

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION

6.0 INTRODUCTION

The primary research considerations for this study are as follows:

1. **Observe, describe and analyse the physiological, psychological and work demands placed on principals. Is there a relationship between managerial tasks (as defined by Mintzberg and recorded by the researcher) and job stress? (This question has been addressed in Chapter 4 with further comment made in Section 6.4).**
2. **Is blood pressure a reliable physiological indicator of stress and can these measurements be related to recorded incidents of stress in the day (either recorded overtly by the researcher or reported to the researcher by the subject)?**
3. **What role does the psychological perspective play in the stress equation? (This question will be addressed in Sections 6.11 and 6.3).**

To answer these questions the study was marked by the following structure. It was:

Field based: Principals were observed at close quarters in the normal carriage of duties over the working week.

Wholistic: Aspects of home life, outside responsibilities and social life were not ignored as the study recognises that home and work can have an impact on each other and cannot be discretely separated.

Psychological: Apart from informal observations on the "mental state" of the principal the study used the Enneagram as a formal way to classify personality traits adding to the understanding of the Psychological Perspective.

Physiological: Blood pressure monitoring was used to obtain objective medical data on the body's reactions throughout the day. This datum was then matched to observed and reported events in an effort to link specific events to rises in blood pressure.

Longitudinal: The studies were conducted over a full working week (of either four or five days). All principals were observed, measured and debriefed over this period.

At every juncture in this study the Conceptual Model (Figure 3) has been used to bring order to the design and framework of the project. Senge remarks that in today's world we are taught to "break apart problems, to fragment the world". While it can make complex tasks more manageable there is a hidden price as "we can no longer see the consequences of our actions, we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole"(1990: 3). The Conceptual Model provides a "big picture focus" and then allows for a discreet examination of the three major perspectives. The "larger whole" is catered for in this way. In a baffling field of investigation the model provides:

- * a visual map of where the study is heading
- * a method to organise and present the literature and
- * a theoretical framework and a philosophical basis for the arguments and findings presented herein.

Each of the six chapters summarised below takes its form from and draws on aspects of the Conceptual Model. This concluding chapter stays true to the theme and provides implications and findings under the three perspectives.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the research problem. Principals today are often cast in the role of the medieval court jester whose role was to challenge the King's authority in an irreverent manner and admonish him by drawing public attention to injustice in the Kingdom. School leaders today must "make waves, shake and rock the boat" (Sungalia, 1990: 11). Life in such organisations can be stressful and the popular press abounds with stories of stress-related incidents,

illnesses, costs and recovery methods. The twin terms of "trauma and triumph" are introduced to show that while people work in an unpredictable period of far-reaching change there are clear signs of hope and success. All is not lost. There are principals who can and do triumph in the midst of general malaise, mediocrity and division in society.

Chapter 2 provides a transactional definition of stress and uses the Conceptual Model to unravel the imposing amount of literature available on the subject. Stress attacks people in highly individualistic ways and the crucial focus for this study is the Psychological Perspective because it governs how an event is perceived; hence its importance at the centre of the interlocking circles of the model. Inherent in this approach is the matter of personal responsibility. Some aspects of life are not changeable; others clearly are changeable and if the person neglects the warning signs, then certain crisis awaits. The story of Grabwell Grommet illustrates this appropriately.

Chapter 3 lays down the research design and methodology. While primarily a qualitative study that is by nature "sample short and data heavy", the study uses a triangulation method to combine aspects of quantitative measuring with the qualitative approach. Jick believes that the artful researcher can use both forms "to enrich and brighten the portrait" (1979: 609). This study is not designed to add to our predictive power and is a replication with refinements of earlier work by Phillipps and Thomas (1983), Sieverding (1985) and Whan (1988). The methodology does not allow for comparisons across the broad

spectrum of principals but it does increase the ability to understand the phenomena of stress in principals. The methodology of the study rests on three pillars:

1. **Physiological measurement, as indicated by blood pressure changes.**
2. **Overt behaviours, as observed and recorded by the researcher.**
3. **Subjective experiences, as reported by the principal in daily debriefing.**

Through the consideration of all three a multi-factorial measurement of stress can be arrived at and incidents of stress can be measured in terms of severity and duration and then matched to a particular management activity. The methodology provides a stable framework to answer the three study questions.

Chapter 4 introduces the participants in the study (PP01 - PP05) and provides the reader with the necessary background information with regard to each participant's school (size, position, socio-economic status), responsibilities, personality characteristics, management style, personal background and physiology. Blood pressure results for each day are posted and comment made on the type of day that was observed. Part B of this chapter presents the results of each week and further commentary is provided on the results and their meaning.

Chapter 5 provides a further review of the literature and is necessary because such an intricate topic deserves a fuller discussion. This chapter complements earlier work because the notion of "managerial tasks" (Question 1) is central to the study. For the purposes of this work a definition of managerial activity and task is provided, based on the studies of Mintzberg (1973) who set down ten

discreet and observable managerial functions. Principals are challenged by a whole raft of fresh management watchwords, theories and designs. Unfamiliarity with terms such as empowerment, mastery, shared vision and Total Quality Management, which have forced their way into the language of work, can be dangerous as a principal's work value is now assessed by such criteria. Further complications arise for principals as the rising tide of public debate and dissatisfaction with educational practice gathers momentum. Distinctions between management and leadership are made in the contemporary literature and these issues are examined to give the study balance and direction.

This chapter concludes the research and answers the study questions presented throughout in both specific terms for individual principals and in general terms in the implications and conclusions as set down. The notion of "Situational Intensities" is developed later in the chapter. Its format follows the general theme of the three perspectives and it advocates a personal taxonomy for coping based on the Conceptual Model. Responses from the participating principals are threaded throughout this chapter drawing on their lived experience in the position.

6.1 THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL AS A SOLUTION

The Conceptual Model used fully supports a transactional understanding of stress where:

(Stress is) a complex interaction amongst the environment, the personality and the body that is an external environmental demand puts demands on the nervous system which are mediated by the personality (the combination of desires, drives, preferences, background and upbringing) triggering complex biochemical reactions (Cooper et al., 1988: 198).

All the key words nominated above are represented in the Conceptual Model; environment (Lifestyle/Workstyle Perspective), personality (Psychological Perspective) and the body (Physiological Perspective). In addition a transactional understanding of stress means that:

- (i) No component of the model is independent of the other components and
- (ii) Action in any component of the model has consequences for other components of the model (Gmelch and Thomas, 1989: 10).

A preventative stress management programme can be achieved through the Conceptual Model. In each perspective there is a variety of sub-factors listed which can be attended to in the development of a wholistic coping profile. Attention to each perspective should be unquestioned in any transactional understanding. Gmelch and Chan believe that a stable profile is much like a four legged table:

One of the legs represents a strong set of goals; the second leg your ability to take care of a job; the third a solid foundation of

good health, fitness and nutrition; and the fourth, creative conflict resolution (1994: 106).

The Conceptual Model as presented also provides a balanced profile to maintain optimum performance by allowing principals to preserve and enhance their greatest asset - themselves. Covey calls this enhancement "sharpening the saw" and describes the four dimensions of physical, social/emotional, spiritual and mental in the figure below:

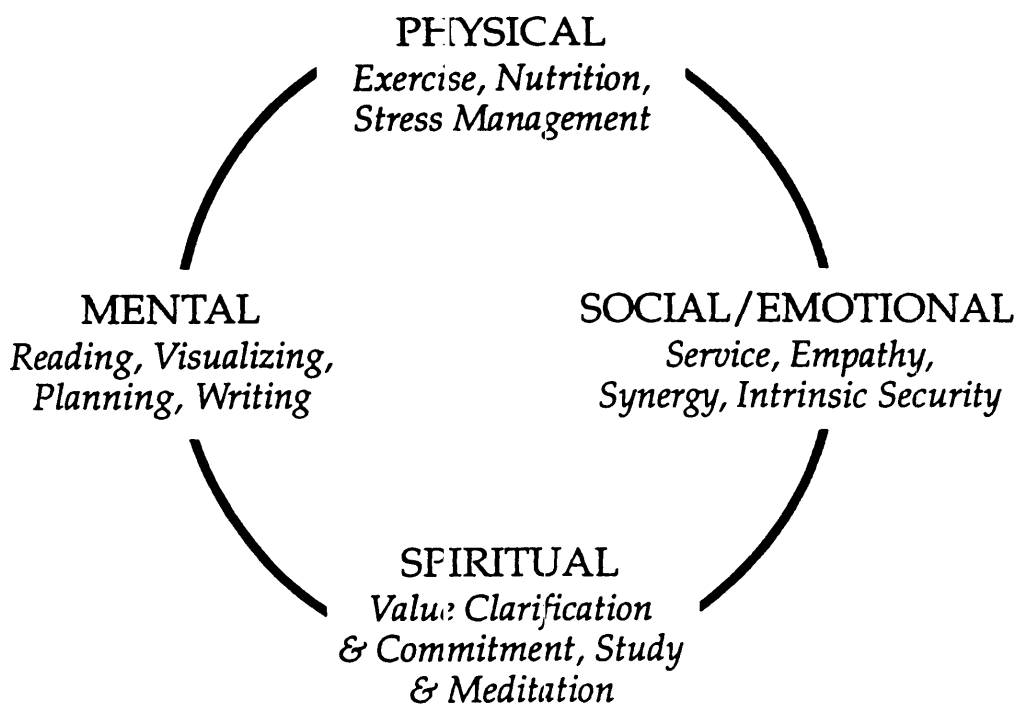


Figure 34

Four Dimensions of Renewal

(1990: 288)

Covey asserts that we are the instruments of our own performance, and to be effective, we need to recognise the importance of taking time regularly to

sharpen the saw in all four dimensions (1990: 289). Siu provides some straight forward advice:

There is no such thing as an occupational stress problem which can be solved for all time and forgotten about, like a mathematical problem of two plus two equals four. There are only occupational stress issues - never fully delineated, never completely resolved, always changing, always in need of alert accommodation (1978: 136).

By reviewing deficiencies, working on strengths and increasing opportunities for positive performance in each of the three perspectives, as part of a total package and on a regular basis, principals can achieve what Siu refers to as "alert accommodation". This researcher does not recommend "dipping into" singular trend techniques as a simple, convenient way to address a complex problem. One-off experiments in relaxation, meditation, aerobics or biofeedback are not regarded as optimising opportunities for stress management. The model suggests a wholistic examination and then a concentrated effort across all three perspectives so deficiencies are corrected, strengths are acknowledged and personal needs are met.

The transactional theory recognises the central importance of the mind (Psychological Perspective) and the reader has already been alerted to its significance. Reznick notes that while psychological relief is more difficult to measure "its importance for the wellbeing of people is unquestioned" (1989: 220). Exercises in the Psychological Perspective cannot be trained for, graphed or even openly discussed as problems in the Lifestyle Perspective may be. They are essentially personal. Internal recognition of personality/temperament changes, adverse reactions to change events, used avoidance behaviours,

temper levels and the amount of fun in any day is absolutely vital for the busy principal. Recognition followed by the necessary adjustments and a commitment to better practice should follow. This is simply very personal behaviour management. This study used the Enneagram as a means of alerting principals to the subtleties of their personalities and it is a most useful tool because it can provide the individual with a mirror in which the reasoning behind a person's actions, responses and behaviour can be reflected upon. Principals who are honest with themselves know themselves well. The Enneagram is one way to further investigate personality and behaviour. Knowledge of self (strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, avoidances) is vital in high pressure jobs.

Ideas for a personal coping taxonomy are presented in the following pages. Examples are given on how the participating principals used these to cope with stress (answering Question 3). These ideas are not intended as one-off miracle cures. Headlines such as "Exercise Your Stress Away" or "Meditation for Low Stress Living" have a restricted use in real life and none here. Quick et al. studied stressed executives and concluded:

... effective stress management may appear to have been intuitive, almost preconscious. In fact the executives describe an evolutionary trial and error process in the development of their stress management habits. For most people the development of effective stress management habits is a continual process of adaptation and modification (1990: 185).

Hence the need for research such as this to provide interested people with practical possibilities to enhance their personal approach and enlightening them with new avenues of adaptation.

6.11 Building Up a Personal Taxonomy of Coping

In general the research literature on coping emphasises that in any serious stress management plan participants must be aware that it will take time, and involves effort, commitment and thought. Siu provides ten proverbs designed for the "journey man executive trying to become the philosopher executive":

Five proverbs for planning are:

1. The bird hunting the locust is unaware of the hawk hunting him.
2. The mouse with but one hole is easily taken.
3. In shallow waters shrimps make fools of dragons.
4. Do not try to catch two frogs with one hand.
5. Give the bird room to fly.

Five proverbs for operations are:

1. Do not insult the crocodile until you have crossed the river.
2. It is better to struggle with a sick jackass than to carry the wood yourself.
3. Do not throw stone at mouse and break precious vase.
4. It is not the last blow of the axe that fells the tree.
5. The great executive not only brings home the bacon but also the apple sauce (1978: 143-144).

Ages of wisdom are represented in at least nine proverbs with the last showing a deft touch of humour in a serious business. They are meant to give a slightly altered perspective in order to put reality in balance. A different point of view can sometimes provide the stimulus to rethink one's formulation of a real or potentially stressful situation. A transactional model of coping agrees with this concept and takes the emphasis away from Selye's original theory of the singular importance of the stressful event. As Siu states, the "event" may not be the problem but how we interpret the "event". Lazarus and Folkman write:

(there is) a growing belief that the physical or psychological impact of any demand will vary depending on how we interpret the situation and how we are able to do something about it (1984: 18).

While researching for his major thesis Covey took down a book from the shelf in a large university library (he regrets he never recorded the title) and was staggered by a line which essentially said:

Between the stimulus and the response is a space. In this space lies our freedom to choose our response. In this choice lies our growth and happiness (1994: iii).

Gmelch and Chan provide three propositions to assist with an individual's preparation:

1. The individual is the most important variable; no one coping technique is effective for all principals in all schools. Therefore coping techniques must be sensitive to cultural, social, psychological and environmental differences in individuals.
2. Individuals can't change the world around them, and principals can't change the barriers in their schools, but they can change how they relate to them.
3. Individuals who cope best display a repertoire of techniques to counteract different stressors in different situations. Their repertoire of techniques, hence, should represent a holistic approach towards coping (1994: 109).

Even though the general literature on coping is both significant and diverse, narrowing it down to an exact coping process is elusive. Quick et al. believe that a personal coping process can be accomplished without professional guidance. They recommend an uncomplicated five step plan:

1. Identify your stressors (role demands, task demands, physical demands).
2. Identify your responses (within the Lifestyle/Workstyle, Psychological or Physiological Perspectives).
3. Identify your options (acceptable, feasible, cost appropriate).
4. Make your plan (written or unwritten, appealing, acceptable).
5. Modify your plan (1990: 186).

Many authors (Adams, 1980; Willis, 1986; Gmelch, 1988; Monteiro, 1990)

invoke formulas for stress management that cut across all aspects of a life; social, intellectual, cultural, sporting, work and home. Fine refers to these types of models as "biopsychosocial" and maintains that in today's lexicon of "risk, coping, competency and crisis theory" they represent a robust approach (1991: 494). With its three perspectives the Conceptual Model allows for a variety of coping options. An individual's coping strategy will vary significantly as there are ample choices. Gmelch and Chan maintain the successful principal will not be the one who can master one technique but the one who can demonstrate creativity and flexibility calling on techniques across a variety of sources (1994: 111). The following coping suggestions are based on the model. For each of the suggestions the reader should honestly assess the relevance for his or her particular situation and then take the appropriate remedial action. Strengths should be acknowledged and celebrated.

Lifestyle/Workstyle Options

At Home:

- * Examine the state of spouse relations. Renew if necessary.
- * Is relaxation at home important or overlooked?
- * Is too much work taken home?
- * Is sufficient time taken for meditation, prayer, sport, exercise?
- * Amount of sleep taken.
- * Time spent studying.
- * Is the morning departure routine relaxed?
- * Amount of time devoted to "cultural activities" and hobbies.

- * Time with friends outside school circles.

At Work:

- * Check social support mechanisms.
- * Examine personal time management techniques.
- * Record the hours worked in a day, adjust if necessary.
- * Note the volume of work in a day, adjust if necessary.
- * Is delegation effectively achieved?
- * Are the physical working conditions adequate?
- * Examine relationships in the school.
- * Are opportunities for peer support and socialisation taken?
- * Is a "trusted other" effectively used?
- * Are sufficient opportunities taken for professional development?
- * Appraise the number of meetings attended. Cut back if necessary.
- * Appraise the "open door" policy. Adjust if necessary.
- * Is technology used to maximum advantage?

Psychological Options:

- * Appraise avoidance behaviours.
- * How much laughter is there in a day?
- * Watch temper and anger levels.
- * Use of rewards to staff (praise).
- * Use of rewards for self (home early, long lunch).
- * Is there time for relaxation or unwinding at work?
- * Do others give positive feedback?
- * Is motivation a concern?

Physiological Options:

- * Assess diet, types of food taken (sugar, fats, fibre, salt).
- * Assess physical sports and/or relaxation sports programme.
- * Is medication taken? Effect on the day?
- * Is there a need for participation in team sports?
- * Check energy level in the day?

These options can be used in a way similar to a diagnostic test; check, evaluate, recommend, carry out and review. In a wholistic approach the individual decides on the areas of need and on the activities that are agreeable, cost and time effective and thought likely to be beneficial. A substantial measure of

personal honesty is required for without it the exercise becomes a hollow shambles not worthy of a true professional who realises his or her stress affects others in the organisation and not just himself or herself. The options presented are personal suggestions which can be made in the shorter term. Although not meant to be rushed there is a need to have some form of "use by" date on them otherwise corrective actions may not be taken.

6.12 Lifestyle/Workstyle Options in Coping

For each of the three perspectives presented in the previous section up to four qualifying questions can be asked to assist the principal in making an informed judgement on whether particular areas need judicious attention or are better left alone. These are:

1. ***Quantity.*** Is the option overused, underused or well placed in the repertoire of techniques?
2. ***Quality.*** Can it be modified, adjusted or improved to better suit the person's special circumstances?
3. ***Intensity.*** When used, does the option disrupt others or can it be worked without upsetting the natural rhythm of home or work life? Is there an element of obsession creeping into the practice? Does intensity in the use of one option lead to an imbalance in the use of others?
4. ***Satisfaction.*** Is there a noticeable feeling of well-being, relief, composure or happiness after using this option? Can the person move to the next task with renewed vigour?

Boone maintains that when treating hypertensive patients (those with a diastolic pressure over 90 mmHg) with non-drug therapies:

Changes in coping mechanisms, perception of control, depression, anxiety, identity, self-esteem, happiness, quality of life,

relationships and other personal variables can have profound effects on blood pressure (1991: 642).

Many of these variables are in the Lifestyle/Workstyle Perspective. Central to this list of options, and mentioned by Boone, is the issue of quality of life. Between home and work most of the waking hours are taken up and the suggestion is that if the coping arrangements in this perspective are not in place then the quality of life will suffer because of the imbalance. Life events continually test the durability of a person's coping resources; hence the need to renew and practise tried and proven techniques and to explore new possibilities.

Implicit in this option is the definite possibility of friction between home and work. A cursory examination will prove to readers that while home and work lives are coupled under the one perspective they may not always be mutually compatible. Roles, relationships and career paths can come into conflict, especially in dual career families where jobs are demanding in time and energy. **All the married principals (PP01, PP03, PP04, PP05) nominated this aspect of balance as a family tension that had to be dealt with on occasions.** Cartwright and Cooper suggest 13 ways to deal with partner problems when one or both are suffering from the signs of stress. Suggestions relevant to this discussion are:

- * Be kind to yourself. The carer needs caring too.
- * Look for early warning signs of stress in those you love.
- * Take action on the other's behalf when their will is paralysed.
- * Be firm and clearly state your needs and rights (1994: 182-183).

6.13 Psychological Options in Coping

Once again each possible option should be checked against the four qualifiers of:

1. Quantity
2. Quality
3. Intensity
4. Satisfaction

Many aspects of personality are often clearer to others than to ourselves.

Principals are judged, fairly or unfairly, by others' views of their:

- * Personality (or lack of it)
- * Temperament
- * Sense of humour and fun
- * Character, ethics and morality

Gmelch and Chan believe that there are seven responses within the Psychological Perspective that encourage stress survivor personalities. These people use the responses to produce positive results.

1. **Find some humour.** Humour can calm emotions rather than add to emotional exhaustion.
2. **Have a private saying.** These can keep a person on course and can come from religious or philosophical beliefs.
3. **Relax and put the crisis in perspective.** Spend time in contemplation before charging ahead with an action later regretted.
4. **Ask questions.** Probe sources about the crisis at hand. The more known, the easier it may be to find a solution.
5. **See the crisis as a challenge.** Look at the crisis as a potential opportunity for growth and change.
6. **Find creative solutions.** Go beyond the logical solution and look for creative or unusual solutions. Use both sides of the brain.
7. **Maintain your flexibility.** Check your usual traits in this list:

tender	tough
shy	outgoing
mature	childlike
emotional	rational
serious	humorous
feminine	masculine

relaxed	easy going
creative	practical
tactful	outspoken
leader	follower
collaborative	competitive
individual	conformer
self confident	critical

(1994: 93-94).

Of the principals studied PP02 and PP04 were confirmed in their belief that a person's actions/responses can best be understood by a thorough knowledge of the individual's personality. Knowing one's self through studying personality traits (such as through the Enneagram and Myers-Briggs instruments) form the basis for a mature personality.

In the original literature review these assumptions were put to the reader:

1. **The Psychological Perspective (and the use of psychological options) may not be the key to understanding stress but in this study it assumes a pivotal position.**
2. **Being in a pivotal position the use or non-use of the stress reduction options serves to either insulate the person against stress or conduct stress into the person.**

Clearly in answer to research Question 3 principals observed were quick both to indicate and to practise its enormous significance in the management of stress by their behaviours which included:

- * A daily emphasis on "fun". Perhaps a too simple term yet a habit which recognises that schools are places with the potential for humour.
- * Careful consideration of the "ethics" in decision making. Justice and fairness were acknowledged as important.
- * Continued personal study (PP03 and PP04 currently studying, PP01, PP02, PP05 recently finished commitments).

Through these examples it was seen to be a powerful perspective.

6.14 Physiological Options in Coping

The effectiveness of each option presented to assist in coping should be checked against the four qualifiers of:

- * Quantity of the option selected
- * Quality of the option selected
- * Intensity in the use of the option selected
- * Satisfaction gained from use of the option selected.

Care should be taken to guard against obsession and overuse in this perspective.

While physical health is viewed highly and valued in society (Hayes and Ross, 1986: 388) evidence in Australian research suggests that as a society we are overweight and relatively inactive (Elmer-Devitt and O'Neill, 1995). This may come as a surprise to those who regularly exercise, however, the facts are that they are in the minority. Aside from physical exercise Boone provides a list of non-pharmacologic therapeutic modalities to reduce blood pressure which include:

- * reduction of body weight
 - * reduction of alcohol intake
 - * reduction of caffeine intake
 - * reduction of salt
 - * reduction of dietary fats
 - * increase potassium intake
 - * increase magnesium intake
 - * increase fibre intake
 - * increase calcium intake
- (1991: 639).

John Dryden (in 1675) agreed with Boone:

'Tis better to hunt in fields for health unbought
Than fee the doctor a nauseous draught

The wise for cure on exercise depend.

Participating principals used the following serious sustained exercise options:

- * PPO1: cycling, touch football, running
- * PPO2: brisk walk each morning
- * PPO5: ski paddling, swimming

There is really no substitute for good physical conditioning, moderation in diet and alcohol, rest and attention to personal health. These are commonsense ways to stay alert, energetic, motivated and fit. Additionally, Hayes and Ross cite research which shows that physical and psychological well-being are strongly correlated and that physical activity has a simultaneous and positive effect on depression (1986: 390). Even heart disease patients who have faced near death situations are now rehabilitated through physical exercise in special gyms attached to hospitals (Courier Mail, February 21, 1995: 17).

6.2 IMPLICATIONS

In a follow-up article subsequent to Sieverding's research, the following recommendations were made after serious concerns were raised over levels of absenteeism, lateness, illness, dissatisfaction, low productivity and low morale in the New York principal population:

The traditional ways of reducing stress, including physical exercise,

dietary restrictions and elimination of cigarette smoking are certainly prudent. This study indicates however, that something more must be done; that stress is far higher and more intense than first imagined, at least among principals in this study (Cooper et al., 1988: 217).

A number of suggestions are listed and developed including:

- * Better information
- * Awareness raising
- * Skill building
- * Organisational change (1988 217-219).

Anecdotal evidence abounds that schools are places of intense pressure and rising stress levels are caused by continual forced change in organisations, funding pressures, curriculum remodelling, issues of student discipline, reporting requirements, legal responsibilities, public accountability legislation, out-of-hours workloads and large class sizes. Wiltshire believes some teachers are burnt out after five years. His suggestion to combat the mounting pressures is for sabbaticals and study courses every three to five years (Courier Mail, March 18, 1995: 1). As on-site leaders, principals are squarely placed at the centre of everyone else's stress given that, after having to deal with urgent system requirements, they have to turn around and face teachers who may well be quite concerned about implementing such requirements.

At the 1994 Society of Behavioural Medicine's Boston Conference research was presented showing that men with stressful jobs have higher than average blood pressure even when they sleep, suggesting difficult work permanently damages the circulatory system. Working women were less likely to show the ill effects of stress, but their blood pressure was more likely to soar

in response to strains in the home. Those in high stress, low freedom jobs had blood pressures averaging 137/85 and these pressures tended to stay high and not fluctuate over the day. Comparable blood pressure readings were commonly recorded on the participating principals in this study. The Conference data suggested that the cumulative effect of exposure to stress over a long period of time permanently raises blood pressure (Courier Mail, April 16, 1994: 15).

This description of "high pressure, low freedom jobs" neatly fits the principal's role. Principals face problems with pressure and freedom in that staff cannot always be privy to the reasoning behind certain decisions. In good times staff will accept these decisions on trust, other times the well of good-will may dry up. It is possible that the principal has an educational, moral, religious or ethical concern about what he or she is being asked to achieve.

There are three implications in this study which call for comment.

1. **Financial burdens caused by stress**
2. **Medical problems inflicted on people**
3. **Legal proceedings and stress.**

These implications have relevance in a broader national sense in that stress causes lower productivity, higher costs, retraining and expensive interventions, however, it must never be forgotten that these implications have importance for the individual. These things happen to real people, battling to do their jobs in an environment which is not always supportive. They have families and friends who are affected and individuals should never be regarded as a set of national trends.

6.21 Financial Burdens of Stress

Participants at the 1994 Australian National Occupational Health and Safety Commission Conference were told that recovering from occupational stress takes longer and costs significantly more than other work related illnesses. Recovery from stress was taking workers an average of 7.7 weeks while in comparison recovery from other illnesses was taking 2.4 weeks. A Public Sector Union Survey showed 57 per cent of Federal members questioned had taken stress leave in the past twelve months with the majority claiming overwork as the cause. Teachers figure highly in worker's compensation claims with the average pay-out being up to five times more than for other workers (The Weekend Australian, June 18, 1994: 10).

The Queensland Teachers' Union provides more specific figures for stress related costs in the profession. A summary of statistics serves to illustrate the growth, intensity and seriousness of the problem:

- * 13 554 days lost due to stress leave in the past financial year in the public service as a whole.
- * Value of claims lodged by teachers in this period cost \$2 097 368 (Courier Mail, December 27, 1994: 2).
- * In 1988/89 228 stress claims lodged, in 1990/91 423 claims lodged, in 1992/93 781 claims lodged with the Worker's Compensation Board (Queensland Teachers' Journal, July 28, 1994: 7).

Reasons associated with this climbing toll include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| * student misbehaviour | * increased workload |
| * parent scrutiny | * feeling of disempowerment |
| * relationships with staff | * forced transfers |
| * departmental demands | * changing policies |
| * harassment from parents | * bureaucracy |
| * mainstreaming of disabled students | |
- (Queensland Teachers' Journal, July 28, 1994: 7).

Principals are placed in a double jeopardy position because none of this happens overnight and in the lead-up to forced stress leave and replacement of the teacher there is doubtless much discussion with other staff, rearrangement of duties, counselling, parent enquiries and departmental consultations. All of this, it is expected, will be handled by the principal in a compassionate and professional manner.

6.22 Medical Problems Caused by Stress

Stress related illnesses have a high marquee value and the ability to capture the attention of the media and public generally but any statement beyond the fact that a stressful life can cause illness "is likely to stir up controversy" (Kasl, 1983: 79). No one can say with certainty which comes first; the job stress or the high blood pressure. Trying to label causes and effects only leads to the age old chicken and egg type argument. Leaving aside the potential for lengthy debate it is wise to simply focus on the physical symptoms commonly associated with stress. Adams lists these as:

Tension, headache, diarrhoea, constipation, common cold, backache, infection, allergy, flu, arthritis, migraine, hypertension, dizziness and ulcers (1980: 198).

These medical conditions can occur in people at any stage and in any job, however, for those in stress-filled jobs these symptoms may well be more acute, prolonged and debilitating. Lansbury and Spillane note that in Australia the study of occupational stress has become a major topic in research work because "work effectiveness and employee health and well-being are inextricably linked"

(1983: 191).

Whan's study of principal's stress listed the medical effects under these four headings:

1. **Subjective effects** (anxiety, tension, nervousness, fatigue, frustration, irritability, guilt, apathy, boredom, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness)
2. **Behaviourial effects** (accident prone, drug taking, emotional outbursts, excessive drinking, smoking, impulsive behaviour, impaired speech, restlessness, trembling, eye blinking)
3. **Physiological effects** (increased pulse, dryness of mouth, sweating, dilation of pupils)
4. **Health effects** (asthma, chest pains, heart disease, headaches, insomnia, skin rash) (1988: 22).

In the first six months of 1995 in the system in which the participating principals in this study are employed, one principal died at his desk of a heart attack (24 03 95) and three are on long term leave due to blood pressure problems. This is not the first death attributed to heart failure recorded in the system and over the years many serving principals have taken leave or resigned because of the pressures of the occupation.

Unfortunately in times of stress people are more easily disposed to seek solace in social drug use, over-eating or poor eating. After adjusting for ageing the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare found that 49 per cent of men and 32 per cent of women were overweight in 1994 (up 5 per cent in five years). The report concludes with the warning that overweight people have a higher risk of developing a wide variety of health problems including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer and diabetes (Courier Mail, December 19, 1994: 5). Weight statistics for the current study used Body

Mass Index (BMI) as a guide. BMI takes into account a person's height. PP03 readily acknowledged attention needed to be paid here and PP04 admitted weight reduction was not as high on the list of priorities as perhaps it should be.

6.23 Legal Proceedings

A recent case in England involving a 15-year-old boy, who after being caught smoking at recess, made rude gestures to the teacher, swore at him, kicked him in the stomach and then ran away, serves to illustrate the dilemma both principals and teachers have in dealing with unruly and obnoxious children. In a scuffle which followed the chase, the lad's jaw was broken. The child brought charges of grievous bodily harm against the teacher. No doubt a stressful time for all involved. In summing up the judge commented:

Nothing has happened to the boy concerned, although he could be brought before a juvenile court and receive a wide range of penalties. Yet a school master, a man of exemplary character and an able, efficient and conscientious teacher has been brought before the court (Courier Mail, March 25, 1995: 29).

The case was dismissed but it illustrates an increasingly common event in society. Principals are caught up in all things legal and when cases go to court the principal faces possible censure, public scrutiny and cross examination as well as having to provide evidence to the court on school policies, procedures and implementation.

Over the past ten years there has been a noticeable increase in the number of teachers requiring legal assistance for stress based workers' compensation claims. The Queensland Workers' Compensation Act defines

injury as:

- (a) death arising out of or in the course of duty
- (b) a disease that is contracted in the course of employment, whether at or away from the course of employment, to which the employment was a contributing factor
- (c) a disease that has been aggravated or accelerated, if the employment was a contributing factor to the aggravation or acceleration.

Disease is not defined in the Queensland Act (although in some other states it is defined) and it is commonly accepted injury can include both physical and mental conditions. In order for an employee to recover damages for mental illness arising out of the course of employment, that employee must be able to establish that the employer was negligent, usually in terms of failing to provide adequate supervision, training or assistance. In Queensland State and Catholic schools the employer is the System Authority, and not the principal. However, the principal acts as an agent for the employer and there is no doubt that the principal is intimately involved at all stages in stress claims. The principal can have a major modifying, pacifying or exacerbating role in the course of events. In recent times parents and teachers have been quick to seek redress through the court system for many reasons including:

- * failure to provide duty of care (accidents and illnesses at school)
- * sexual harassment and discrimination
- * failure to teach
- * failure to enrol the pupil (in the case of special needs students)
- * dismissal of teacher
- * failure to employ (in the case of religious schools)
- * the discipline of students

One of the participating principals was, at the time of observation, preparing for court procedures involving a parent at the school and several pupils. The case has attracted national attention (due mainly to the media

interest in matters sexual) and in many respects brings unwelcome attention to the school. For the principal and his administration team it is indeed a trying time. Simply the threat of legal action hanging over a principal is enough to cause severe dislocation, loss of energy for mundane teaching matters, a lack of interest in the welfare of others and plain anguish. These matters are never simple. They take enormous time to complete (the matter above is now in its second year), can involve unions and a confrontational approach and disrupt home and social lives. As a consequence they cause occasions of high stress in principals and are a major implication for this study.

6.3 LONGER TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

George Bernard Shaw offers some practical advice:

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them (in "Mrs Warren's Profession", cited in Cartwright and Cooper, 1994: 66).

The previous section was by nature somewhat depressing. There can be no other way when there are such serious financial, legal and medical implications associated with stress. However, as Shaw indicates, circumstance need not

dictate everything. Principals can do much to confront the challenge of high demand, limited freedom jobs. Shaw is suggesting a proactive approach and this is a major recommendation from this research. Adams believes the amount of pressure (stress) encountered between the two extremes of rust out (boredom, apathy, lethargy) and burn out (mistakes, withdrawal, indecisiveness) is critical. The optimal range is in the middle ground where high performance and low health risk are found. Within this range a principal can look forward to challenge, control, commitment and clarity (1989: 39).

Quick et al. provide five simple yet refreshing messages for executives as a way to meet the challenge of stress and stay on top. Once again they take a proactive stance.

1. **Be intellectually curious.** Intellectual curiosity and education expand a person's understanding of the world, providing perspective as well as knowledge for problem solving.
2. **Be physically active.** People who are physically active dissipate stress induced energy while at the same time develop a stronger and more efficient cardio vascular system.
3. **Balance work with non-work.** People who balance work with non-work activities place work in the larger context of life which gives perspective and reduces psychological dependence on work.
4. **Seek social support.** Supportive relationships provide people with a variety of informational, evaluative and emotional needs. Gratification is essential to healthy functioning.
5. **Create systemic change.** People at the top need to be able to create a work environment that is challenging, productive and creative while at the same time being emotionally healthy (1990: 137).

Similar advice is given by Gmelch and Chan who believe that "optimum stress and effective performance build from a foundation of experience and perseverance" (1994: 97). The blend of both moves a person to his or her level

of competence. Four ways are suggested for principals to stay at their operational best:

1. Establish and update goals. Goals are an excellent stress filter.
2. Take control of the job. Control is a key concept.
3. Maintain a foundation of sound health, fitness and nutrition.
4. Manage conflict creatively. Conflict often leaves bruised personalities and egos (1994: 107-108).

While it is not possible to banish stress forever, kill it off, or walk away from it, it is possible to use the advice above to proactively create situations that suit the principal's needs. Circumstances need not determine everything. Circumstances can be changed.

The following six recommendations are presented by the researcher and are based on the review of the literature and on the experience gained from observations of principals at work. These are not short term "fixers" and they cannot be put into practice overnight. They require a high degree of commitment and dedication. The six recommendations provide a longer term framework in which school leaders can operate. Good principals in stressful environments use these and exhibit the "right stuff" by refusing to allow circumstances to depress and control them. They get on in the world; take charge and use every opportunity. The six recommendations relate to:

- * **vision**
- * **decision-making style**
- * **communication**
- * **hardiness**
- * **character**
- * **peer support**

When combined with a carefully considered personal taxonomy of coping across the three perspectives (Lifestyle/Workstyle, Psychological, Physiological) the

principal will have both professional and practical ways to stay at optimum performance. These six recommendations were observed in varying degrees in the schools studied and were used by the principals as general techniques to cope with stress.

6.31 Vision

Recommendation: Develop a process for securing a shared school vision with parents and teachers.

Senge believes that most adults have little sense of vision and when pressed they will most often provide a list of what they don't want. Negative vision is commonplace (1990: 147). This is a positive, proactive suggestion to principals and it means more than the development of a "mission" type statement. While these are excellent blueprints for school philosophy and it is vital to spell out the moral stance of the school they do not set out a clear and jointly developed path of action. This vision recommendation relates to both "Mission Statements" and to the development of an action plan over several years. Block maintains that defining vision can have powerful effects on the leader because it can:

1. Signify disappointment with what exists now. Perhaps what is in place is poor and needs changing.
2. Expose the future.
3. Hold the leader accountable. Once created, stated and published a benchmark for action is set in place and all actions are judged against the vision (1990: 105).

The researcher believes an encompassing vision process should attempt to:

- * Identify items, programmes and actions that deserve commendation. Obviously these should be acknowledged and fostered.
- * Identify school procedures and programmes that cause concern.
- * Place before the whole community a jointly developed plan of action to address these concerns over a suitable time frame.

Visioning enlists others. A great vision in the mind of the principal goes nowhere. Such a process is challenging, involving, memorable, visual and driven by values. As a longer term stress reducer it can be very useful for the principal because the process can:

- * Relieve the principal of the burden of being the only one to dictate vision and direction. Many others become involved.
- * Give to the wider community a favourable impression of the principal as a person who works systematically and collaboratively to effect change.
- * Open up positive talk (we can do this) rather than negative car park discussions about what's wrong with the school.
- * Put the onus on everyone to work together.

Galvanising people is no easy task in a cynical and unforgiving world yet this is precisely what a principal must do. All schools visited had public Mission Statements and worked to ensure school policies and procedures were faithful to them. PP05 listed the school's yearly goals in the Staffroom as an open statement of the direction and focus for that year. PP01 had taken the next step and was in the process of defining action plans across all aspects of school life (relationships, curriculum, parental involvement, administration). This process was identified as a "school review" and was driven by a group of parents and teachers with the principal playing a low key but central role. The group's communication with the parent body and publications were meritorious. No doubt initially stressful for the principal, the longer term potential for this process to give the school a purposeful sense of direction was apparent.

6.32 Decision Making Style

Recommendation: Develop an appropriate decision making style based on knowledge of self.

Chamley et al. believe that because of the vast range of decisions a principal must make he or she can easily fall victim to the "Superprincipal Complex". This heroic figure aspires to be an expert in all areas (1992: 2). Trying to be everything for everyone is a perilous endeavour. While a principal must be informed, well read, knowledgeable and able to offer an opinion, handling decision making processes is more than handing down judgements. These authors advise principals to engage in participatory management and process consultation as a panacea for the "Superprincipal Complex".

Jannis and Mann outline three behavioural patterns often used to cope with controversy:

1. **Vigilance.** When the individual is optimistic about finding a solution and believes there is sufficient time to do so.
2. **Defensive avoidance.** When the individual is pessimistic about finding a solution they escape conflict by avoidance, procrastination, buck passing and rationalisation.
3. **Hypervigilance.** When an individual is optimistic about finding a solution but believes there is insufficient time to make a careful search; panic and high stress occur, and they seize upon the least objectionable alternative.

These authors argue decision-making is not a simple process of following stages and that time pressures, self-esteem and feelings of pessimism cause individuals not to follow the following the seven criteria for making high quality decisions:

1. Thoroughly canvas a wide range of alternative courses of action.

2. Survey the full range of objectives to be fulfilled.
3. Carefully weigh whatever is known about the costs, risks and negative consequences against the positive consequences.
4. Intensively search for new information.
5. Correctly assimilate and take account of any new information.
6. Re-examine all alternatives and all known positive and negative consequences.
7. Make detailed provisions for implementing or executing the chosen course of action (1976: 657-667).

Knowledge of self is important in the decision-making process and to achieve success in this area principals should be:

- * able to articulate their own goals
- * willing to entrust others to make high quality decisions
- * able to relinquish authority to others
- * willing to assign responsibilities elsewhere
- * keen to acknowledge the success of others
- * willing to admit their own ignorance in certain areas (Chamley et al., 1992: 3).

Brisbane Catholic Education encourages every principal to work as an Administration Team with the school deputy. This is a well-developed concept in BCE. The observer witnessed administration teams at work in all five schools. Each week this occurred in a formal meeting and at other times it was conducted informally. The larger schools used three member Administration Teams while all others used two member teams. All principals indicated to the researcher the satisfaction and support that they gained from the practice of meeting regularly to discuss operational and philosophical aspects of the school. A decision-making style that recognises the significance of the Administration Team philosophy will lessen the burdens inherent in the job.

6.33 Communication

Recommendation: Adopt attitudes and behaviours in communication that are stress reducing (rewarding) to others rather than stress provoking (punishing).

Communication and decision-making style are closely linked. Covey maintains certain attitudes and behaviours are essential to clearing communication lines. He lists these as:

Attitudes

- * I assume good faith. I do not question your sincerity or sanity.
- * I care about our relationship and want to resolve this difference.
- * I am open to influence and prepared to change.

Behaviours

- * Listen to understand.
- * Speak to be understood.
- * Start dialogue from common point of agreement and move slowly to areas of disagreement (1992: 110).

Good communication takes time. Notes in pigeon holes, rushed verandah conversations and distracted discussions in crowded lunch rooms may be necessary but time for more qualitative sessions should be sought if warranted. Good communication eases the stresses of the day by clearing information agreeably. Schafer argues that some people are distress provokers either unintentionally or with full awareness. He argues that "positive strokes" to others prevent and reduce distress for them and, through a loop back effect, for self (1992: 391). This list of punishing and rewarding actions is a worthwhile reflection on the importance of communication in schools.

Punishing actions (promotes distress in others)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| * Monopolising the conversation | * Using non-verbal put downs |
| * Interrupting | * Speaking dogmatically |
| * Showing obvious disinterest | * Fault finding |

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| * Throwing verbal barbs | * Refusing to compromise |
| * Making others feel guilty | * Asking loaded questions |
| * Excessive soliciting of approval | * Breaking confidences |
| * Losing temper | * Insincere flattery |
| * Manipulating people | * Inappropriate joking |

Rewarding actions (stress reducing in others)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| * Giving others a chance to talk | * Treating others as equal |
| * Listening attentively | * Delaying automatic reactions |
| * Praising sincerely | * Levelling honestly |
| * Constructive suggestions | * Keeping confidences |
| * Affirming good practice | * Good humour |
| * Expressing genuine interest | * Stating agreement |
- (Albrecht, 1979: 265).

Covey firmly places communication as the most important skill in life and asks how many years have people spent in learning how to listen? For Covey the biggest trap in communication is that most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. Empathetic listening as defined by Covey seeks to understand first and reply second (1990: 237-240). Those who consistently monitor their communication style and adjust it where necessary tend not to promote stress in others.

Principals are constantly communicating. Verbal communication takes up by far the major percentage of the day and its importance in the stress equation is vital. PP01 and PP02 spent quality time during the week of observation talking with teachers at length and in private about school issues. This is simply part of their habitual practice and gives everyone the chance to communicate without the distractions of children in class. There was a wide variance in the style of communication (which depends to a large degree on personality) from PP02, who was for the most part quite proper and formal, to PP03 who

exercised an informal, jovial manner on every occasion. In the analysis of the most commonly recorded management activities, "Disseminator", rated in the top three for each principal. As a group these principals spent between 23 per cent (PP01) and 48 per cent (PF04) of time in such activities. The researcher recorded many conversations between principal and teacher in which the answer or direction was already known before the question was asked. It seems in this manner of conversation people are looking for confirmation of their decision from the principal, which may come either orally (an expression of agreement) or non-verbally (a simple nod, smile or no response). It would seem many people ask "out of duty" or to "test the waters". In many respects such conversations are really "light business" in that no change of position or direction is required. They remain quite important conversations and often allow quick access to the principal.

6.34 Hardiness

Recommendation: Seek to develop a strong psychological profile through the hardiness constructs of control, commitment and challenge and through a thorough knowledge of self.

Hardiness is a general personal characteristic that emerges from rich, rewarding and varied childhood experiences (Funk, 1992: 335). This general quality manifests itself in feelings and behaviours that are characterised as:

1. **Commitment.** Where a hardy person views new challenges as interesting and meaningful.
2. **Control.** Where a hardy person sees stressors as changeable.
3. **Challenge.** Where a hardy person sees change as a normal aspect of life rather than a threat and looks to change as an opportunity for growth (Maddi and Kobassa, 1984: 50).

High hardy people see the environment worked in as satisfying and these people approach situations with curiosity and enthusiasm. Antonovsky uses the term "coherence" to describe a similar personality pattern:

The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability things will work as well as can be reasonably expected (1979: 123).

According to Maddi and Kobassa hardiness modifies the strain caused by stressful experiences by altering events to make them less stressful and by allowing coping to be "transformational" (finding opportunity for growth). They also postulate that high hardy people have well developed social support networks and use these effectively. Low hardy people do not have these networks (1984).

The personal resources of commitment, control and challenge can be discovered by knowing one's self better. Personality typing tools such as the Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram can assist principals better to understand their behaviours and response patterns in certain situations. A thorough knowledge of self includes acceptance of strengths and an acknowledgment of weaknesses. These instruments are not meant to box and restrain behaviour but to assist in discerning one's personality.

All principals in the study completed the Enneagram. Each day during the observation period the researcher saw evidence of principals operating in accord

with the personality descriptions of the Enneagram. The evidence is convincing-high hardy characters not only have good support networks but these people also know themselves well.

6.35 Character

Recommendation: In the final analysis what we are communicates far more eloquently than what we say or do; so seek to develop sound character traits as the foundation of success.

In the longer term, recommendations about the development or recognition of the importance of character as a "stress reducer" may seem somewhat out of place and yet modern managerial theorists (DePree, Block, Covey) all go to great lengths to extol its virtues. Block discusses aspects of organisational politics and sees it at its finest when:

If our intention is to work in an organisation in which authority resides within the person, contribution is self-interest, and authenticity is the norm, then all we have to do is make sure our actions are aligned with our intentions

and at its worst when:

....this is politics at its best, where our actions, not our speeches, become our political statement. Politics as oratory, smoke-filled rooms, back-scratching and bargaining is a game that works, but is not worth playing (1990: 98).

Covey is convinced that what we are communicates more than what is said. "There are people we trust absolutely because we know their character. Whether they're eloquent or not, whether they have human relationship techniques or not, we trust them, and we work successfully with them" (1990:

22). In his study of 200 years of "success" literature Covey identified the "Character Ethic" as the foundation of success for the first 150 years. In the past 50 years the literature has focused more on personality, public image, human relations and mental attitudes. Covey regards these as useful but somewhat manipulative and deceptive because they encourage "quick fix" power strategies and communication skills over age-old virtues such as integrity, humility, courage, justice, patience, industry and modesty (1990: 18-19).

To build up trusting relationships a leader requires both character (what the person stands for) and skills (what the person can do). Covey sees three character traits as essential for maintaining a high trust organisational culture:

1. Integrity. Habits congruent with values, words with deeds and expressions with feelings.
2. Maturity. Courage balanced with consideration.
3. Abundance mentality. There is plenty out there for everyone (1992: 198).

Trustworthy relationships are a key factor in organisational health and this recommendation clearly places the school principal in a modelling role for maintaining the good repair of relationships in a school. Imagine working in an environment with relationship patterns based on power, inside knowledge, fear and insincerity.

In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people (excluding overlaps), for a total of 20, and each of these 20 people is afraid of six people, making a total of 120 people who are feared by at least one person. There are six people who are afraid of me, and one small secretary who is afraid of all of us. I have one other person working for me who is

not afraid of any, not even me, and I would fire him quickly, but I am afraid of him (Joseph Heller's "Somethings Happened", cited in Cartwright and Cooper, 1994: 65).

Humorously put, but a strikingly accurate assessment of wretched office politics.

When individuals are duplicitous, when they say one thing, but practise another, or when they bad talk people behind their backs but sweet talk them to their face, there is a subtle but eloquent communication that undermines trust and leads to arrangements requiring external supervision, control and evaluation (Covey, 1992: 198).

The principals who are sound in character and consistent in action, behaviour and speech are better placed to make and take difficult decisions which affect others while maintaining their loyalty, trust and good-will. High trust school cultures do not radiate stressed relationships. Principals seen in this light can operate without the culture of fear or be seen as shallow and manipulative persons. Character development is long term, starting early in life, but it is the foundation of success.

Catholic schooling authorities have long recognised the value of the personal development of principals employed in the system and have provided educational courses and reflective retreats for many years. The development of the whole person (professional and personal) is regarded as crucial. One cannot be ignored at the expense of the other. All participating principals, in the current study, have, over the years, attended this style of course aimed at giving a more personal, reflective and spiritual emphasis to an individual's personal development. In the frenetic activity of school life this cannot be done on one afternoon per semester. It requires ongoing commitment, time and money and

the right people for solid service delivery.

6.36 Peer Support

Recommendation: Use peers (fellow principals and trusted others) as a means of social support to buffer stress.

As part of a strategy to guard against stress this final longer term recommendation to principals seeks a degree of commitment and personal honesty. Numerous suggestions have been made in the stress literature of the possible beneficial effects of social support. Willis calls on principals to develop a personal support system of trusted others to whom the person can turn to for advice and empathy. In making this call he cautions that it should not just be a case of "talking shop" with colleagues but should include opportunities for constructive criticism, analysis of problems and the opportunity to develop new perspectives (1986: 30-31).

Hence the need for a high level of personal honesty in this recommendation. Those who fail to admit to trusted others that a situation or person is causing a degree of stress, will never reap the rewards that such an opportunity can offer. Problems can be redefined, solutions offered and courses of action proposed in an atmosphere that is non-judgemental, supportive and confidential.

Studies by Terry et al. confirm the role social support can play in buffering stress and report:

Consistent with previous research in the area (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992), there was evidence that, irrespective of the level of stress, high levels of supervisor support appeared to have a beneficial effect on job satisfaction and general psychological well-being (1993: 173).

While this recommendation may seem rather clear and obvious there is much about it that is problematic and not as straight forward as it appears because:

- * While the principal may seek social support others may not be willing to give it in return. **Access becomes a problem.**
- * Of the natural tendency to keep mistakes, poor choices and problems hidden from others. **Honesty becomes a problem.**
- * Advice given may not be acted upon. **Action becomes a problem.**
- * Trust and competence are two different concepts. While a principal may trust someone he or she must also be sure that the advice given is competent and professional. **Trust in the group (and in the person) may be a problem.**

The researcher believes that this final recommendation to guard against stress is perhaps the one that has the greatest potential and also the greatest under-utilisation in schools. Certainly the concept of Administration Teams is included here but in another sense the term "trusted other" conveys a more intimate professional relationship.

In the school observation period the researcher saw evidence of all principals engaging in serious discussions with "trusted others". Sometimes these were with people outside the school community, including fellow principals, but more often these types of conversations were with senior teachers with whom they had some special rapport. PP01, PP03 and PP05 all used these senior teachers regularly for confidential discussions. As mentioned, the Administration Team was well used by all principals to discuss items of a

sensitive nature.

6.4 REFLECTIONS

This section reflects on the conduct of the study. In doing so it will provide answers to Questions 1 and 3 of the research. Australian stress studies of principals using a mix of physiological measures and direct observation were first reported by Phillipps and Thomas (1983). The studies by Sieverding (1985) and Whan (1988) followed and further explored aspects of job stress in principals. While there have been refinements built into this study which were not available earlier and some variations to the methodology, all these research works share a similar path. In general terms this study supports the findings of Sieverding and Whan; that is, stress is a major problem for some principals. A number of qualifying factors have to be made to this statement as consistency in the intensity of the stress faced differs in this work from that identified by previous research. These are:

- * **Methodology.** Different physiological measures have been used. Sieverding used heart-rate monitors in New York City principals and Whan worked with a Tissue Perfusion Monitor on primary principals in the New South Wales State Department of Education. The current study was conducted using an Ambulatory Blood Pressure Monitor on primary principals in the Catholic Education system.
- * **Context.** The school and community context of each of the three groups varies widely.
- * **Values.** The school and community values may well vary.

6.41 Research Comparisons

Variations in Methodology. Both Whan's Tissue Perfusion Monitor (TPM) and Sieverding's Hittman Comp-Act IV heart rate recorder were recording physiological changes on a minute by minute basis. In this study the QuietTrak Ambulatory Blood Pressure Monitor (ABPM) was set to record every fifteen minutes with an emergency, patient activated facility to record a stressful event at any time. Analysis of Whan's results in particular show TP index figures from over 100 to under 10 on various graphs in his Chapter 5 resembling a city skyline. This quite dramatic change in readings was matched with observed behaviour and managerial activity. Whan's case was consequently very clear. The ABPM recordings, while showing a good degree of variance, do not display such conspicuous fluctuations. Hence, indications of stress may be more subtle. Sieverding's case-by-case heart rate summaries (Chapter 4) are more in line with the ABPM figures. All three studies charted hourly changes in their graphing. The ABPM hour was made up of four readings while the other two studies averaged out a higher number of readings.

School settings. Another reason why the overall ABPM results are not as marked as Sieverding's or Whan's work can perhaps be found within the school context. It is reasonable to assume that different contexts (school size, position, status, wealth, resources, ethnic characteristics, staff levels and technology) may affect results and any subsequent comparison of those results. Qualitative studies such as this are always going to be sample short and data heavy. Sieverding's New York principals, Whan's New South Wales State

Department principals and the current study's Brisbane Catholic Education principals obviously represent a diverse group of professionals. Philosophies and support structures will vary between government (secular) agencies and those with a religious background. Already the possible mediating effects of personal development inservice (as opposed to professional development) by Catholic Education authorities has been suggested. The researcher is unaware of the scope of this style of inservice in other employment situations.

Values associated with certain schools may also have a "dampening effect" on the overall stress of principals. Where students and parents share a common moral/religious/family background, support for the school's discipline and student management processes may be more uniform. Sieverding notes, "Apprehension about crowd control and managing large groups combine to produce a substantial amount of stress" (1985: 159). Of Sieverding's top five stressors three relate directly to student control (disturbance handler, supervision, discipline) with a total weight that far outnumbers any other category of activity. Whan's school case studies abound with stories of seemingly serious student and parent confrontations. Perhaps only Ruth Stibbard had what might be regarded as a "desirable" school (1988: 125). Richard Geoffrey's case reads as most arduous. Whan details among other things:

- * Jeffrey (student) attacking another student, and then the counsellor.
- * Student attacking brother with a knife (at home) and then running away from school.
- * Three eight year old boys vandalise a classroom at lunch and
- * A year six girl admits to sexual activities at home (1988: 130).

All of this occurred on one day and all before lunch! At this rate it probably comes as no surprise that the TPI reads like a city sky line.

Such serious discipline concerns were not observed by this researcher in any school. They may well happen on occasions but all schools had behaviour management plans in operation. In the analysis of the management activity for each principal matters of discipline rated between 3 per cent and 4 per cent of all activity. This is a very low figure and it was consistent for all five participants. Other considerations such as male students leaving in middle years to attend secondary colleges affect overall school discipline.

Candidates chosen. The selection of candidates may also be one reason why the overall results in this study are not as marked as those in Sieverding's and Whan's work. Whan (1988: 103) explains how he arrived at his sample of ten principals. Each was well known to the researcher and formally asked to participate. Sieverding's group was selected randomly across four school districts in a presumably dense population zone. There is no evidence that Sieverding was on familiar terms with any of them (1985: 41-42). Because of the intensity required in the current research five principals were asked to participate. The researcher chose "middle of the road" schools in urban areas. Only one (PP05) could be regarded as being in a high growth population area. PP01 and PP05 are principals of larger schools in the system (over 500 pupils) while the remainder of the participating principals lead schools which are mid-sized in the system (250-350 pupils). With 107 primary schools in the system

the researcher could have chosen schools with vastly different circumstances (inner city, high migrant intake, low socio-economic status). This may be a relevant starting point for further research.

6.5 A NEW VIEW

During the conduct of the observational and data gathering phase of the study the researcher noticed some inconsistency between managerial activity and blood pressure movement. There was no consistent rise in blood pressure when certain managerial tasks required of the principal were repeated. Even when these tasks were identical and repeated within a short timespan, matching blood pressure rises could not be guaranteed. Discipline matters caused both Sieverding's and Whan's participating principals much stress, indicated by sharply rising physiological charges to the state of the body. This initially troubled the researcher as comparable managerial tasks (such as disciplining children) did not generate the same amount of physiological change in blood

pressure as reported by Sieverding and Whan. It would be reasonable to suggest discipline matters might well raise a principal's blood pressure being a rather intensive and demanding responsibility. Changes in the body's blood pressure during the day could not be solely ascribed to a Mintzberg managerial task. Whan notes that stressors such as the short-comings of teachers, pupil misdemeanours, meetings, deadlines, interruptions and work overload caused physiological signs of stress in the TP Index (1988: 299) and while the current research found a similar pattern, the mere presence of one factor (for example, a recalcitrant pupil or a long and demanding meeting) did not necessarily mean a rise in blood pressure. Other factors were at play.

These can be explained through the concept of Situational Intensities (SI). SI is to some extent a refinement on the traditional concept of "stressors". In the literature stressors is commonly taken to mean those factors or events which cause the stress response. Stressors are the agents or demands which evoke a response and the vulnerability of individuals to any stressor varies. Even the vulnerability of one person to the same stressor can vary depending on how it is perceived. People perceive stressors idiosyncratically. SI focuses not just on the incident, event, conversation or action in question, but more on the intensity surrounding the principal. SI nominates those "other factors" at play and suggests a more fluid state of affairs about the principal rather than nominating lists of specific events which might cause stress. The research reality was that the lists changed for the one person from day to day (and within the day) and were not necessarily the same for any two principals. This is a

new view on the stress question in schools.

6.51 Reference Marks

Throughout the weeks of observational study there were times in every day when each principal had a blood pressure reading taken with several factors similar or constant:

1. The principal was alone and unbothered for five minutes either side of the reading.
2. The reading was taken when the principal was seated.
3. The reading was taken when the principal was at his or her desk.
4. There were no phones ringing or outside intrusive noise to distract.
5. The principal was working quietly (light reading or note taking but not, for example, furious deadline writing or an activity requiring intense concentration).

These specific blood pressure readings were noted on the observer's log sheets and an average reading for the week was calculated. This is termed the Reference Mark (RM). The RM is a measure of the lower end of a principal's working day blood pressure. It is not an average, which by definition takes in all readings (including the highs), but the blood pressure measure of a principal alone and unbothered. The opportunities for taking a RM varied between principals and hence the need to average these readings out across a week for each subject. On some days the general tempo of administrative tasks precluded any such measure. The figures below illustrate the number of Reference Marks obtained for each principal:

PP01

Day 1	5 readings
Day 2	1 reading
Day 3	2 readings
Day 4	0 readings
Day 5	2 readings

Total **10 readings with blood pressure averaging 119/82**

PP02

Day 1 5 readings

Day 2 3 readings

Day 3 3 readings

Day 4 3 readings

Day 5 4 readings

Total **18 readings with blood pressure averaging 142/85**

PP03

Day 1 2 readings

Day 2 3 readings

Day 3 2 readings

Day 4 0 readings

Total **7 readings with blood pressure averaging 119/83**

PP04

Day 1 3 readings

Day 2 3 readings

Day 3 2 readings

Day 4 0 readings

Total **8 readings with blood pressure averaging 117/82**

PP05

Day 1 4 readings

Day 2 3 readings

Day 3 0 readings

Day 4 2 readings

Day 5 4 readings

Total **13 readings with blood pressure averaging 128/81**

The researcher noticed that this brief period of tranquillity in a principal's day rarely lasted as other factors quickly intruded and disturbed the equilibrium. These other factors can come from a variety of sources and are explained as Situational Intensities because they have the ability to immediately change the current working situation. Whan's study shows the almost impossibility for successful forward planning of events and meetings in a principal's day. Each of Whan's case studies is brimming with unforeseen, unwanted and unavoidable

interruptions of every conceivable nature from major to minor and serious to humorous. Other studies by Phillips and Thomas (1983) on Interruptibility in a principal's day confirm this phenomena. Situational Intensities is an attempt to describe the principal's unique working environment. Clearly the principal has little control over how the day's interactions develop, unlike the doctor who has a schedule of appointments and a secretary to vet calls.

6.52 The Case for Situational Intensities

During the weeks of observation the researcher saw principals' days in a state of constant flux. Sometimes the intensity of the situation changed from one minute to the next in a way similar to the constant, unavoidable and unforeseen interruptions highlighted by Thomas and Phillips and Whan. In the course of the five weeks observation the researcher considered how this constant state of flux impacted on the principal. Some tasks, such as simply reading, raised blood pressure dramatically, while others, which might be considered more demanding (discipline, monitoring students), made little impression. While the Psychological Perspective could be expected to account for some of the difference through an individual's personality and temperament there was more going on around the principal.

SITUATIONAL INTENSITIES

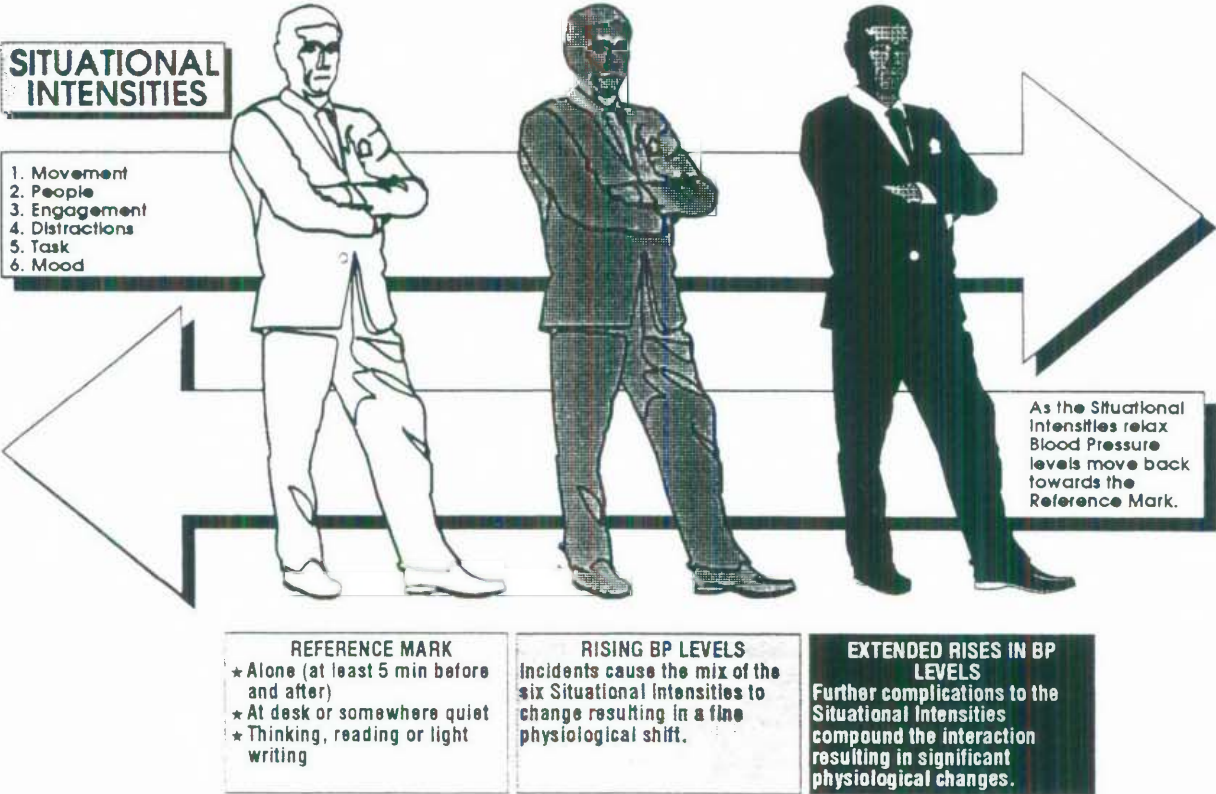


Figure 35

Situational Intensities

Variations to the Reference Measurement and subsequent blood pressure fluctuations can be traced to the following six factors:

1. **Movement** In this situation is the principal walking, standing or sitting? Has the principal arrived at the scene after a brisk walk?
2. **People** In this situation is the principal involved in conversation/discussion? Does the conversation involve one or more persons? What is the status of the person(s) the principal is engaged with? Does the status of the other person(s) affect the principal's manner, tone and bearing?
3. **Degree of engagement** In this situation is the level of contact "heavy or light"? Is the conversation demanding requiring the principal to defend school policy or the actions of others? Is the conversation business or social? Does the paperwork require intense concentration or is it bland, routine mail?
4. **Distractions** In this situation are there are other distractions competing for the principal's attention (phones, other teachers, parents, children)? Is the principal agitated by the commotion?
5. **Task** In this situation what management task (refer to Mintzberg) is the principal engaged in? Is it one handled with ease or perhaps a more difficult task?
6. **Mood** In this situation is the principal in good humour, energetic, alert and interested? Does the principal's mood change during the conversation?

The Model explains how in any encounter the intensity can fade away or gain potency rapidly through the action of any one or a combination of the six factors above. The researcher observed many occasions when a seemingly uncomplicated observation log notation, such as "PP01 walking to assembly", became a taxing exercise through the action several Situational Intensity factors

working together. These changes in intensity are reflected in the body's physiological functioning through blood pressure fluctuations. Events such as:

- * A child arriving at the office with a bleeding wound
- * An angry parent arriving to see the principal without an appointment
- * A teacher demanding clarification on a principal's policy position
- * The secretary expressing anger at the amount of work
- * A computer breaking down while in use with information lost
- * The principal seeing children who are fighting
- * Talking to a group of demanding parents
- * Phone calls in quick succession
- * Long meetings discussing weighty matters
- * Visits from central office staff

need to be judged in terms of the six factors above. On this reading above and in a diary log book they may all appear to be stressful and unwelcome incidents likely to cause a significant rise in blood pressure. In reality this may not be the case as other elements from the Situational Intensities might serve to restrain any rise in blood pressure. Some of these might be:

- * An easily reached and acceptable joint agreement between the parties was reached.
- * The use of humour diffused the situation.
- * An acceptance of a misunderstanding or an apology was tendered by either or both parties.
- * The principal's people management skills calmed the person(s).
- * A new drama took precedence transferring everyone's attention.

The observer saw all these modifying factors at work and witnessed many occasions when principals used their communication skills to diffuse potentially difficult situations or other outside factors intervened to change the situation. A close reading of Whan's case studies reveals a similar pattern. Such is the openness of a principal's day that these troublesome occurrences are rarely timetabled and in a sense they are almost like "random acts of violence" arriving in the middle of other events to demand attention. "Doorstep" interviews were a

particularly common experience for the participants, giving the principal no time for preparation or adjustment. Often the topic demanded the principal's full attention and called for careful judgement.

The Situational Intensities model shows how changes can occur incrementally and shift the nature of the interaction in subtle ways. Exacting predicaments don't always explode unannounced on the scene. This happens when:

- * Social calls change to business matters and turn serious
- * A initially agreeable conversation with one teacher becomes potentially troublesome when several others join in
- * A student interview takes a surprise turn and reveals more than was expected
- * Discussions with a supervisor cause a slow but perceptible change in mood from buoyant to concerned and then to defensive.

This model can explain shifts in the working equilibrium and why a certain managerial task may not be as stressful as it seems. The model can account for "play-acting" on the part of principals in cases of student discipline and how seemingly social interactions change tempo and turn serious. The researcher emphasises the action of the principal's current "mood" as important in understanding why some potentially difficult situations are easily dispatched and why on other occasions the reverse is true. An upbeat and relaxed mood can do much to refocus a principal enabling the person to see the predicament in a different light.

6.6 FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As the observational phase of the study progressed the researcher became concerned about the adequacy of Mintzberg's managerial categories as applied to school principals. Mintzberg's Nature of Managerial Work contains a table summary of the ten roles with a column of identifiable activities for executives (1973: 93). This, along with a description in the preceding column, could be updated to better account for unique school situations. The researcher was at times troubled in coding such incidents as:

- * (to the principal) "Where is the key to B5?"
- * How to code simply having fun. Mintzberg's ten roles all appear rather serious and schools can be places of great hilarity.
- * Meaningless "downtime" where the principal simply shuffles paper, tidies the desk, or writes notes to himself or herself.
- * Accounting for social talk moving to business talk and vice versa. It is for this reason that timing conversations was not considered.
- * Simply being out on public relations exercises. Just walking the yard or being seen by people.

The necessary judgement on coding was made by the researcher but not all situations neatly fit Mintzberg's categorisation. Perhaps further observational studies might consider this question of the coding of a principal's activities so better distinctions can be made especially in the light of the review of literature in Chapter 5 where management and leadership functions are defined separately.

In the course of spending a full week with the participating principals the researcher often discussed broad issues of stress in schools and witnessed a

gradual opening up on the part of the participants to events and occasions that trouble them. In the lead-up to the research none of this was volunteered to the researcher and indeed the common reply was "not much stresses me". Yet it appears this is not the case. There is a natural reluctance to speak openly and honestly on these matters. The use of "trusted others" has already been recommended but this seemingly practical method may be of limited use given the cautious response of the principals. What is the best method to provide resources, counselling and assistance to the sufferers of stress? If a person will not admit to, enquire about and take steps to discuss pressing concerns then what can be done to assist? Are there other ways to provide a suitable service because the participating principals in this study were:

- * keen to talk about stress after becoming comfortable with the researcher
- * very interested in their own blood pressure readings and feedback from the data gathering
- * interested in the researcher's personal observations about how they handled difficult situations during the week.

The ABPM device has proven to be a highly effective instrument to measure physiological stress in principals. Being lightweight, mobile, accurate and unobtrusive it has properties which deserve further exploration. The researcher noticed stressful behaviour on many occasions showing that such actions and events are observable. The opposite is also true. On occasion, principals seemed confident, in control and relaxed and yet the blood pressure readings reflected a degree of stress that belied the outward appearance. The unseen strain of running a successful meeting where the principal has to keep people on task, ensure things happen, negotiate agreements and propose action

can only be measured physiologically. This style of research is both venturesome and productive.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Schafer believes we live in the best of times and the worst of times. Humankind is gifted with options and not at the total mercy of climate or the rampages of pestilence. Technology enables people to leave behind most of the struggles of daily living and yet for all these advantages there are unintended traps. Too much change, not enough time, overwork, fast paced lives, the quest for material goods, isolation and neglect of our bodies are causing distress in populations. People are fatigued (1992: 508). These issues have been canvassed throughout the thesis. In itself, stress is not bad and a degree of stress should always be with us to challenge, provoke and force action. These are exciting times, anxious times; but, as the tightrope artist Karl Wallenda said "Being on the tightrope is living. Everything else is waiting" (McCall, 1988: 41). Stress will always be a part of school life and the evidence presented indicates that, as the pace of change continues, so will the stresses of the job. Principals who take up the challenges, know themselves and face the stresses confidently, with buffering options in place, will provide sound and admired leadership. They'll know life.

More than ever teaching and administering in schools seeks the mysterious mark of quality which is so difficult to define and yet so easy to recognise. As suggested, quality costs. Schools can't be ambivalent about quality and expect to be regarded as highly performing institutions. Very little excellence in this world comes without hard work.

With a complex topic it is best to finish simply:

Quality Living

**To live content with small means,
to seek elegance rather than luxury,
and refinement rather than fashion;
to be worthy, not respectable,
and wealthy not rich;
to listen to stars and birds, and babes and sages,
with open heart;
to study hard,
to think quietly, act frankly, talk gently,
await occasions, hurry never;
in a word, to let the spiritual,
unbidden and unconscious,
grow up through the common -
this is my symphony.
(William Henry Channing, 1989: 48).**