**Short Description**

This presentation explores the state of leadership in UK universities in the face of external pressures and turmoil, and makes the case for leadership to include courage, compassion and resilience. Each topic is discussed with the intention of developing a framework that can then be used to support leadership development to lead our universities effectively through the current chaos.

**Detailed Abstract**

**Introduction and Background**

UK higher education is perceived as currently being in a state of huge flux and even chaos. The "old order" of a traditionally elitist system funded by central government has been broken down and replaced with mass participation and student fees. This has led to an increase in marketization and government regulation for which academic leadership is general under-prepared. In addition, the introduction of student fees has led to universities becoming the latest in a line of "political footballs", and the pressures of competing in a global environment in both research and teaching have been worsened by Brexit and immigration policies. In the face of these pressures, the public universities are, in some cases, struggling to survive and are not thriving. At the same time, the legacy of the leadership model in UK universities where leadership has traditionally been conferred on those with a successful research background has not helped. Very often this results in chaotic leadership, poor people management and a sense of confusion compounded by the turbulent macro-environment.

It is clear that the traditional models of leadership are not working well for the higher education sector at the moment. There is a need for a new model to inspire and develop all leaders (both academic / faculty and professional services) throughout the organisation. This presentation makes the case for a three-legged stool of leadership, consisting of courage, compassion and resilience.

**Courage**

> *Courage is the quality shown by someone who decides to do something difficult or dangerous, even though they may be afraid.*
> Collins English Dictionary

The English word "courage" comes from the same Latin stem of the French word "coeur" meaning "heart". Manning and Curtis (2012) state that courage underpins leading by values and that leadership often involves dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty. In those types of situations, leaders require courage to act true to their values and convictions in order to make effective decisions.

History is littered with leaders who we would consider to be courageous: Winston Churchill's leadership during the Second World War; Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership against segregation in the US; Nelson Mandela's leadership against apartheid in South Africa. The common thread that ties these together is not only that these people were in the right place at the right time to lead, but that they also stepped up and were courageous in the face of great opposition.

In the face of great uncertainty in UK universities, we now need leaders of great courage to be clear about the directions that they want to take our institutions in – but we also need them to be values-driven leaders.  Too many projects are undertaken for reasons of vanity and not genuine benefit to students and staff.  The sector is plagued with accusations of "fat cat" salaries and benefits packages for the most senior leaders and instead of speaking out against this, most university Vice-Chancellors are quietly hoping this will just go away.  When the top leaders do not behave with courage and integrity, it makes it much more difficult for those further down in the organisation to do the same and so a culture develops where courage is not supported.

**Compassion**

*When people hear the word compassion, they tend to think of kindness. But scientific study has found the core of compassion to be courage.*

*A standard definition of compassion is, "a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it."*

*The courage to be compassionate lies in the willingness to see into the nature and causes of suffering - be that in ourselves, in others and the human condition. The challenge is to acquire the wisdom we need to address the causes of suffering in ourselves and others.*
The Compassionate Mind Foundation https://compassionatemind.co.uk

In the face of the challenges described earlier, our universities also need leaders with great compassion both for themselves, for their colleagues and for students, but in the first instance, the compassion needs to be for themselves.  Paul Gilbert's work on compassion focused therapy is based on the neuroscience that describes our brains in three sections: "threat", "drive" and "soothe".  If these are not in balance, then constant perception of threats can cause too much "drive", leading to further perceptions of potential threats, eventually leading to depression.  Yet, leadership development has not yet included how to balance minds against the constant perceptions of threat – particularly exacerbated by political turmoil and both external and internal uncertainties.  If we are to develop resilient and courageous leaders, then we need to focus on developing compassionate ones – and the starting point has to be self-compassion.

**Resilience**

*A resilient leader knows where they are strong, their areas for development, what takes them from pressure to stress and how to rebalance.  Has confidence in who they are and what they do, so that they create, build and take opportunities; bouncing back, knowing they will find a way through uncertainty, change and even crisis.*  The Resilient Leaders Development Programme https://www.resiliencetools.com/

In previous presentations at ILA conferences, I have introduced the Resilient Leaders Development Programme – an online tool which helps individuals and teams to assess their leadership resilience as defined in 4 areas – clarity of direction; awareness; leadership presence and resilient decision making – enabling leaders to make appropriate decisions in times of turmoil and to recover from crises in order to

move forwards.  The bigger problem, however, is how to create courageous, compassionate AND resilient leaders in organisations where the systems and structures have not previously supported this.  Indeed, where the culture may have actively prevailed against this.  I am intending to develop a framework whereby organisations can do an audit of how supportive the systems, structure and culture are of leadership courage, compassion and resilience in order to be able to address these issues at a macro-level as well as developing leaders' abilities in these aspects.