

RESILIENCE
***AND* PERSONAL**
EFFECTIVENESS
***FOR* SOCIAL WORKERS**

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CHOOSING MINDFUL PRACTICE AND BUILDING A RESILIENT CAREER

Key Concepts and Issues in this Chapter

- Joyful effort
 - Mindful careers
 - Emotional intelligence and resilience
 - Reality testing
 - Flexibility
 - Impulse control
 - Happiness
 - Optimism
 - Developing emotional agility
 - Developing creative thinking skills
 - Managing career transitions
 - Dealing with setbacks and disappointments
 - Intelligent CV creation
 - Your CV as a source of job security
 - Future impacts of new technologies
 - Managing your future
-

Introduction

Historian Edward Gibbon (1776) said, 'The winds and the waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators.' What Gibbon was saying is that there is no good or bad luck but rather that people who are skilled and competent can effectively steer themselves through the treacherous waters of difficult times. I introduced this idea in Chapter 2 when I gave the example of Derren Brown's programme in which he found that people with a more positive, open approach were able to take advantage of opportunities when they became available. Social workers who are finishing their training now are beginning their career in an environment of great change and significant challenge. Local authorities are facing financial restrictions as never before while the Care Act has increased their responsibilities. There is no easy prescription for what social workers can do to ensure that they have a rewarding career in which they achieve real change for those that they serve but in this chapter I will consider some of what can be done in this respect.

Joyful effort in work

Social work requires an approach which Buddhists might refer to as joyful effort – that is, a striving to do a good job while obtaining pleasure and fulfilment from the work. The Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler (2003) discussed three different approaches to how we can regard work: as a way of earning money, as a way of building a career or as a 'calling' which serves a higher purpose. They suggested that while we might think intuitively that certain jobs would lend themselves to this way of thinking more than others, this is not always the case. They used examples to illustrate that some people can achieve joy and fulfilment in relatively routine jobs whereas some people in what ought to be more meaningful jobs can become burnt out and disillusioned. Reminding ourselves of the importance of the work which we do and how it helps people is important when we begin to feel disillusioned by the frustrations of the workplace. It may be that sometimes when we are feeling brought down by bureaucracy and lack of resources we have to focus on the smaller things we have achieved which have been beneficial to others. For example, answering an email query from a colleague might seem a small achievement. However, if we were able to direct them to a resource which was helpful to a service user then our small action may have achieved a significant benefit for another person. Celebrating small victories in stressed times is one way of staying engaged with what we are doing and avoiding descending into despair and burnout.

Building a mindful career

I introduced the concept of mindfulness in Chapter 2 as a technique for trying to see the world more clearly. At the beginning of Chapter 3 I suggested that one can easily

lose track of one's purpose in relation to work. Here I want to argue that having mindfulness in relation to your middle- and long-term goals is important in terms of keeping your career on track. The reader might challenge me at this point on the usefulness of mindfulness as a tool in looking at where we are going in the longer term. After all, mindfulness is about being able to focus on the present. However, one of the reasons that people are thought to lack mindfulness is that they have a tendency to ruminate on the past and focus too much on future problems that might never occur (Shonin et al. 2015). By being mindful and being more aware of how we are feeling in the present we can think about how we feel about our longer-term career in a clearer and more realistic way. We can ensure that we are able to listen to our own thoughts and feelings without being overtaken by unnecessary fears or preoccupations.

If you want to develop mindfulness then you could consider joining a class or reading about how to practise mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditations usually involve focusing on the passage of the breath in and out of the body while intrusive thoughts are allowed to drift out of the mind. They involve letting go of distractions and preoccupations and opening the mind to peace and understanding. By clearing the mind we can be open to new experience and become more creative and in tune with our real selves.

Langer (2014) suggested that mindfulness can reduce stress by allowing us to escape from pessimistic or doom-laden predictions about how things will turn out. It can also prevent us from falling victim to the delusion that we are indispensable and solely responsible for the success or failure of any particular piece of work. By having a realistic appraisal of a situation we can approach it in a calmer and more logical way. There are several different ways in which most situations can be resolved, each of which will result in a different set of challenges and opportunities. Langer stated that the only situation in which mindfulness is not helpful is one in which we have found the very best way of doing something and also that nothing else changes. Of course, we are never likely to find ourselves in a situation where our life and our work are not changing. As I will discuss in this chapter, political and social change and the rapid development of technology mean that social work jobs are changing very quickly. By developing our career mindfully we can try to maintain our awareness of these changes while keeping in touch with our own personal and professional objectives.

The role of emotional intelligence in developing a resilient career

The concept of emotional intelligence has been much discussed in psychology over the past few decades. It has been developed as a concept to explain why some people appear to be better than others at understanding their own and other people's emotional states and utilising these insights to enhance their relationships. It is a highly controversial subject with some academics claiming that it is measuring a distinct and valid group of abilities which can predict job success while others dispute these claims. Locke (2005) questioned whether emotional intelligence is a distinct form of

intelligence or simply an ability to apply intelligence effectively in the interpersonal domain. Another criticism has been that since emotional intelligence strongly correlates with certain personality traits, then it is these personality traits (plus general intelligence), rather than a distinct form of intelligence that is being measured by EI Inventories (Schulte et al., 2004). Landy (2005) reviewed the evidence for emotional intelligence as a predictor of work success and concluded that much of the evidence for this has come from outside mainstream science and cannot therefore be substantiated. It should be pointed out that creating measures for predicting success in business is a highly profitable industry. We should therefore be cautious in accepting at face value some of the bold claims which are often made about the value of psychometric tests. Some universities are at the moment contemplating whether to test students for emotional resilience before they come on to programmes. I would urge caution as the ability of psychometric tests to validly measure traits or skills which can be predictive of future success is open to question. I think it is more useful to apply knowledge from psychology to help people to develop their potential rather than to make judgements about their capabilities.

Whether we accept that emotional intelligence is a valid concept and something distinct from general intelligence and personality we can still accept that qualities associated with the construct are useful in promoting good interpersonal relationships at work.

Stein and Book (2006) described the Bar-On measure of emotional intelligence. This consists of 15 factors which they considered to be linked to success at work and how they could be developed. I would like to consider five of these factors: reality testing, flexibility, impulse control, happiness and optimism. I have chosen to focus on these factors because I consider that they are related to mindfulness and to building up resilience across the span of one's career.

Emotional intelligence: Reality testing

Reality testing was described by Stein and Book (2006: 173) as 'tuning in to the immediate situation'. It involves being able to arrive at an objective understanding of a situation and being able to test how accurate this is. This is not as straightforward an ability as it might seem. It is possible for two people to be confronted with exactly the same situation and reach very different conclusions about it. Freeman et al. (2005) demonstrated this using a virtual reality experiment. Participants wore headsets which immersed them in a virtual reality environment in which they would encounter other electronically generated people who might look at them or look away. The virtual reality characters were created to be neutral in the reactions towards the experimental subjects. However, even though all participants experienced the same visual stimuli, the way in which they interpreted the virtual reality characters varied greatly. Some participants thought they were friendly and welcoming, whereas others found them hostile or threatening. The degree to which the characters were found hostile or friendly correlated with participants' scores on the Fenigstein Paranoia

scale. This is a measure of paranoia (suspicion about the intentions of others) across the non-clinical population. Paranoia score was positively correlated with making negative interpretations about the VR avatars. People with a tendency towards suspicion about other people in general would be more likely to see the virtual reality characters as threatening, whereas people who scored low for paranoia might see the same characters as being friendly or welcoming. What the study showed was that people's preconceptions about how trustworthy other people are has an influence on how they interpret social signals in their environment. There is obviously some benefit in being a little cautious about other people so that we can avoid danger. However, too much suspicion about others will make it difficult for us to make friends and get the most out of social interactions.

An ability to think objectively and reality test our social encounters is a skill which will help us to build our social network and establish good relationships with those that we work with. Stein and Book (2006: 173) state that this is the ability to 'discern the difference between the way things are and the way that we hope or fear they are'. It involves searching for evidence in the environment and then testing any interpretations which we come up with. This ability allows us to detect threats and problems quickly and avoid panicking unnecessarily and also to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Just as our psychological view of the world affects our interpretations and responses to social interactions, so too can our worldview affect our attitude to risks and opportunities in our work environment more generally. If we can develop a habit of carrying out reality testing when we encounter new situations rather than defaulting to either catastrophising or ignoring new information then we can respond to new situations in a mindful way. We can thus build resilience into our approach to work.

Exercise

Reality Testing

1. Think about a situation in which you got very upset and panicky and imagined a catastrophic outcome but for which the end result was satisfactory. Now think about why you jumped to conclusions about how bad things would get. What information did you use to arrive at the negative conclusion? What other information could you have taken into account to form a more balanced view? Why do you think you failed to arrive at a balanced perspective?
2. Now repeat the exercise with a situation in which you failed to react to important information and this resulted in an error or oversight. Was there an alternative way you could have responded? What steps could you take to respond more appropriately if a similar situation re-occurred?
3. Thinking about your responses to 1 and 2 above can you think of a strategy for ensuring you respond calmly but proportionately to important information about work?

Emotional intelligence: Flexibility

Stein and Book (2006) considered flexibility to be ‘an ability to adjust emotions, thoughts and behaviours to changing situations and conditions’. They also stated that people with flexibility were ‘open and tolerant of different ideas, orientations, ways and practices’ (p.151).

Social work does of course need a great deal of flexibility. No two days in social work are exactly the same. Social workers frequently have to deal with unexpected crises and sometimes several at once. Anyone who requires a predictable environment for work is unlikely to find many jobs in social work which are suitable for them. However, social workers are also having to demonstrate flexibility in relation to the tools and structure of their work as well as the work itself. Technology and social policy are moving faster than they ever have. At the time I graduated as a social worker in 1989 my classmates and I expected that we would be doing a job that would last us our whole career until retirement and would probably not change much in that time. Current social work students are under no illusions that their job role will have this longevity. They are aware that they may have to face privatisation, outsourcing or possibly setting up their own independent practice. They are also aware that they will have to adapt to all sorts of technological changes in their work. Only very basic IT literacy was needed when I graduated and most typing and data entry were done by admin staff. This is an exceptional situation now and social workers must become increasingly adept at using new technology. Technological changes will have huge benefits in the long term but it requires all social workers to rapidly change their work practices. The changes in employment of social workers will create a great deal of uncertainty and instability for workers including fears about maintaining a regular and dependable income. Social workers will have to become accustomed to dealing with a rapidly changing environment.

Flexibility is something we can practise and develop. Many of our self-defeating habits such as procrastinating or over-eating are part of entrenched and habitual patterns of behaviour. By varying how we approach our day we can help ourselves break out of habits and develop our ability to respond in more novel and appropriate ways to new challenges. We can start to respond more mindfully to the demands in our environment.

Exercise

Flexibility

Think about your regular routine and how you spend the work day. Do you follow a very regular schedule? Why not change something this week about your work routine.

For example, vary the time you have lunch or the type of food you choose. Or why not do something different over your lunch period or have a morning break at a different time.

Now reflect on whether you enjoyed varying your routine. Did you feel in any way refreshed? Did you avoid any unhelpful habitual behaviours?

Emotional intelligence: Impulse control

Stein and Book (2006: 204) defined impulse control as ‘the ability to delay an impulse, drive or temptation’. It’s important not to confuse impulse control with a lack of spontaneity. People with impulse control problems are liable to lose their temper or act unpredictably and make highly risky choices without thinking through the consequences. They are not able to deal calmly with interruptions or frustrations. If you are able to show good impulse control it does not mean that you are out of touch with your instincts or feelings. It simply means that you are able to take the time to evaluate your options for responding to stimuli and make sensible choices before you commit to speech or action.

People with poor impulse control will often respond to a perceived criticism or attack by another person by losing their temper or lashing out. If you have a long-term or ongoing problem with impulse control you may find that that over time this causes damage to your personal and work relationships. You may end up being forced to leave jobs or experience multiple divorces or financial problems through reckless spending. If you recognise this as being a major problem then I would recommend therapy to discuss why impulse control is a problem for you.

It is possible that even if you do not have major problems with impulse control that you have some areas in your life where you can face conflict with others in response to particular triggers. A common situation where this happens can be emails. If we receive an email which we perceive as aggressive or confrontational from another person we can respond to this quickly by firing off an equally or even greater provocative email which can end up in a spiral of recrimination. We may later find that we have misread the email or jumped to conclusions. Even if the email was in fact impolite, firing off counter-attacks is not going to improve the situation. In those circumstances having a plan for dealing with this type of situation will help you to cope better. For example, you could resolve never to work on emails when you are feeling overly tired or frustrated. You could also decide that if you are annoyed by an email then you should wait for a defined period (e.g. 24 hours) before replying to it. You could also decide that if you have any negative feedback to give someone that this is done in a planned way in person rather than by email or phone.

If you are normally someone who responds thoughtfully and carefully to others but have recently become easily frustrated, impulsive or argumentative this could be a sign that you are experiencing a high degree of stress or even burnout. In this case you should take time to discuss your behaviour and feelings about it with someone

you trust. If you conclude from this that you are experiencing problems with stress then you should seek help and support for this and find some way to get respite from your burdens.

Exercise

Impulse Control

Think about a situation in which you acted impulsively. Ask yourself how much thought, if any, went into your response. Then think about whether this is part of a pattern of impulsive behaviour or not. If you do have a tendency to react spontaneously in a negative way in certain situations then think about what these situations have in common. What are the triggers? What psychological function do you think your impulsive responses could be fulfilling? For example, do situations which trigger you activate any longstanding anxieties or threats to your self-esteem or represent any past conflicts or tap into painful memories?

What alternative strategy could you have for dealing with these situations? Now try to visualise yourself responding differently to that situation. At the earliest opportunity put your new behavioural response into practice.

Give yourself praise for having handled the situation differently. Focus on why you feel more satisfied with your improved response. Think about how you can embed your better response into your habitual way of responding to similar situations. One way of improving impulse control can be to write a flash card with instructions for how to deal with situations which you have problems with. You can have a list of things to do; for example, if your impulse problem was in dealing with emails as discussed above then you could have a card which says: 'If I receive an email which makes me angry then wait 24 hours before responding, ignore any content that is unimportant and find an alternative medium for dealing with any difficult issues.' If you then find yourself in the situation you can bring the card out of your purse or wallet as a reminder from your calm reasoning self about what to do.

Impulse control has important long-term consequences for career success. Stein and Book (2006) cited a famous longitudinal study by Shoda et al. (1997) which found that children who were able to delay gratification at age 4 demonstrated better social skills, better coping strategies and better scores in SAT tests at age 16–18 than children who were poor at delaying gratification. The experimental test which they took at age 4 was simply that they were offered the choice between eating one marshmallow on the table in front of them or waiting for an adult to return from an errand at which point they would be able to get two marshmallows rather than the one. The researchers found that the ability to delay gratification to get a larger reward later rather than a small reward instantly was a better predictor of SAT scores than their IQ.

If impulse control remains a problem for you in your adult relationships or your workplace then it is still worth working on behavioural control now. Building a successful and resilient career involves perseverance, application and dedication over a long period. There are no short cuts. Building up your portfolio of skills will take time with many of the rewards only being realised much further down the line.

Emotional intelligence: Happiness

Stein and Book (2006: 217) define happiness as a combination of ‘self-satisfaction, general contentment and the ability to enjoy life’.

According to a survey by the Office of National Statistics (2015) the happiest place in Britain is the Fermanagh and Omagh areas of Northern Ireland. In the same study Northern Ireland came out best on most measures of wellbeing. I can easily understand this. Over the last few years I have visited Northern Ireland every year in my role as an external examiner. I feel great from the moment I land in the airport. Everyone I encounter is so courteous and genuine in their expression of friendship. People appear to take joy in small everyday things and the fact that the country has experienced a great deal of disharmony and poverty does not seem to detract from this.

We may experience a rush of exhilaration when we have a major achievement such as getting a new job that we wanted, buying a new home or finding out that we have passed a difficult exam. However, the joy of major achievements can often be short lived. To experience happiness more regularly and fully we need to be able to get enjoyment from small everyday things and be able to absorb ourselves completely when we are doing something which we really enjoy.

Positive psychology is a division of the psychology discipline which has tried to take on the issue of how we can enrich our lives and make ourselves happier and more contented. One writer from this field Mihali Csikszentmihályi (1990) has described the phenomenon of ‘flow’ as being a psychological state in which we are completely engaged in an enjoyable activity to the exclusion of everything else. A flow experience could be anything: painting a picture; an intense game of football with friends; sailing on a calm sea and enjoying the feel of sunshine on your skin; playing with your child. What distinguishes it as flow experience is a feeling of joy and total engagement. Csikszentmihályi suggested that we can improve our psychological outlook by trying to have as many flow experiences as we can. I am having a flow experience writing this book. Hopefully it shows and you are enjoying the experience of reading it. If you really enjoy your work and it continues to fulfil you then you should be able to experience flow at work. The reality of the demands of social work are such that this is not going to be possible all the time but hopefully you should have some good experiences in your social work career in which you help people to move their lives forward. Experiencing and recognising these feelings are important in maintaining the energy and enthusiasm which we need to go forward positively in our career and maintain a commitment and focus through periods of stress and strain.

Managers have a role in making the workplace more conducive to workers having flow experiences at work. Csikszentmihályi (2003) wrote ‘The challenge for someone who wants to create an environment that attracts and retains enthusiastic and enterprising workers is to understand why people want to work in the first place, and then provide conditions that fulfill that need.’ Social work is a profession which attracts people who want to help and support people to fulfil their potential. If management can keep this perspective in mind then it should be possible to create a workplace environment which facilitates staff in working towards this objective. Csikszentmihályi argued that a work environment which allows people to grow and develop will improve achievement and happiness of workers. An encouraging and nurturing environment will improve outcomes greatly for workers and ultimately the users of services as a result of the positive engagement of staff.

Exercise

Flow

Plan some time over the next week to do something which you really enjoy – perhaps a hobby or activity which you have not had enough time for recently. Stick to your plan and enjoy your relaxation time. Afterwards think about the degree to which you were able to tune out the background chatter of things which have been concerning you. Did you benefit from getting time and psychological space away from your everyday concerns? Close your eyes and imagine yourself experiencing the activity again. Reflect on whether you allow yourself enough time for relaxing activities that allow you to unwind completely. Think about how you could manage your time better to allow you to set aside more time for complete relaxation.

Emotional intelligence: Optimism

Stein and Book (2006: 230) described optimism as ‘the ability to look at the brighter side of life and maintain a positive attitude even in the face of adversity’. They stated that optimism does not mean seeing everything in life through rose-tinted spectacles but is rather an ability to be realistic while retaining a conviction that we can learn from mistakes, work towards positive goals and take advantage of opportunities when they arise. In Chapter 2, I described Burns’s list of common cognitive errors such as ‘all or nothing thinking’ and over-generalisation, which can lead us to a pattern of self-defeating thought processes. A person with optimism is able to see which part of the reason for their failures is in external circumstances and does not take temporary setbacks as personally as someone with a pessimistic thinking style. They are able to resolve to try better next time and plan how they are going to tackle the situation differently rather than working on the assumption that they will always fail.

Exercise

Optimism

Think about a setback which you recently had either in your personal or professional life. Think about why it upset you. What thoughts went through your mind about the implications of what happened? Did you think that the incident was isolated to the particular situation or related to some more global failing on your part? Did you take the view that you could overcome the problem and achieve a better outcome in the future? Think about the relation between your thoughts about the situation and what your feelings were.

If you had been left with negative thoughts about yourself or depressed feelings about your abilities or personal qualities then try to reframe how you think about the situation. Think about what qualities you have which might help you to handle a similar situation differently in the future. If there is a need for you to acquire additional knowledge or additional skills then think about what you might have to do to acquire these things. Put together a plan of how you can become better prepared to deal with a similar situation in the future. Now think about how it makes you feel now that you have a plan for dealing with your difficult task or situation. Do you feel any more confident or positive?

Dealing with negative thoughts and feelings: Emotional agility

David and Congleton (2013) stated that there can be two habitual responses which people can have for dealing with negative thoughts and feelings – both of which are self-defeating in the long run. One is to suppress them, only for them to re-occur as themes again in other situations over long periods of time. Another response can be to give in to the negative impulse by, for example, becoming angry with another person or giving into depressed feelings about ourselves. David and Congleton suggest an approach which borrows from cognitive psychology. That is that we should clearly label in our minds what the negative thoughts are which we are having and acknowledge that they are thoughts and that they belong to us. We should then identify what emotions have arisen in us as a result of these thoughts. Again, we should identify clearly for ourselves that they are feelings and that we own them.

David and Congleton stated that this action of identifying and labelling thoughts and feelings allows you to see that they are information about your current state of mind and that they may change over time. You can accept that you are having these thoughts and feelings without having to respond to them right away. Having clearly identified the thoughts and feelings which we have about a difficult situation, we can then give ourselves space to decide on a response which is consistent with our values.

Developing emotional agility over time will help us to become more in tune with who we are, what we really feel and respond to difficult situations in ways which are most helpful to us in the long term.

Exercise

Emotional Agility

The next time you feel brought down by a setback or feel you have responded to a difficult situation in a way which you are unhappy with, work through the following questions.

1. What were the different stages in the incident or conversation? What was it about my reaction which left me feeling unhappy?
2. What were the thoughts which went through my head?
3. What feelings arose from the thoughts?
4. Did I respond in a careful considered way, did I respond on an impulse without thinking, or did I respond by denying my feelings and trying to ignore my thoughts and feelings?
5. Does the incident remind me of previous situations in which I have had similar difficulties?
6. What values and qualities would I like to be able to show if I were faced with a similar situation again?
7. How could I respond in the future in a way which was more congruent with the values I identified above?

Developing creative thinking skills

In Chapter 8 I introduced the concept of professional curiosity and why it was important in enabling social workers to identify and face up to new issues and professional challenges. Thinking creatively is also important for managing our career and thinking about how one can develop professionally.

Social work is constantly facing new challenges as a result of societal change. Female genital mutilation, honour-based violence and radicalisation, for example, are problems which are widely discussed in social work media now, but were little understood only a few years ago. Even now, the profession is in the early stages of thinking about how we can tackle these problems. Finding approaches to these emerging problems requires imagination and creativity.

Kelley and Kelley (2012) stated that as children we are extremely creative because we are not self-conscious about drawing or writing or thinking unusual things. However, when we get into our teens formal education tends to set up a dividing line between people who are creative and those who are not. For example, I used to love

drawing when I was in primary school. However, when I went to secondary school my art teacher told me that I had some talent but not enough to make a career out of art – so that was that – I went down a purely academic route. Kelley and Kelley say that we need to reawaken our child-like sensibilities to rediscover our creative side. We can do this by getting outside of our office, our procedures and our comfort zone. They suggest that we should try to stop our internal ‘judge’ from interfering and allow ourselves space to uncritically think about ideas and come up with new solutions to problems. For example, is there scope for taking a community or group work approach with some of the problems you are dealing with on your patch? Kelley and Kelley (p. 118) have a mantra, ‘Don’t get ready, get started.’ They suggest that taking small steps towards a goal is the best way to overcome nerves about trying something innovative or creative in our work. Thus, if we want to try to tackle emerging social problems the first stage has to be making a start in engaging with people in local communities who have knowledge of these problems.

Managing career changes successfully

The profession is currently facing a great deal of structural change partly as a response to government spending restrictions and partly as result of local authorities moving from being direct employers to commissioning services from independent providers. I discussed the issue of social work practices in Chapter 5 and looked at potential positives and negatives of these changes for social workers. Originally, it was only services such as home care and residential care which were privatised. However, some local authorities are currently thinking about outsourcing assessment and fieldwork services. It is likely that this trend will continue. Making a change from working in a local authority to working as part of some sort of social work practice or community interest company involves fundamental changes in both your security of employment and the amount of control which you have over your work and your career. There are new risks and uncertainties, new challenges and new freedoms and opportunities. It represents complex change.

Brimm (2015) suggested a framework for dealing with complex change in the world of work based around seven Cs: Complexity, Clarity, Confidence, Creativity, Commitment, Consolidation and Change. I will describe the seven Cs and how they might be applied to dealing with organisational change in social work.

The first C, complexity, involves thinking carefully through all the issues that apply to your situation. It may be the changes have been initiated externally – e.g. that the local authority which you work for has decided to restructure – or internally – e.g. that you have independently decided that you want to work for yourself. Regardless of where the change has been instigated you will have choices. If your employer restructures then the choices will be about whether to leave or to stay. Thinking through this will involve gathering information about how your job will change if you stay and also what alternative positions might be available with other employers. If you are considering working for yourself this involves detailed consideration of the costs, benefits and risks of such a decision and talking this through with your family. Decisions such as this are detailed and there are likely to

be many interrelated issues, such as where you will live, whether you can afford to take on a mortgage, etc.

The second C is about seeking clarity. Once you have identified all the implications of the options in a complex decision the next stage is to think about their relative importance and get a clear idea of how important they are to you. For example, if you are just about to start a family then it may not be the best time financially to think about working for yourself. Alternatively, if your partner has a stable income then the flexibility of working from home may tip the balance towards working for yourself at this time. By taking time to think deeply about what is important to you personally and professionally you can increase the chance of the decision you make being one that is right for you.

The third C is confidence. Brimm stated that there is an optimal amount of confidence which will empower us to deal with change competently and decisively while avoiding being reckless or rash and failing to think through important issues. If we are feeling anxious about a new role then getting a mentor who has managed the same transition effectively can be a way of getting support.

The fourth C is creativity and this involves freeing ourselves up creatively to come up with new strategies for dealing with our new responsibilities or the new structure we find ourselves in. As I stated in the section above this means freeing oneself intellectually. A holiday or a break of some sort before starting a new role can be helpful in giving yourself the ability to change.

The fifth C is commitment. The Roman god Janus was the god of transitions and gateways. He had two faces, one looking forward and one looking back. When we are at a career transition we too will be at a boundary where we will be looking back at our recent work and experiences, possibly with some sadness and loss and also looking forward, perhaps with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. To make our transition successful we need to implement the fifth C by making a wholehearted commitment to our new path in spite of our regrets about leaving the old one and our anxieties about what lies ahead.

The sixth C is consolidation. The task now is to begin to find your identity in your new role or organisation. This can be a difficult phase as it involves adapting to new ways of working and embedding new skills and new perspectives. Enjoying the company of friends and doing leisure activities which you enjoy are good ways of maintaining continuity in at least some parts of your life while you adjust to a new role.

The final C is change and this involves dealing with all the new challenges which will come with your new job role. Even after you have adapted to a new role, change will continue to come and you may eventually find yourself contemplating how to deal with a whole new set of changes.

Dealing with setbacks and disappointments

Even if we approach our career building with optimism and confidence we will inevitably have failures and disappointments. There will be the promotion which we

missed or the career move which did not live up to what we hoped it would be. It is easy in these situations to start to feel anger and resentment and these emotions can build up to the extent that they can overtake us and consume us. We have probably all experienced a situation where we have a friend who is frustrated about some sort of injustice at work and who talks incessantly about it every time we see them. We may have had issues like this ourselves sometimes but not realise it because friends are too polite to point out how obsessively we have been focused on it. In these situations the self-talk and negative emotions are going to be damaging to us psychologically and physically. The Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama and Cutler, 2003) suggested that we should carry out deep reflection into our thoughts and feelings and consider whether our emotions might be damaging to us. He suggested that we should reflect on previous times in our life when we let ourselves be overtaken by such emotions and consider what effect it had on our relationships with others and our ability to live life positively. If we can put negative feelings aside then we can start to put together a credible plan to improve our situation. This may well involve looking for another job. However, if we can find greater contentment in the short term then this will make us stronger and better able to recognise and take advantage of opportunities when they come along.

Holiday (2014) said that if we are unable to accept setbacks and take the view that life is against us then this is akin to taking a red traffic light as a personal attack. He suggested that we reflect on how much worse the setback could have been. We should accept that the course of our life will have unpleasant blips in it. In the longer term we can triumph against career setbacks and in fact they may send us in a different direction which is ultimately more fulfilling. In any case, falling prey to defeatism or anger is not going to help us to improve our situation.

Intelligent CV creation

A curriculum vitae (or resume) is not just a record of achievement, it is a valuable tool which can help you to think creatively about your skills and experience and widen the range of jobs you might consider applying for.

I would recommend that as soon as you graduate as a social worker you put together a CV. You may think that this is unnecessary as most UK social work jobs ask for an application form to be completed rather than a CV. However, writing a CV and constantly updating it has several advantages. First of all, you will have a comprehensive and regularly updated list of all your qualifications, training, achievements and previous responsibilities all in one easily accessible place. Thus, for example, when you are filling in an application form you are not struggling to remember exactly which year you got your Practice Education qualification or the exact title of that residential work job you did just before your social work degree. Second, it helps to remind you of exactly how experienced and well qualified you are. Writing a CV can be a real confidence booster. Why would anybody **not** want to employ you with such an impressive list of training, education and experience?

I would recommend having a comprehensive CV which lists everything. Then, if you are asked to submit a CV for a specific job you can produce an edited version for that particular job which highlights some aspects of your career and qualifications and omits small pieces of training or experience which are not relevant. It is absolutely essential that everything in your CV and any job application is truthful. This does not mean that you have to be modest. You should certainly talk up what you have done but you must still be honest. I once saw an article on the *Guardian* website in which the journalist suggested that everyone lied in job applications. Perhaps this is the case in certain parts of the media but it is an absolute no no in jobs in health and social care where trust is of paramount importance. If you are talking about work in which you have been part of a project team, you should clarify what your role was in the work rather than just saying you were involved in the work.

You can find templates for CVs easily on the internet. Pick one that is clear and straightforward. My CV has the following headings: Profile, Experience, Education and Training, Papers and Publications. The first heading 'Profile' is something which is worth doing, but I would recommend that you do this section last. The Profile is a brief description of yourself which would make you attractive to an employer. It should sum up what sort of work you are capable of, your most important qualifications, your professional identity and something about your attitude to work. For example, 'I am a committed child protection social worker with 5 years' frontline experience. I am a qualified practice educator and have undertaken training in family therapy. I am an enthusiastic team member and have considerable experience in joint work with the Police and other agencies and professionals.'

In the section on Experience you should list all your posts in order, starting with the current or most recent one and working back. For each post you should list the name of the employer, the job title, a list of your responsibilities and also a list of what you consider to be your achievements in the post. Achievements can be any special contributions you made, such as a very complex case or group of cases which you were involved with or a piece of group work or project work which you undertook or perhaps a forum or study group which you set up. It is important to record these achievements because when you go for job interviews, employers will want to know of instances where you showed initiative, innovation or took responsibility.

The section on Education and Training should list every piece of training and education you have had from short in-house courses on the Care Act to degree qualifications. Of course, when you come to completing a job application form or are sending the CV to an employer you may want to miss out very short courses which are not relevant to the job being applied for. Application forms normally have separate sections for education and training and it is not always clear which of these categories some courses fall into. When I am in doubt I try to think about what is going to make sense to the person reading the form and have regard to the amount of space available in each section. I tend to miss out or just summarise my school qualifications as they were a very long time ago and not very salient any more for the type of jobs I am applying for. However, that will probably not be the case for all readers.

The last section on Papers and Publications is a relevant section for me because I am an academic. Some readers may want to include this section to highlight any research or publication you have been involved with. Alternatively, you might want to have a section which highlights special projects or large pieces of work you have been involved with.

I don't have a section in my CV for hobbies or interests. I don't honestly think most people are interested in this and it can just lead to people making assumptions about you based on their prejudices or preconceptions. If you are asked for hobbies and interests on an application form I would tend to list interests which you have that are either neutral or likely to be regarded positively.

Exercise

CV Creation

Now I would like you to create a CV for yourself that sets out who you are and what knowledge and skills you have to offer. If you do this well, it will be a useful skeleton on to which you can add all the new skills and experiences which you gain as you progress as a social worker. It will also provide you with a record which you can use to evidence your professional development if required to do so by the professional regulator.

After you have completed your CV, reflect on how you feel about having listed all your experience and accomplishments. Hopefully it will have given you a confidence boost.

Your CV is the real source of your job security and employability

My mother had a very strong view when I was growing up that public service was the key to job security. She thought that I ought to join the civil service and that doing this would guarantee me a career structure, a good pension and a job for life. I was a big disappointment to her when I quit my job with the Audit Commission to do voluntary work. I never looked back of course, and forged an alternative career structure which nobody but me seems to be capable of understanding.

There is no prescription for career success that someone else can give you. You will have to find your own path. However, I am firmly of the view that employability and job security are qualities which reside in the individual worker and not in their employer or any contract they have with them. We are living in a time in which globalisation, information technology and outsourcing are radically and rapidly changing the nature and structure of human services work. For example, if we are employed by a local authority we cannot be certain that it is going to continue to be our employer in the future. We cannot be sure either that our job role will continue to exist or that it will continue to be done by people with the same experience or job

title that we have. A permanent post can turn out to be extremely impermanent as a result of austerity policies and privatisation. This is not just a feature of the public sector. Many professional roles in the private sector are being outsourced too so that employers can exploit specialist skills for short-term pieces of work. Levinson (2015) described this as a 'new age of self-reliance' in which employers no longer expect to have long-term relationships with their employees. He said that workers need to keep in mind alternative roles which they look to if their current employment comes to an end. Levinson stated that specialist skills can lose their currency and marketability. He suggests that workers should think about their fundamental personal qualities and generic skills and how these can be transferred from one work environment to another. For example, an ability to use a particular computer package is something which is of little use if that package becomes obsolete. However, an interest in information technology and an ability to adapt quickly and enthusiastically to new forms of IT is a very useful quality. Similarly, the skills of networking, teamworking or leadership which we develop as a social worker can be easily adapted to new work settings.

Marc Andressen (2007), a venture capitalist, said it is impossible to plan a career in the rapidly changing environment which we are in today. He stated, 'Instead of planning your career, focus on developing skills and pursuing opportunities.' He suggested that just as a professional investor spreads their risk by having a portfolio of investments so the professional should look on their career as a portfolio of jobs, roles and opportunities. My own career has involved working as a social worker, a team manager, a project manager, a lecturer and a head of a department. Each successive job has been an opportunity to enhance and widen my portfolio of skills and experience. I have on occasion taken a reduction in terms and conditions or salary to get a job which will improve my marketability in the longer term. Sometimes, counter-intuitively, there may be greater advantage in taking a temporary job if it allows you to gain access to a field which is difficult to break into, or gives you experience which you think could be in demand in the future. Clearly, your personal circumstances will influence your appetite for risk, but a permanent post is not always the low risk option it once was. If you do have a permanent job you should be taking advantage of the relative stability to improve your skills portfolio. Speaking on the James Altucher podcast (Altucher, 2015), business writer Taylor Pearson stated that workers can be earning a regular salary but at the same time accumulating a 'silent risk' by not developing skills which can be applied to a wider job marketplace if their current job disappears.

Of course, there are collective as well as individual ways of influencing the future direction of your profession, and hence your career options. You could join the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) or the Social Work Action Network (SWAN). Both of these organisations are standing up for the profession, raising awareness about issues and helping social workers to stand together for their voice to be heard. SWAN additionally promotes links with social work in other countries to provide an international perspective and allow social workers to make connections across the world.

New technology

I remember in the early 1990s a friend of my wife and I went on a professional exchange visit to Japan. She gave a talk to a group of Japanese social care professionals about social care in Britain. At the end she opened the floor to questions. She told us that the first question that someone asked her was, 'What progress have you made in the UK with robots?' Our friend did not know what to make of this question and when she told us about it, my wife and I fell about laughing. We thought the idea was ridiculous. It was not a concept that seemed alien to the Japanese, however. The Japanese animator Katsuhiro Otomo had made an anime film in 1991 called *Roujin Z*, which was a futuristic parody about a robotic suit which could give personal care to an older person.

Now fast forward almost two decades to 2010. At this time I was working as a project manager, responsible for a range of social care projects which used new technologies such as satellite tracking for people with dementia. I found myself on a steering group of a project which was going to design social care robots, alongside robotocists and engineers. What had once seemed like science fiction was coming closer to reality.

Technology is moving faster than ever. It has great potential to enhance social care and social work. Maintaining an interest in emerging and developing technology is an important way of future proofing your career. If you can combine a good skill set as a social worker with an interest and understanding of technology then you will be well placed to take advantage of job opportunities which will undoubtedly develop around technology. Nourbakhsh (2015) stated that over the next two decades medical robotics will make wheelchairs obsolete and visually impaired people will be aided by cameras and sensors. Nourbakhsh stated that these innovations could be an early step towards transhumanism, a future state in which highly sophisticated hybrids of humans and machines (cyborgs) will be able to out-perform purely biological humans. Such possibilities will have many associated ethical dilemmas and will challenge our understanding of what it is to be human.

Exercise

Managing the Future

In this chapter I have looked at the issues around rapidly changing technological and economic factors and the importance of maintaining a broad and up-to-date range of professional skills. Now I want you to think about how you can help to shape your future. You will all be familiar with the concept of forecasting. That is, looking at current

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trends and extrapolating from them to make predictions about phenomena such as the weather and the future state of the economy. Robinson (1990) invented the concept of 'backcasting'. This involves deciding on a future state of affairs which we find desirable and then working backwards in time to consider what policies and initiatives would be necessary to bring about this state of affairs.

The exercise which I would like you to do contains elements of forecasting and backcasting. I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. How do you think your profession will have changed five years from now? Now think about how the field you work in may have changed 10 years from now. Think about current trends in the law, politics, social policy and employment practices and the possible influences of developing technologies. How do you think all these influences will affect the types of job opportunities which will be available in your field or area of interest?
2. Now think about how you would like to fit into the job marketplace of the future. Do you want to be a manager, a practitioner, an agency worker, a consultant...?
3. Think about what sorts of skills and experience will be needed to meet the opportunities that will be available.
4. Make a plan for how you are going to obtain the necessary experience and skills over the next few years to improve your career options over the next decade.

Of course, none of us have the ability to genuinely predict the future with any degree of certainty. However, we can resolve to actively manage our skill set and our career. In so doing we can be like an able navigator and have the winds and the waves on our side. We will have a career which is resilient and fulfilling for us and socially useful for the society we live in.

Chapter recap

In this final chapter I returned to the concept of mindfulness and asked you to think about how it could help you to think objectively about your work and your career and whether you are progressing towards medium- and long-term goals. I then moved on to look at some of the components of emotional intelligence which can be helpful in building resilience into your career in the long term.

The second half of the chapter looked at the changing nature of work and careers in the twenty-first century in response to factors such as globalisation and technological change. I set out the view that your career success and your long-term job security are grounded in your portfolio of skills and experience rather than in any one job role or employer. The chapter finished with an exercise in thinking about where you want to be in your career in the future and how you might get there.

Further reading

The *Community Care* website is an essential resource for anyone working in social work or social care and I would recommend that you sign up for daily emails which carry the latest social care headlines and links to the articles. The *Guardian* newspaper site also has social care pages and you can sign up for news alerts with them also. Keeping up to date with what is happening in your profession is essential.

If you want to keep in touch with technological changes in society then an excellent resource is *Wired* magazine which is available in US and UK editions. They also, of course, have a website.

I would also recommend reading as widely as you can. If you use Twitter then you can follow feeds from organisations such as the HCPC, BASW, SWAN and Department of Health. Try to read a newspaper regularly, either a paper copy or online and vary which paper you read so that you get exposed to a range of ideas and perspectives.

Final note

I hope you have enjoyed this book and that it is helpful to you in developing a resilient and fulfilling career in which you achieve positive changes for the people you work with. I would love to hear your experiences of reading and using the book. Please follow the Twitter account for this book @ResilientSW. You can also message me through this account. Please also consider leaving a review on Amazon. Academic books don't often get reviewed, but by taking a few minutes to share your thoughts you can help other readers decide whether this book is going to be helpful to them.