Leaders in Transition: Conversations that Matter

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Leaders in Transition: Conversations that Matter.

*Everyone had connections to the school except me – it felt really lonely – I needed to feel included. I needed someone to share the history of the school with me*

(From a leader for whom the transition was difficult.)

**Introduction**

Professional support for leaders is well developed in New Zealand with the *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* document (Ministry of Education, 2008) forming a substantial base for shaping leadership pathways. This is evidenced in the development and support programmes for Aspiring Principals, First time Principals and Experienced Principals.

An emerging need that was not being addressed overtly in the above programmes, was that of leaders in transition from one leadership role into another. Leaders were talking to each other and to advisers about inadequate support as they transitioned into a new leadership role. A pilot investigation by Leadership and Management Advisers, UC Education *Plus*, University of Canterbury, in 2009, reinforced this.

In 2010, this concept was further investigated by the Leadership and Management team. The 2010 study posed the key questions: “*What support is available to school leaders when they are transitioning into a changed leadership role?*” and “*What support should and could help leaders as they transition into a changed leadership role?*”

This paper draws on conversations with leaders who are experiencing a transition into a changed leadership position and conversations with other people involved in the transition. The paper suggests that *conversations matter* for leaders transitioning from one context to another.

**Background to the study**

The Ministry of Education, Aotearoa/New Zealand recognised the importance of school leadership and its impact on student learning. In 2009 the Professional Leadership Plan (PLP) was developed in partnership with the New Zealand Education Institute, New Zealand Principals’ Federation, Post Primary Teachers’ Association, Secondary Principals Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand School Trustees’ Association, leadership researchers and the Ministry of Education, to deliver the goal of providing strong professional leadership in every school. This plan built on and incorporated the outcomes of the *Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (Robinson, 2008) and included the publication of *Kiwi Leadership for Principals: Principals as Educational Leaders. (KLP)* (Ministry of Education, 2008). This publication has become the framework for supporting the professional development programmes of Aspiring School Leaders, First Time Principals, Experienced Principals and Middle and Senior Leaders (see Figure 1). A model for Middle and Senior Leaders is ready for publication.
While the KLP and the above programmes effectively support groups of school leaders at varying stages, little attention has been paid to leaders who transition from one leadership role to another. In 2009 a pilot investigation by Leadership and Management Advisers UC Education Plus, reinforced this. The outcomes of this pilot suggested that:

- Transition is a very real phenomena for leaders who move into new roles
- Support for these leaders is random and left to chance except when a leader is in a formalised programme
- There is a need for all parties involved to better understand transitioning
- Transition is under-acknowledged and under-researched
- Further investigation is warranted

Transition literature

A literature search revealed an apparent lack of New Zealand-based research in this area especially in the education context. While there are some literatures related to transition in other contexts such as business, these were of minimal value to this study. A wider literature search revealed a richer source of information.

According to Kelly and Saunders (2009) pre-service training prepared the leader for an interview but was of little use when in the role. They write of the phases of transition and the need for leaders to be aware of these and carefully plan and select tasks appropriate to those phases. Leaders in transition should build alliances inside and beyond the school at each of their defined stages: 1) Professional isolation, 2) Organisational socialisation and 3) Occupational identity. The authors also stress the importance of organisations providing support for their leaders in transition.

A leaders’ power is constituted by the call of the group. Status arises both from the group’s expression of its identity and from its acceptance of the leader’s congruence with its identity (Kelly & Saunders, 2009). The authors agree that when the promotion is within the group the group has a stronger hold on the one promoted. In some cases there is a sense of ‘he’s still one of us and we may not let him lead us just yet’. Culture is a key in the transition process.
According to Peters and Le Cornu (2006) emotional discomfort is generated by the paradoxical nature of the expectations around leadership in the new setting. Often the leader may have expected to continue operating as a transformative leader, in contrast to the multiple expectations and the needs of the setting they have inherited. They may shift emotionally from initial excitement to surprise and disappointment. This is compounded if the promotional material distributed as part of the application process differs from the reality (Peters & Le Cornu, 2006). The authors stress the importance of accessing support from partners, colleagues, trusted others and deliberately set up groups. They suggest building support networks and trust within the new setting as a strategy to help manage the impacts of transition. They also recommend critical reflection, dialogue and collaboration with peers as a way of reframing negative experiences into learning experiences. Peters and Cornu (2006) identify key activities that draw on personal capabilities and qualities – the ability of leaders to engender support and trust from those around them and at the same time demonstrate empathy, reliability and professionalism.

According to Pease and Wellins (2007) there is little preparation for future leaders. The authors write of the paradoxes of excitement and fear especially in relationship to their phases of transitions. They suggest phase one invokes professional motivation and excitement, phase two encourages inflated but untested ego, phase three engenders isolation, self-doubt, a sense of reality and growing confidence. They sum this up as moving from relative obscurity to one of professional prominence and public accountability. The pace of personal learning required in the first year in a new role can serve to firm up the leader’s own ‘road map’ and this pace becomes even more demanding into the second year. A leader’s ability to manage this and address the emotional responses mentioned above determines the ease and success of the transition (Pease & Wellins, 2007). The authors advocate for organisations better defining transitions.

When leaders, who are probable high performers, are promoted into unfamiliar territory there is a need for significant personal transformation from ‘being the leader’ to ‘accomplishing through others’ (Dalmau, 1994). Leaders may be faced with greater risks, rapid learning and an associated fear of failure as they navigate and adjust to the organisational politics. According to Dalmau the community within ‘controls’ the transition process. There is a set of conscious, tangible, rational and non rational, visible and less visible, verbalised and silent transactions that occur between the group within and the newly appointed leader that directly impacts on the nature of the transition.

Most writings affirm that transition can be regarded in phases – attempts to usurp these phases lead to difficulties. Knowledge of these phases assists a leader in deciding which tasks to attempt at which stage of the transition period. There is a need therefore for knowledge related to transition to be made more overt.

Personal and emotional responses are recognised as part of transition and occur at each of these phases. Paradoxical and competing expectations often come as a surprise to a leader during the early stages in the new role.

The literature highlights the manner in which internal culture, values and people within the new place influence and control the reality of the new principal’s ability to lead change. Internal and external influences (eg. political) are highly influential early in the role.

**The Study**

This study uses a qualitative approach, to provide rich description of the thoughts, feelings, stories and/or activities of a small number of participants (Mutch, 2005). Mason (2005) describes qualitative research as aiming to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data. It is an approach that seeks an ‘inside view’ rather than imposing an ‘outsider view’. In this way it is possible to form new concepts or refine concepts that are grounded in data (Neuman, 2000).
In designing the study, the term ‘leaders’ was interpreted widely to include teacher, middle and senior managers and principals. The term ‘transition’ was also interpreted widely to include moving between schools or within a particular school. Participants were selected by the Leadership and Management team from knowledge of leadership changes in local schools. Consideration was given to representative sampling (Table 1).

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee following which signed permissions were obtained from participants and dates negotiated between individual advisers and their interviewees. Taped interviews were conducted by the Leadership and Management advisers using guiding questions. Each interview was approximately one hour duration. The tapes were then transcribed by clerical staff, who had been briefed regarding ethical requirements, and given to the lead researcher for analysis. Each transcript was read and emerging concepts identified on the initial sweep. These emerging concepts were chunked into possible key themes with associated subthemes and shared with the research team. A second reading affirmed these themes. On subsequent readings these themes were colour coded and identified within the texts. A quantitative measure was obtained by counting and ordering those themes according to the times mentioned during the interviews.

**Table 1 Participant profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>New Position</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nature of transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Intermediate Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>From previous principalship in a neighbouring primary school and ERO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Acting principal for 10 weeks</td>
<td>Secondary Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Deputy Principal in same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Acting principal for 1 year</td>
<td>Primary Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>From Deputy Principal in another school where she also has been acting principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Primary Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>From syndicate leader in another school. New principal in school at same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Primary Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>From previous principalship in decile 2 school to decile 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Acting principal</td>
<td>Intermediate Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>From Deputy Principal in same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chairperson BoT</td>
<td>Intermediate Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Appointing new principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Primary Rural</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First time principal (FTP) from Deputy Principal in urban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Acting principal for 1 year</td>
<td>Primary Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>From Deputy Principal in same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Secondary Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Time Principal returning to school after 3 years when he was Acting Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Primary Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Experienced principal from neighbouring school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Home based leader</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Promoted from within same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Literacy leader</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Promoted from within the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Conversations from the pilot project also contribute to the data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Themes

Analysis revealed the following key themes which are listed in order of frequency.

1. Clarity of expectations, role definition, systems already operating in the school.
2. Support during the induction and early phases of transition. This support could be from inside or outside the organisation or from friends and family.
3. The school culture – both of the setting leaders were leaving and the new setting. Many factors were attributed to the school culture including ceremonies and rituals, the previous leadership style, allegiances to the past leader and the state of the new school or role.
4. The emotional responses that accompany a transition. The range, intensity and unexpectedness of the emotional responses from the leader and others were unexpected.
5. The leader themselves and their previous experiences, their awareness and management of the transition process, and their personal professional capability for influencing their transition.

These key themes can be linked to the Educational Leaders Model (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Links between key themes and the Educational Leaders Model

Key Findings

Theme 1 – Clarity of role and expectations.

I thought I would at least be handed a document that told me what was expected of me, but there was nothing. I didn’t get that because basically it didn’t exist. I got this list of passwords but none of them work. It was a real shock. After a couple of weeks of feeling rudderless, I asked for more direction and I was told to ‘just see what needs doing and have a go at it’. What I needed was a document to say ‘these are your responsibilities and this is what is required’. It would have made a huge difference.

From a leader (refer table 1, code 3) for whom the transition was difficult.

The need for leaders to have clarity of role, expectations, systems, and information related to the role was mentioned 108 times. When the change in role was internal it appears that this aspect was not well managed, rather it was assumed that the leader already knew what was expected. This theme seems of particular importance at the pre-appointment and induction phases.
Interviewees spoke of confusion and frustration as they learned of the systems within, especially if this knowledge lay with staff (eg. a clerical assistant) who were reluctant to share this knowledge or were used to controlling these systems. In some cases this knowledge left with previous staff. This slowed the progress of implementing change for the new leader.

Leaders transitioning within a school spoke of the expectation that they would already know what to do and how to do it. In general their induction was poorly managed. In some cases middle/senior leaders were promoted to a position that had not been clearly defined or articulated prior to the appointment. In one case an acting principal who assumed the previous role of deputy principal when a new principal was appointed, inquired of the principal what the role should look like, she was told to make it up as she went along.

Participants who had been involved in programmes such as the Aspiring Principals’ Programme commented that exposure to systems and role expectations through these programmes prepared them well for their new role.

Leaders’ knowledge and awareness of the transition process appeared to be limited. When the interviewers used the term ‘transition’ most participants agreed that knowledge and awareness of transition as a process would have helped them.

“I’m an old warrior at this stuff so I do things intuitively. Knowledge of transition? Yes maybe. Then I would have known why I did what I did and why it worked because I was in the right phase.”

From a leader (refer table 1, code 1) for whom their transition was successful

**Theme 2 - Support for leaders in transition.**

Did I feel supported? No I don’t think I did. I think I got hung out to dry really because of the internal dynamics here. I didn’t know who to trust inside this school and I didn’t have any established networks outside the school that I felt entirely comfortable with to share what I was going through.

From a leader (refer table 1, code 5) for whom their transition was difficult

The importance of support, or lack of support for leaders during the transition phase was mentioned 100 times during the interviews.

Leaders said they looked for support from inside the new context and beyond. Friends and families were seen as important for personal support. Many participants fell back on previously established networks during the early stages until new networks were established. Comments were made that some existing networks were not as useful if the leader had moved to a different role. For example, a senior leader moved to an acting principal’s role and established networks with other first time principals and then moved back into the previous role. It took some time for her to re-establish former networks.

Leaders moving to a new region initially found it difficult to engage in already established regional networks. Interviewees commented that it took some time to learn who to trust and which networks best served their needs.
External advice was readily available for leaders who were in established programmes such as First Time Principals’ or Aspiring Principals’ Programmes, which offered mentoring support. One-to-one personal mentoring as offered in the First Time Principal’s Programme was described as ‘life-saving’, ‘crucial’ and ‘the difference between surviving and failing’.

For leaders not in a programme, external support was not readily apparent and participants did not necessarily think to ask for it.

There appears to be little difference in the need for support in regard to moving between or within the school or whether the leader was beginning or experienced.

_The day you (adviser) rang me and said welcome and would I like a visit was like a huge load being lifted off my shoulders. I think I talked non-stop for over an hour. I knew you from another time and I knew I could trust you. I just wish I had known before I started that that was going to happen. It would have those first couple of weeks so much easier_

From a leader (refer table 1, code 14) for whom the transition was successful

**Theme 3 – Culture.**

_There was no formal acknowledgement, no introduction, no powhiri, no welcome. It’s like I just slid in under the radar. And that was typical of the culture here. The behaviour of some of the staff towards me was horrendous and I was like ‘what’s going on here?’ It certainly wasn’t what I was used to._

From a leader (refer table 1, code 14) for whom their transition was difficult

Culture was mentioned 86 times in the interviews. Leaders found it particularly difficult when they moved to a culture that was very different from the one they left and when there was a mismatch between their own moral and ethical stance from which they operate and the context of the new position. An experienced principal commented on the impact of the culture existing in the new school – one of divisiveness, deficit thinking and minimal commitment to the job. This caught her by surprise and took careful management and a long time to shift. It took priority in her planning as she was unable to lead the desired changes until this was addressed.

The presence or absence of ceremonies recognising leaving one context and arriving in the new context appears to have significant impact on the leaders’ ability to begin in the new role. In New Zealand the indigenous ceremonies of Powhiri (welcome) and Poroporoaki (farewell) are widely adopted by all and are meaningful and powerful. Leaders for whom these ceremonies occurred felt welcomed, appreciated and ready to start in their new role. The absence of such rituals hampered the leaders’ ability to begin. A first time principal spoke of the excitement she felt when winning a principal’s position, experiencing a moving poroporoaki (farewell) from her previous role, moving to a new region and putting the skills learned in the aspiring principals’ programme to the test. Two weeks into the new position and she still hadn’t been formally welcomed. She began to doubt her ability to do the job and regretted the move.

The manner in which the departure of the incumbent leader was managed aided or impinged on those within the setting as they addressed allegiances to the previous leader and acceptance of the new leader. In a successful transition, the board chair managed the parallel process of assisting the incumbent to leave with dignity and pride while inducting the new principal into the role.

In a less successful transition, the incumbent principal would not engage in discussion with the successor and even withheld the school keys, codes and documentation until the very last moment. It was left to a senior leader to meet in private with the new leader.
Leaders who moved to a new role within the same school found it difficult to adjust to the changed relationships that occurred with their colleagues. Some found it difficult to assume a leadership role and to work with colleagues who had become close friends, especially when the role warranted giving difficult messages or addressing the under-performance of their colleagues. This was especially difficult if no induction had occurred and if there had been no formal, public acknowledgement of the new role.

Understanding the existing culture played a significant role in the nature of the transition. This links to themes one and two – finding out as much as possible about the school at the induction phase and having support in the early stages of the transition.

I saw it as my role as board chair to make sure the existing principal could leave with dignity and pass the mantle over to his successor. And at the same time, between us, we made sure the new principal was well supported and got as much information as possible to make the change over smooth.

From a leader (refer table 1, code 7) from the Board Chair of a leader for whom the transition was successful.

Theme 4 – The emotional responses associated with transition.

It was very emotional – I kid you not – the worst day of my life leaving that school and all I had achieved and wanted to still achieve and move to another country and another school not really knowing what I had taken on.

From a leader (refer table 1, code 10) for whom the transition was difficult.

Emotional responses were mentioned 81 times in the interviews.

The participants in this study experienced a range of emotional responses – grief and loss of previous role, anxiety, excitement, a sense of isolation, concern that they would not meet expectations, disappointment that the new setting did not match their expectations and concern that they had made a wrong decision.

The intensity and range of emotional responses often caught new leaders by surprise. This caused them to doubt their ability (pono) to do the new job. A senior leader, who unwillingly accepted a promotion to the position of literacy leader, said she had doubts right from the start. Her continuing anxiety, the need to compromise the quality of her core job in the classroom and the weight of responsibility resulted in ill health (dis-ease) and the need to take extended sick leave. A first time principal taking up a role in a challenging school with extreme student behaviours, a dysfunctional board and stressed staff could only tolerate the emotional toll for 18 months before realising this was not for her. Other leaders were able to work through the emotional roller coasters and move forward in their role.

Leaders in transition also expressed their surprise at the emotional responses from existing staff in the new setting. Some commented on the way in which some staff spoke to them or ignored them or spoke on a surface level to cover their emotional insecurity. These responses ranged from ‘over the top’ greetings and constant “knocking on my door to assure me they were doing a good job", to avoidance, open hostility, anxiety about expectations, and cynicism. There appears to be little difference in these responses whether the transition was within or outside the setting.

Some staff within the setting demonstrated difficulty in transferring loyalty from the previous leader to the new leader. This was influenced by the farewell processes and involvement of the previous leader in inducting the new leader. The reasons for the previous leader leaving also appear to be significant.

Timing of the transition appeared to be significant. This included the gap between appointment and taking up the appointment, the time of the school year, the new leader’s ability to have access to information and the site, and the internal requirements of the new role relative to school events and requirements. Anxiety, confusion and frustration were experienced when the timing was mismanaged.
It appears from this study that the way in which the transition process was managed had an influence on emotional responses. When managed well the response was positive but when the transition was poorly managed the emotional responses were negative and stressful.

*It was interesting actually, standing there in the rain while my previous school walked me over to stand with my new school. Suddenly I wasn’t one of them anymore. But at the same time I was excited about being accepted by a new community. There were tears in people’s eyes – it was so authentic and meaningful.*

From a leader (refer table 1, code 8) for whom the transition was successful

The following theme goes some way to explaining how a leader manages their transition based on who they are and how they operate.

**Theme 5 – The leader themselves.**

*I wish I had taken advantage of learning from my previous leaders at least some of the nuts and bolts of being a principal – you know SUE reports etc. I missed the boat there. We kept saying we must but didn’t get round to doing it.*

From a leader (refer table 1, code 3) for whom their transition was difficult

Although interviewees did not mention this overtly, it became clear as the transcripts were analysed, that the leaders’ own leadership capabilities (developed through their previous experiences) and their inner qualities, played a key role in the way in which their transition was managed. The complexity of roles caught some leaders by surprise, especially if moving to a principal role, and they needed a strong moral and ethical base from which to operate.

When interviewees deliberately joined pre-training programmes they were well prepared for the systems and routines aspect of their new role. When interviewees had maximised the influence of role models in a previous setting and were open to learning from that, they were well positioned to adapt to the new setting. Two participants deliberately planned and organised their own transition into the new role, not necessarily in overt recognition of the importance of this but rather because that was who they were and how they operated – they took control and thought strategically.

The outer circle of the ELM model identifies key characteristics of leaders. They are: Ako (continuous learning), Manakitanga (moral and ethical beliefs) Pono (self belief) and Awhinatanga (support and networks). When leaders are strong in all of these areas, events such as transition into a new role have minimal negative impact on the leader or those around them. When one or more of these characteristics are weak the leader in transition is vulnerable to the emotional and cognitive impacts of the change. As with above themes, the Kiwi Leadership for Principals and the ELM model offer New Zealand leaders the language with which to describe this.

*Yes I knew I was ready to leave and take on a new challenge. It was my choice so I could control the situation. I was thinking strategically and thinking if I do this and this it will be a good basis to build on next year and that is exactly what we have been able to do.*

From a leader (refer table 1, code 8) for whom the transition was successful

**Relevance of the findings from this study to the literature.**

**Theme 1 - Clarity of roles and expectations.**

Kelly and Saunders (2009) write of the phases of transition and the need for leaders to be aware of these and carefully plan and select tasks appropriate to those phases. Dalmau (1994) describes these phases through the analogy of the dance.
Peters and Le Cornu (2006) write of the paradoxes of managing the site (systems and practices) and leading learning. This is particularly evident in the early phases while the new leader is coming to terms with the new site. Kelly and Saunders (2009) advocate that pre-service training prepared the leader for the interview but was of little use when in the role. Pease and Wellins (2007) also comment on little preparation for future leaders.

**Theme 2 – Support for leaders in transition.**

Peters and Cornu (2006) reinforce the importance of accessing support from partners, colleagues, trusted others and deliberately set up groups. They suggest building support networks and trust within the new setting as a strategy to help manage the impacts of transition. They also recommend critical reflection, dialogue and collaboration with peers as a way of reframing negative experiences into learning experiences.

Kelly and Saunders (2009) advocate that leaders in transition should build alliances inside and beyond the school at each of their defined stages: –1) Professional isolation, 2) Organisational socialisation and 3) Occupational identity. They also stress the importance of organisations providing support for their leaders in transition.

Pease and Wellins (2007) indicate that the leader needs to ask for data. They also advocate for organisations better defining transitions. However this is not mentioned in other readings.

**Theme 3 - Culture**

This theme is well recognised by Dalmau (1994). He states that the community within ‘controls’ the transition process. There is a set of conscious, tangible, rational and non rational, visible and less visible, verbalised and silent transactions that occur between the group within and the newly appointed leader that directly impacts on the nature of the transition.

Kelly and Saunders (2009) state that the leaders’ power is constituted by the call of the group. Status arises both from the group’s expression of its identity and from its acceptance of the leaders congruence with its identity. Kelly and Saunders agree that when the promotion is within the group the group has a stronger hold on the one promoted. In some cases there is a sense of ‘he’s still one of us and we may not let him lead us just yet’.

For both of these writers the theme of culture is highly important in the transition process.

**Theme 4 – Emotional responses.**

Pease and Wellins (2007) state that the background to the appointment is important to the new leader. This, they say, includes the previous incumbent and the previous experiences of the new leader.

Peters and Cornu (2006) articulate that transitions generate emotional responses and attribute that to the emotional discomfort in the paradoxical nature of the expectations around leadership in the new setting. Often, Peters and Cornu (2006) state, the leader may have expected to continue operating as a transformative leader which is in contrast to the multiple expectations and the needs of the setting they have inherited. They may feel let down from the initial excitement to surprise and disappointment. This is compounded if the promotional material distributed as part of the application process differs from the reality.

Pease and Wellins (2007) write of the paradoxes of excitement and fear especially in relationship to their phases of transitions. They suggest phase one invokes professional motivation and excitement, phase two encourages inflated but untested ego, phase three engenders isolation, self-doubt, a sense of reality and growing confidence. They sum this up as moving from relative obscurity to one of professional prominence and public accountability.
Theme 5 – The leader themselves.

Peters and Cornu (2006) identify key activities that draw on personal capabilities and qualities – the ability to engender support and trust from those around them and at the same time demonstrate empathy, reliability and professionalism.

Dalmau (1994) articulates that when leaders, who are probable high performers, are promoted into unfamiliar territory there is a need for significant personal transformation from ‘being the leader’ to ‘accomplishing through others’. They may be faced with greater risks, rapid learning and associated fear of failure as they navigate and adjust to the organisational politics.

Kelly and Saunders (2009) suggest that leaders draw on their personal resilience as they negotiate the transition phases of: Evocation and Acceptance, Discovery and Acknowledgement and Innovation and Satisfaction.

Pease and Wellins (2007) identify that the pace of personal learning required in the first year in a new role can serve to firm up the leader’s own ‘road map’ and this pace becomes even more demanding into the second year. A leader’s ability to manage this and address the emotional responses mentioned above determines the ease and success of the transition.

Reflections

While not frequently mentioned in the accessed literature, clarity and understanding of expectations, systems and processes is high on the list of these leaders in transition and this could be attributed to New Zealand’s self-managing schools and the complex roles that New Zealand leaders play. In cases when the leader in transition is aware of the transition process and the associated phases, he or she selected the tasks relevant to the phase (Kelly & Saunders, 2009). This results in a greater degree of co-operation and willingness to effect change.

Transition evokes a range of emotional responses in the leader who is transitioning (Peters & Cornu, 2006) and others involved in the transition. The Kiwi Leadership for Principals (Ministry of Education, 2008) and the ELM model offers New Zealand leaders the language with which to describe this.

This study does not support the position that pre-training programme has little impact on the leader in a new position (Saunders, 2009). This maybe is indicative of the strength and alignment of the New Zealand programmes and the way these programmes are based on the Kiwi Leadership Framework and the ELM.

Based on this small representative sample of New Zealand educational leaders in transition we can make the following tentative statements:

- Transition is a significant phenomena that requires recognition from all parties involved – the leader, those making the appointment, those within the school, support agencies, professional development providers
- Many leaders are not well supported in their transition
- Knowledge related to the transition process is not well known or shared. The phases of transition require recognition and careful management
- Someone on site needs to take responsibility for managing the transition process
- Leadership consultants have a key role to play in supporting leaders in transition. This support is adequately managed in organised programmes – National Aspiring Principals’ Programmes, First Time Principals’ Programmes - but not beyond these programmes
- All leaders need support when in transition regardless of experience
- Middle/ senior leaders need as much support as principals when transitioning
- A system is needed that alerts support agencies to leaders who are transitioning
- Support for leaders in transition needs to be available early in the transition
The existing data from this study could be further analysed to explore the following:

- The relevance of leaders changing role within or between schools.
- Leaders moving to a different type of school/setting – decile, primary or secondary.
- The influences of the status and expertise of previous leader
- The nature of tenure and the timing of appointment.
- Changes during transition period – new Board of Trustees, staff changes, Education Review Officers’ visit, change of tenure, other distractions eg. building projects, financial state, unknown factors on appointment
- Leaving the classroom behind
- Mismatch between expectations and reality
- Mismatch between own morals and ethics

Conclusion

We set out to explore the questions: *What support is available to school leaders when they are transitioning into a changed leadership role?* and *What support should and could help leaders as they transition into a changed leadership role?* There is ample evidence in our interview data that, amongst other things, timely conversations can make all the difference to leaders transitioning from one leadership context to another. Equally the absence of such conversations, the silence that surrounds some transitions, can cause leaders distress and hinder their transitional progress. There is a need to promote support for leaders who are in transition and better prepare our leaders for their transitions. Conversation is one of the keys to achieving this.

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