Developing Authentic Academic Leaders in UK Higher Education: Challenges and the Resilient Leaders Model
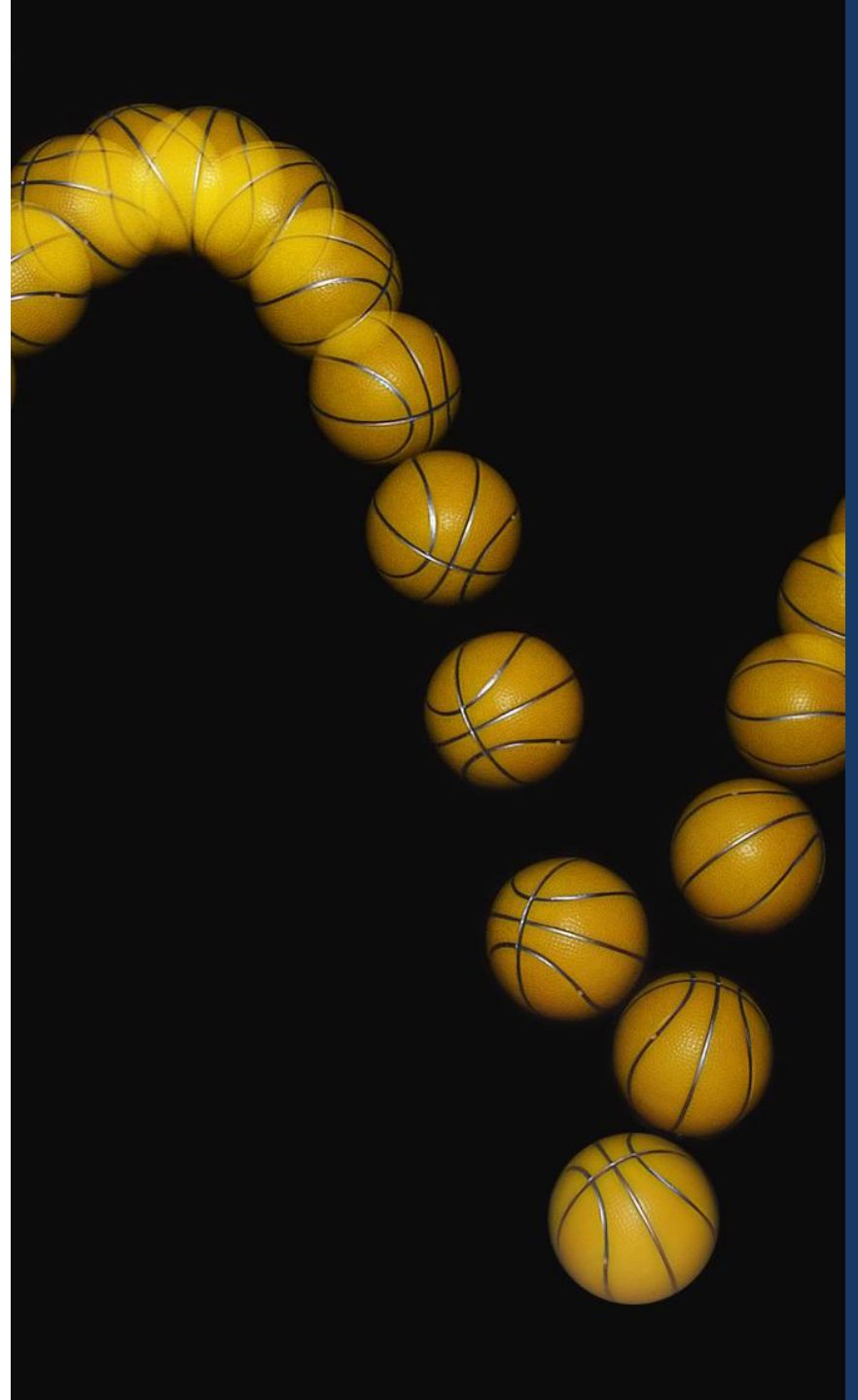
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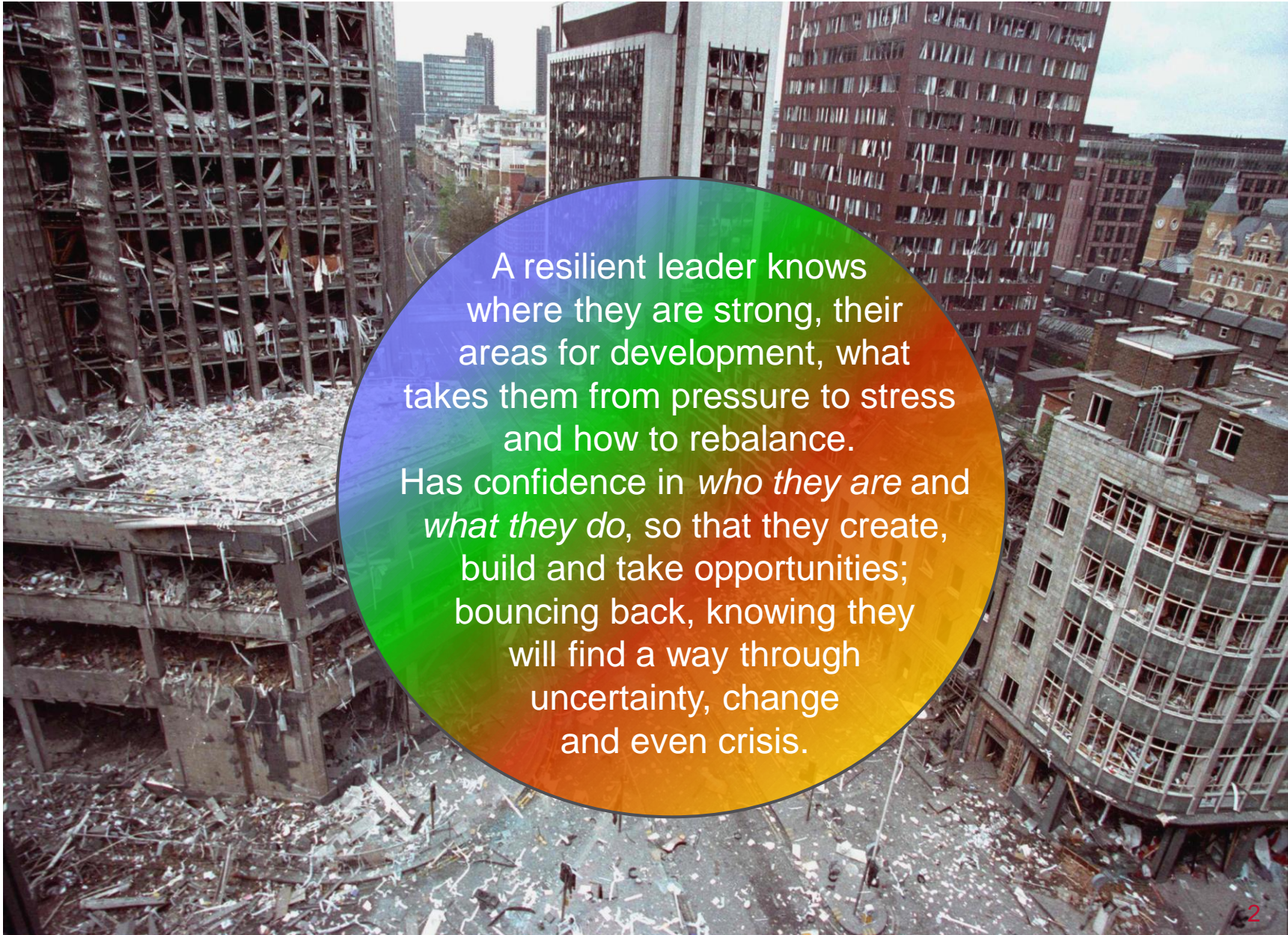Director, Brunel Educational Excellence Centre

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Resilience Tools
Leading the Way

A Resilient Leader

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.

Session Aims

- Follow on from last year's paper…

    Providing an evidence-base for university leadership development

    Working with http://www.resiliencetools.com to support the dimensions that leaders have found difficult

- Introduce you to the online Resilient Leaders' Development Programme (RLDP)

- Map leadership experiences "from the horses' mouths" against RLDP

Background & Project Aims

Building on existing work in research career development, we wanted:

To understand the career journeys and leadership experiences of academic leaders

To inform the literature and training and development for "the next generation" of research leaders beyond "prestige factors"

Literature

Little research into experiences of academic leaders (Peters and Ryan 2015)

Academics leaders are interesting because they have achieved promotion based on prestige factors – not suitability for the post in leadership / management terms

The role itself can involve a focus on other aspects and cause identity-conflict and dissatisfaction (Blackmore 2015, Kandiko-Howson and Coate 2015)

Leadership in UK higher education

- Higher education sector is in a state of chaos

- Leadership traditionally has been conferred on those with a strong research background

- The "human element" is often lacking

- There is little sense of talent development or support for progression to leadership roles

- Results in chaotic leadership, poor people management and a sense of confusion

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The "story" of RLDP resonates in UK HE

- What you do and who you are

- The need for clear vision in amongst confusion and constantly changing policy

- The need for decision making which is consultative but not paralysed by analysis

- The need for better work-life balance – duty of care to self and others

- The need for strong leadership presence – which is authentic and serving of others and the greater good focused on the purpose of the organisation

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My experiences

- Used the Resilient Leaders elements for some years

- Helped me to clarify vision and direction

- Identify the need to take care of myself as well as others

- Recognised that my strengths – environment awareness and awareness of the needs of others are positive but need to be balanced in order for me to function fully

- An ongoing flexible tool which is useful at every stage of my career and development

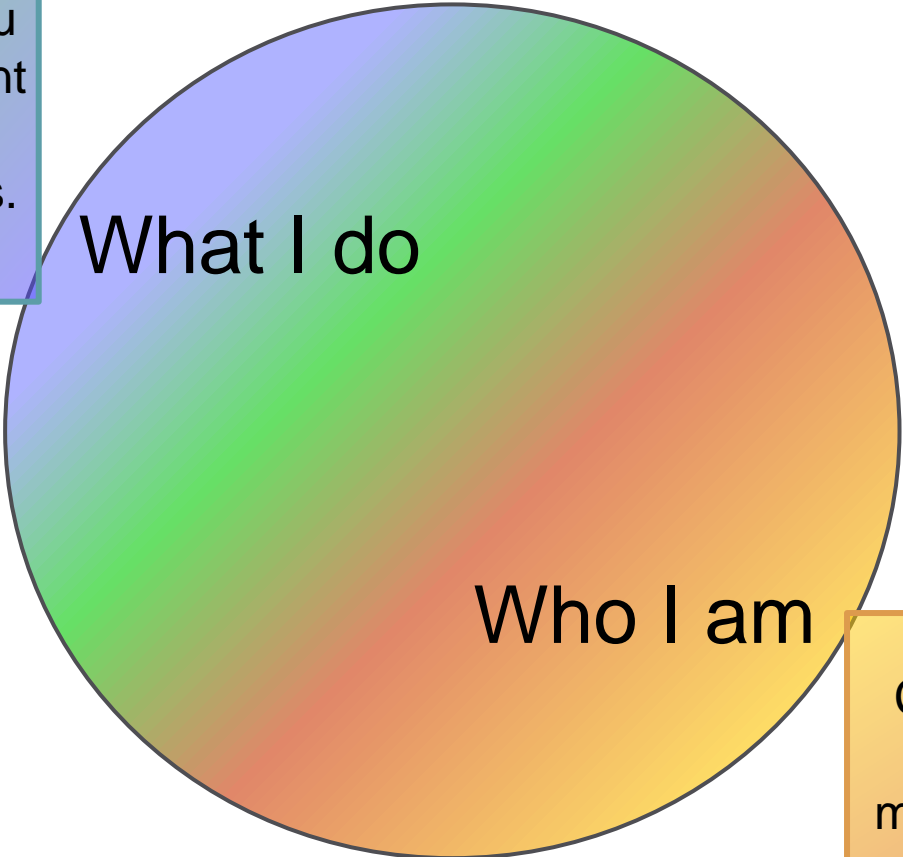- Mapped findings from our study against the RL elements

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Resilient Leader's Elements

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Resilient Leader's Elements

Setting a context, knowing where you are, where you want to get to and focusing on results.

What I do

Who I am

Channelling your emotions and motivating yourself and others in a positive and purposeful way.

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Resilient Leader's Elements

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Resilient Leader's Elements

Strategic Intent *Having a vision and realistic strategy for the future and finding ways to achieve them*

Unifying Purpose *Creating alignment, communicating effectively and enrolling people in the Strategic Intent*

Determination *Seeing through the fog of events, being able to adapt without compromising the Strategic Intent*

Clarity of Direction
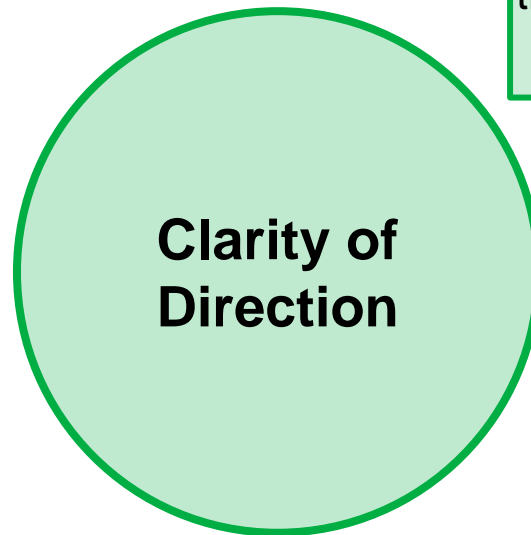
IMPACT

People know where they are going, why they are going there and they know you are determined to succeed.

Each individual can work out what to do for themselves in order to get to the end point.

Clarity of Direction

Resilient Decision Making

Awareness

Leadership Presence

Resilience Tools
Leading the Way

Clarity of Direction

"Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, who was sitting in a tree, "What road do I take?"

The cat asked, "Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know," Alice answered.

"Then," said the cat, "it really doesn't matter, does it?"

— *Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

"…you know, there's nothing wrong with planning and having a strategy and knowing what it is. You know, not sort of nailing yourself to it but knowing that there's a direction you want to go."

"So a big lesson I learned was to try to allow people to do their job. Don't micro manage them. Too much micro management, try not to set them targets. People will set their own targets. Set them the context in which you're going to talk about success and then they'll grow beyond any target you'll set."

"So leadership in one sense is about it suggests follow ship. And I've always thought that leadership is about having something to lead on. So you've got to have a clarity around why would anybody want to follow you? If you believe in that kind of leader follower thing…why would anybody want to follow you? You've got to have something compelling and whether that's about who you are as a person or what you believe in or how you set out a vision of where we're all going, you've got to have something."

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Resilient Leader's Elements

- **Self** *Appreciation of your motives, attitude, strengths and weaknesses in a variety of situations*

- **Others** *Appreciation of the different motives, attitudes, cultures, strengths and weaknesses of others (e.g. your customers, your team, your business partners and your family)*

- **Environment** *Understanding your organisation, its systems, processes and culture, at all levels; also the forces that affect your organisation and your workplace*

Awareness

IMPACT

Everyone, including you, works at their best, resulting in higher productivity and motivation.
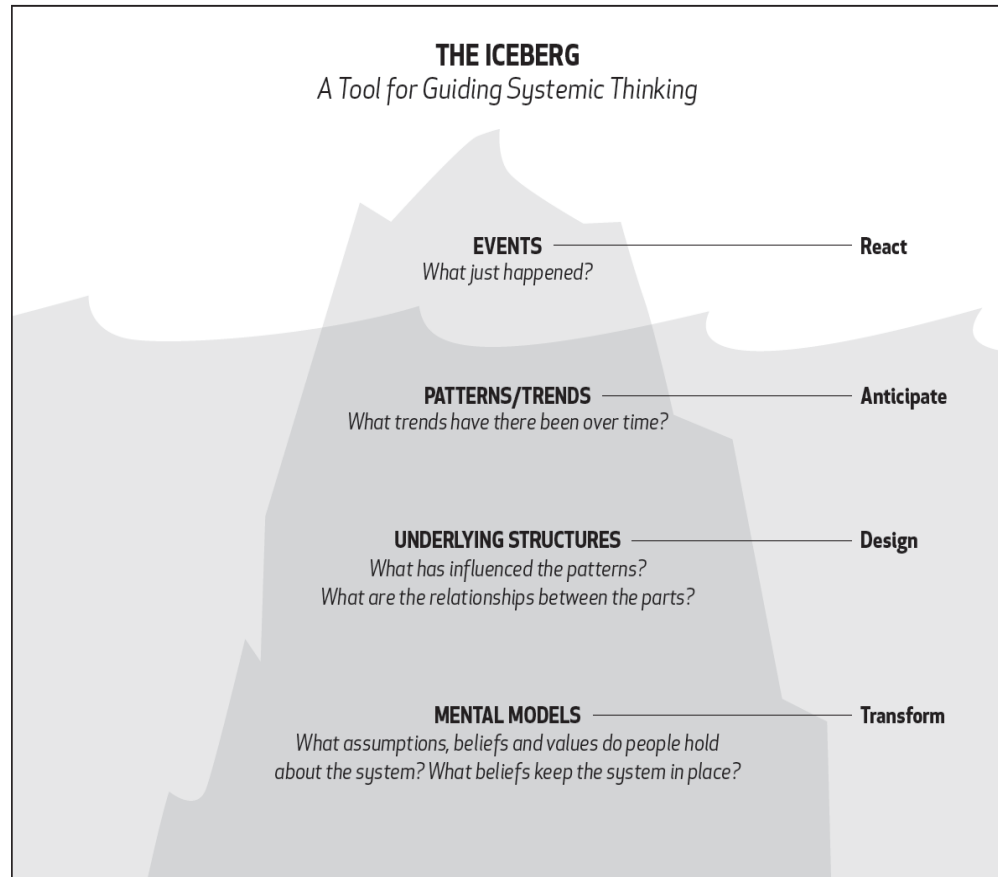
Diversity is appreciated and used to the benefit of all.

Systems and processes serve people in achieving their goals.

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Leading the Way

Systems Thinking in HE

- Universities are often portrayed as being composed of silos

- Important to understand that they are actually complex and interdependent networks of systems

- In complex systems we can't easily connect cause and effect, or inputs and outputs

- Systems thinking is a language and way of thinking that helps to identify and understand patterns

- By understanding the systems, we can identify leverage points – where we can change things

THE ICEBERG
A Tool for Guiding Systemic Thinking

EVENTS — **React**
What just happened?

PATTERNS/TRENDS — **Anticipate**
What trends have there been over time?

UNDERLYING STRUCTURES — **Design**
What has influenced the patterns?
What are the relationships between the parts?

MENTAL MODELS — **Transform**
What assumptions, beliefs and values do people hold about the system? What beliefs keep the system in place?

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Understanding the Environment

"…the only thing perhaps is not understanding... I don't know what the right word is but understanding the full map of the sector, of the structure, you know, with competing and often sometimes conflicting priorities, you know, and how to really approach this and manage this. Because coming in as a researcher. I'm talking now in my role as…research, all guns blazing, REF was round the corner, a new school was being formed out of four previous schools, there was a lot of pressure to ensure that research was successful enough to go into the REF, so my approach was research, "Everything's got to stop, it's got to be research," without really understanding that there's some other bread and butter stuff that needs to be done and engaging the conversation and having the skills sets to be able to navigate through that maze and get people to buy into my urgent agenda without putting them off and alienating them."

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Managing Self and Others

"I wish I had known better how to kind of manage upwards in a way, how to manage and talk upwards in a way that was effective and could... so, you know, to position myself to do that and for people to understand, and to not be scared."

"I think I'm still struggling; I know what I should be doing more of and I have put in strategies to try and manage the amount of stuff that comes through. I find it very difficult to say no to things but it's not even at the moment though I feel I've got many opportunities to say no."

"I suppose I wish I had known it would take up all my life and that there wouldn't be any space for anything else. I knew it would be full-on but I didn't know it would be 60+ every week; working a day at the weekend pretty much every week."

"You have to be more selfish and that's a horrible word to use, but you do have to…you've got to be more conscious that you need to protect your time."

So one of the reasons that I ended up doing that research leadership role is that I think…I've a skill in advocacy…I believe in what my colleagues do I can take that and present that in a strong way, so that's my skill,

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Resilient Leader's Elements

- **Authentic** *Demonstrating integrity and conviction, operating to your values and ethics, being true to yourself*

- **Serving** *The needs of others (e.g. your customers, your team, your business partners and your family) are the priority; you are committed to the development of people*

- **Intentional** *Remaining focused on the purpose of the organisation, to be positive and appreciative rather than criticising; having personal energy and a bias for achievement*

Leadership Presence
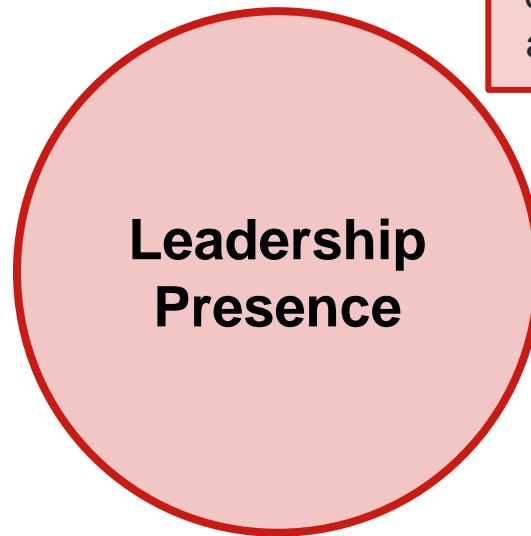
IMPACT

The best person takes the lead at any given time and is fully supported by all around them, leading to greater effectiveness and better results for the organisation.

People know each other well enough to anticipate other's actions and act accordingly.

Clarity of Direction

Resilient Decision Making

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Resilience Tools
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Authenticity

"…you need to be connected to everybody in the department at all kind of levels. So I used to spend a lot of my time and still do in my role now, it's no different from when I was head, walking round talking to the professional staff, the support staff, finding out what's going on, because they understand it more than I am ever going to understand it."

"Head of department is the most interesting role in that sense because you move from an academic in a body of people, or a colleague in a body of people into suddenly having this title that most people in the body who haven't done that role, everybody in that role believes they have some real authority and power…. And I was told that the day I stopped being head of department I would become me again. And I remember hearing that and thinking that can't be true, but for some people it was. They would come into my office and be completely different from how they were the week before when I wasn't head, because I was now head of department, and I found that absolutely bizarre."

"There's always a certain amount of imposter syndrome in what you do. So you get promoted to one job and you think good grief I'm going to get found out, I can't do this. "

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Resilient Leader's Elements

IMPACT

Great decisions are made at the right time, with the right people, in the right place.

Contingency options are always available so that the unexpected can be dealt with effectively and confidently.
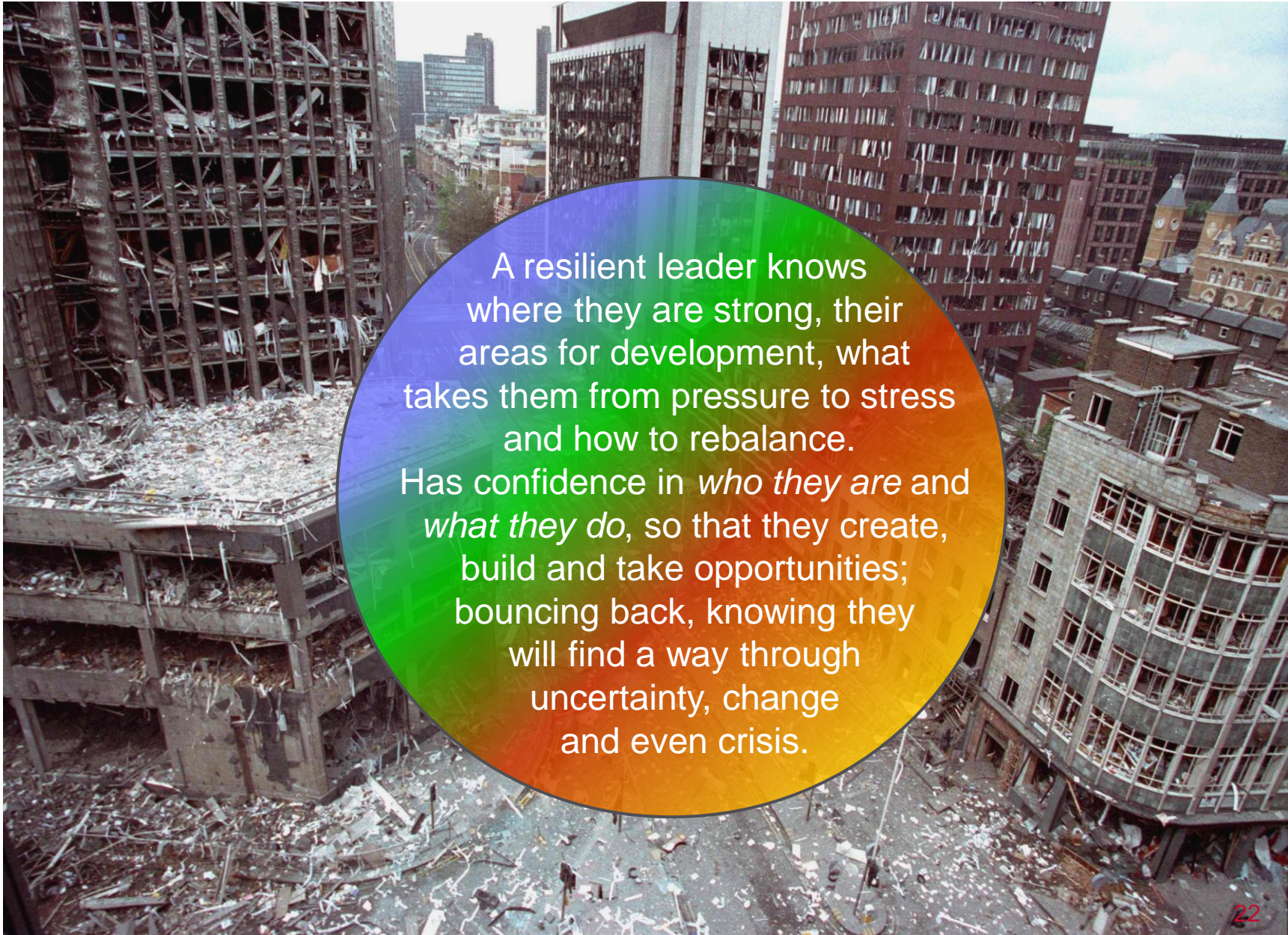
- **Creative** *The ability to work outside the usual frame of reference and to take a valuable idea from concept to reality*

- **Robust** *Combining intellectual rigour, evaluation and awareness, giving solid foundations and contingency planning*

- **Versatile** *Creating options, responding to the needs and urgency of the situation, thinking and operating at the appropriate level*

Resilient Decision Making

Clarity of Direction

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Being Creative, Robust and Versatile

"The second thing is that there is a barter economy and if you're going to be an effective leader you've really got to understand the barter economy, which is that people will do you something as a favour but they wouldn't dream of doing it just because it says in their job description that they have to."

"I think you have to go out there really early on and make meetings and time for people and find out how they operate and what motivates them and what's going to assist them because obviously the more they feel they're empowered the better it's going to work for everybody and you're going to get the most out of them because you've found out what makes them tick…"

"In this role you have to let stuff go I think. And I think there's power in letting stuff go."

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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.

Using the Online Tool

- Define a personal Leadership Goal.

- The first thing the RLDP asks you to do is to write an aspirational description of the leader you want to be in the future.

- Then take the **2 part** Resilient Leaders Assessment® (RLA®) – around 40 mins.

- Review your Resilient Leaders Profile and make a note of any insights or questions it raises for you.

- The RLDP will identify your areas for development and will generate activities / exercises for you to start doing and reflect on. You will have a learning log to record your insights.

- Around 3 months later take the Assessment part again and the system will generate a "before and after" picture, enabling you to see your development.

References and Further Information

- Blackmore, P., 2015. Prestige in universities: in tension with the efficiency and effectiveness agenda? Paper presented at the *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference*, Newport, UK.

- Kandiko-Howson, C. and Coate, K., 2015. The prestige economy and mid-career academic women: strategies, choices and motivation. Paper presented at the *Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Research Conference*, Newport, UK.

- Peters, K. and Ryan, M., 2015. *Leading higher education: higher education leadership and management survey.* London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

https://www.resiliencetools.com/