states that school leaders working in complex rapid response school environments need mindfulness practices to remain "focused, alert and delightfully engaged" in their work. She states that they need mindfulness to "bring out the best in their leaderships and to turn their workplaces into healthier, more successful environments".

Nakayiza encourages leaders to facilitate mindfulness practices between teams to enable more

authentic collaboration through dialogue that is based in deep, non-judgemental listening. She asserts that using mindfulness can create calm and relaxed teams, enabling team members to maintain focused on the present and effectively making decisions with "full consciousness and not robotically". She asserts that "mindfulness mediation is accredited for its ability to train leaders to be less reactive so that can make better decisions. Take broader perspectives on the situations they face and develop environments of trust and safety" that respect the views, values and contributions of all those they work with every day" (Nakayiza, 2016).

Strategies for improving wellbeing of staff

The PricewaterhouseCoopers ROI analysis indicates that there is no singe method that will improve the wellbeing of staff, what is also clear is that whatever wellbeing strategies are

introduced, they need to be developed with comprehensive staff consultation to have the greatest effect. Their research is also clear that there needs to be more than one strategy or approach to enhancing staff wellbeing. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014)

Measures of teacher wellbeing can be taken through staff wellbeing and satisfaction surveys, annual review feedback and review of absenteeism. Another broader measure with potentially serious implications for teacher workforce, is the contribution of poor wellbeing leading to disengagement and attrition from the profession. There is growing research interest in understanding what contributes to teacher 'burn-out', resulting in teachers and leaders exiting the profession.

A joint Australian and Japanese meta-analysis of teacher attrition research identified the ways a leader can influence the wellbeing and therefore the overall engagement of staff. Mason and Matas (2015) reviewed themes

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from 20 qualitative research projects into teacher attrition and categorised the themes into four areas:

- Human capital – the collective knowledge and skills of a team
- Social Capital – the trust and connections between members of a team
- Structural capital – physical infrastructure and resourcing to support the work of individuals and the team
- Positive psychological capital – the individual personalities and physiological traits of teachers.

The researchers found leaders can influence all areas to reduce teacher attrition. With direct reference to wellbeing, the study recognised that social capital, defined as the "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, as cited in Mason & Matas, 2015, p. 56) have a significant impact on student outcomes. In short "the underlying principle is that human interrelationships are valuable" (p. 56). A leaders' actions to support school communities to strengthen social networks and create deeper and more meaningful relationships not only improve teacher wellbeing, but in doing so increase the likelihood of improved student outcomes.

"In education, schools that have strong social capital through solid relationships and support have better outcomes not only in student academic achievement, but also in retaining staff" (Matas and Mason, 2015, p. 56). The research recognises

the ways a school leader fosters the social identity and cohesion of a team can have a profound effect on staff's sense of engagement and wellbeing in the workplace.

Whilst not every wellbeing activity will have equal impact in every school, their research indicates that actively supporting greater social cohesion is contributing directly to the ability of teachers to remain engaged and positive within a school community. Of course, managing social cohesion also requires leaders to identify and actively manage norms, behaviours and practices that impact on the cohesion of the school.

Conclusion

Poor wellbeing of school leaders impacts on their capacity to effect change, achieve peak performance of staff and build a culture and community that produces resilient and productive teachers, students and families.

The research makes clear the importance of attending to personal wellbeing to lead effectively. Just as the safety message on aircrafts asks a passenger to put on their own oxygen mask first, a leader not attending to their own mental health and wellbeing will not assist others as effectively and can risk the effectiveness of the organisation.

A school leader's wellbeing can be enhanced through other self-care activities like exercise, minimising alcohol/drug use and seeking out trusted mentors and colleagues to share the challenges of educational

leadership (Riley, 2016). But it can also be enhanced through effective relationships with an employer, particularly the Board Chair. Research suggests that a leader's wellbeing can also be enhanced by developing some simple but regular mindfulness practices.

Finally, as with all cultural practices in an organisation, a leader who manages their wellbeing is more able to establish the kinds of cultural and social norms that will build the wellbeing and resilience of the rest of the school community. An investment in the wellbeing of staff pays off in increased engagement, less lost time and a more engaged team.

Independent Schools Queensland is supporting schools to implement staff and student wellbeing programs.

On our website:

- **Find out more about how you can implement wellbeing initiatives in your schools.**
- **Find out more about how your school can access employee assistance programs negotiated as part of ISQ's group schemes and offers.**

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