

Resilience and Leadership: An Action Plan for Navigating the Sea of Change



The Sandspit Road School / Te Kura o Rangiaawhea logo has a local significance and importance. It shows the headland, Ohurua, which was a prominent paa site occupied by Chief Papaka. The names have both been gifted to two of our school buildings. Our local reserve is the location of battle. When we talk about learning and leadership of learning we draw on our logo and local history.

There is one thing we can guarantee in education, and that is that it is always changing. With change comes anxiety, and a need to be resilient and maintain self-worth. As a leadership team we are taking steps to ensure Sandspit Road School / Te Kura o Rangiaawhea kaiako teachers maintain a relentless focus on the teaching and learning in times of (turbulent) change.

1. The Philosophical Compass: Different Boats, Same Sea

In the landscape of educational leadership, change is a constant tide. While every school represents a unique vessel, we all navigate the same turbulent waters of shifting policy and pedagogical evolution. Our transition process is anchored in the philosophy: *"Different Boat, Same Sea / Different Curriculum, Same purpose: to teach, to learn, to be."*

To safeguard staff self-worth during these voyages, leaders must frame the learning process not as a test of existing competence, but as a structured journey of growth. This journey is defined by the **4 Cs of the Learning Voyage**, which must be viewed through the lens of resilient leadership:

The 4 Cs of the Leadership Voyage

- **Concept (The Destination):** The leader's clearly communicated vision. This provides staff with a sense of purpose and psychological security by defining the "harbour" we are aiming for. Our harbour is educational excellence and achievement for all tamariki.
- **Conflict (The Storm):** The inevitable phase where learning becomes challenging. Leaders must frame this "rough sea" as a necessary growth phase rather than a personal failure, preventing the "storm" from eroding staff self-esteem. It feels like the waves of change are rough and unrelenting at the moment. Together we can navigate the storm.

- **Construct (The Navigation):** The expert act of active synthesis. This is where the leader facilitates the "trimming of sails"—adjusting strategies and professional practice to make sense of new requirements. We need to hold on to what we know works best whilst adapting to mandated requirements.
- **Consider (The Logbook):** The metacognitive stage. Leaders provide the time and space for staff to pause, chart their progress, and review the strategies used to plan the next leg of the voyage. We cannot do it all at once, but we must not drift. Strategic direction is critical.

2. Phase I: Outfitting the Vessel and Establishing Command

Resilience begins in the harbour. To protect staff from the anxiety of the "sea of knowledge," leaders must act as the **Experienced Captain/First Mate**. As leaders, our primary objective is to lower the perceived danger of the voyage (changes) by providing "models of good practice" and early advice on "tricky concepts." By demonstrating manoeuvres before the crew is expected to perform them, we validate their professional capacity.

Our Pre-Departure Checklist: Assessing Organisational Readiness for Change

- **Gather the Charts (Audit Staff Capacity):** We are systematically compiling curriculum mapping documents and auditing current expertise to identify exactly where the "uncharted waters" lie. We are utilising the skills of the leadership team to bring sense to the changes and to implement the changes at a manageable pace.
- **Stock the Hold (Resource Allocation and PD):** We have engaged with external expertise to ensure the 'provisions' of professional development and necessary resources are fully distributed before the transition begins. Our leadership team will have all the resources and information prior to leading the changes.
- **Check the Rigging (Assess Mental Readiness):** Evaluate staff 'basic knots'—their foundational knowledge—to ensure they feel equipped for the deeper waters of the new curriculum. We are ensuring the basics are in place, that all staff have access to professional learning, practice analysis discussions and impact assessments.

3. Phase II: Navigating the Initial Squall and Managing Anxiety

As the vessel leaves the coast, staff often face the Fear of the Unknown Horizon. Overwhelming "what-ifs" regarding the new curriculum can lead to professional paralysis. During this phase, the Skipper's Resolve/ leadership's determination is the "inner engine" of the school. Our leaders' mental toughness and visible self-belief provide the steady hand that prevents staff from feeling they are "capsizing" under the

weight of new expectations. Our staff take their cues from us as leaders. We stay calm, collected and carry on with our relentless focus on teaching and learning with impact.

How do we do that?

Maritime Challenges Leadership Counter-Measures

Fear of the Unknown Horizon	Implement Short Tacks: Deconstruct the transition into manageable, step-by-step manoeuvres rather than one overwhelming straight line. Implement one new curriculum at a time. Focus on one aspect of Assessment for Learning at a time. Create feedback loops.
Churning Water (Anxiety of New Concepts)	Establish Anchorages: Create dedicated, quiet time to "drop anchor," allowing staff to rest, resupply, and process their progress without the pressure of movement. Time to embed before bringing in more changes. Self review often- feedback loops. Celebrate the journey so far.
The Drift of Uncertainty	Skipper's Resolve: Maintain a resolute heading. Your calm, focused direction mitigates staff anxiety and provides the security needed to leave their comfort zones. Together is better; We've got this. Leadership present a united and resolute front.

4. Phase III: Strengthening the Crew and Tacking Against the Wind

Mid-voyage represents the period of highest risk to staff resilience. This is where the "ache of effort" meets the resistance of the change. This is when 'change fatigue' sets in. Leaders must utilise Teamwork to ensure that "Learning Pain" does not lead to staff "abandoning ship." We have to move forward with the new curriculum and teaching standards.

The Safety Line Protocol:

In heavy seas, leaders must ensure every crew member is tied to a collective Safety Line. We facilitate this by:

- **Bouncing ideas off with staff:** We use team discussions to strategise and crowdsource wisdom for navigating specific obstacles.
- **Securing the line:** If a staff member's self-worth slips due to the stress of change, the leadership and colleagues must secure the line, preventing them from being swept overboard by professional doubt. Reminders that we know what good looks like, that we have navigated change many times before as a profession and we will do it again are crucial. We create a culture of support and we leave no one behind.

Managing Learning Pain

Tacking against the wind is the arduous, mentally taxing process of pushing against resistance to gain ground. To help staff "keep sailing regardless" when they feel the struggle, we follow this 3-step guide:

Acknowledge the Ache: Validate that the struggle of Tacking is a natural sign of mastery in progress, not a lack of skill.

1. **Use Radio Calls:** Provide constant, real-time feedback to keep staff focused on the heading and to assure them they are not sailing alone.
2. **Reinforce the Outcome:** Remind the crew that "no struggle means no mastery." Changes are needed to ensure our learners are not left behind others.

Lighthouse Beacons

In the thick 'fog' of a curriculum transition, leaders must provide 'Lighthouse Beacons' through:

- **Feedback:** identify exactly how the staff is successfully implementing the changes and improving practice and outcomes.
- **Feedforward:** illuminate the specific next steps of the change journey so staff know what is expected and how to navigate change.
- **Inner Voice Development:** Coaching staff to develop their own internal guidance systems for future navigation.

5. Phase IV: Making Port and Seeking New Horizons

Reaching a destination requires a formal transition to bolster self-worth before the next voyage begins.

The Safe Docking Ceremony

The act of Making Port must be formally recognised. As a leader, we must:

- Celebrate the Docking: Recognise both the major milestones and the small victories of navigation.
- Empower the Crew: Ensure staff own their harbour, acknowledging that their resilience and skill—not just the design of the journey of change—brought the vessel through the storm.

The Metacognitive Logbook

Once the ship is safely docked, lead the staff through a "Principal-led Logbook" process. Facilitate a synthesis of new ideas by asking:

- "What steps were most effective in breaking down the new curriculum requirements?"
- "During the journey of change when did we experience the most significant growth in understanding?"
- "How has this journey prepared us for the next horizon/ change? What do we need to do more of, what do we need to change?"

6. Core Leadership Assets: The Principal's Perspective

The strategies outlined in this plan are born from decades of research and leadership experience. This work is deeply rooted in the foundational assessment research of Dylan Wiliam, Paul Black, and Shirley Clarke and the meta analyses. These five anchor values serve as the bedrock of school culture, ensuring staff resilience is not an accident, but a structural certainty:

1. Assessment for Learning: The underpinning philosophy that ensures every step of the journey is monitored and understood.
2. Student Agency: The ultimate goal of the voyage, toward which all staff effort is directed.
3. The Curriculum: The compass that provides unwavering direction regardless of the weather.
4. Quality Teachers: The school's primary assets; it is their expertise and self-worth that power the vessel.
5. Relationships: The school culture itself, acting as the bond that keeps the crew together through the roughest seas.

