Losing your Head: Are Principals Attached to their School?

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Abstract

This article explores the effects on former principals who have undergone involuntary job dissolution. It draws upon a study of 10 former principals who have experienced involuntary job dissolution in England and Australia; however, none of the participants were dismissed. Hour long, one-to-one interviews were conducted with each participant and key emergent themes analysed. There was a high level of congruence of data from the two countries with key findings of effects on former principals' physical and emotional health, self-belief, professional identity and finances, plus a sense of loss of power. The effects of these job losses were significant and long-lasting. The analysis locates these results in the established literature on job loss and, particularly, on Bowlby's Attachment Theory. The manner of departure appears to carry substantial meaning and there are implications here for the management of school principals. Attachment Theory suggests people undergo physical and emotional loss when separated from loved ones. The participants displayed a sense of grief akin to loss of a significant other. The authors forward the concept that principalship involves attachment to the school institution as a love relationship.

Introduction and context

Pressure on school principals globally is 'unrelenting' due to increased expectation, scrutiny and public accountability, with the role often regarded as 'high stakes' (Crawford and Earley, 2011); media coverage often reflects this and the subsequent health issues (Thomson, 2009; Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs, and Tregenza, 2003), and potential aspirants to the role may well be deterred by these perceived complexities (Simon, 2016).

There are concerns over principal turnover and these two phenomena may well be linked (Marks, 2012; Lynch & Worth, 2017).

The emerging literature on job loss has not been applied to school leadership to date and, therefore, non-traditional leadership theory sources, such as counselling, human relations, personnel and social work have been consulted for this article. Specifically, key themes have been identified and include: the effects of job loss on individuals (Latack and Dozier, 1986; McKee-Ryan and Kinicki, 2002); how job loss may relate to grief (Archer and Rhodes, 1993; Blau, 2008); attachment (Albert, Allen, Biggane, and Ma, 2015); and how effect of job loss may vary by social class (Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar, 2013; Hald Andersen, 2009). It is timely for us to investigate the unexplored implications for principals who have experienced this phenomenon.

'Involuntary job loss' has been defined as something which happens to an employee "through no fault of their own" (Gowan, 2014: 259). However, our definition of 'involuntary job loss' includes the employees' unwillingness to leave their employment; it is enacted by the employer. These are not usually cases of outright dismissal but rather of negotiated removal or resignation. In the case of school principals, these types of exit are not due to downsizing or redundancy: a post is made redundant, not a person. Every school requires a principal, and the situation is therefore highly personal.

Involuntary job loss effects on a group of former school principals in England and Australia are located within the literature on attachment and loss in the context of employment from other occupations. The participants' professional practice is not evaluated, but rather this article is an exploration of job-dissolution effects on them

personally. Through former principals' personal narratives, knowledge in the field may be expanded to be of use to those that create leadership preparation and development programmes, and to those that appoint, manage and support school principals in England, Australia and globally.

Literature Review

Attachment theory, loss and grief

Attachment theory, initially developed by John Bowlby (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980) is regarded as one of the most influential theories of psychology (Finkel and Simpson, 2015). Attachment theory suggests that humans are innately predisposed to form attachments with primary caregivers (often parents) to increase the probability of survival. These affectional bonds create feelings of security and, when separated by either emotional or physical proximity from the significant other, distress occurs. Attachment is a cradle-to-grave phenomenon, with behaviours replicated in adulthood as humans seek bonds with others, particularly with romantic relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). The loss of attachment figures causes grief, the severity of which is related to the disruption of regulatory systems and day-to-day life, and to what extent the significant other was part of the griever's self-identity.

Loss and grief are fundamental aspects of human experience: we grieve when we lose what we love. The loss of significant others and consequential grief, in particular bereavement, has been documented by Bowlby (1980) and Kübler-Ross (1969) both of whom provide stage-based theories. Bowlby elicits four stages: numbness; yearning, searching and anger; disorganization and despair; and reorganization. People can oscillate between the four phases. Contrastingly, Kübler-Ross' more linear theory presents five

stages which are traversed more consecutively: denial; anger; bargaining; depression; exploration and acceptance. In denial, a griever questions the event and finds difficulty in accepting its existence. The anger stage potentially involves self-blame or focusses on a target. Subsequently, the bargaining stage involves attempts to reverse the events, followed by depression before any acceptance. For Kübler-Ross these stages are important so that a griever can 'move-on' and rebuild their relationships, with the duration of bereavement often cited as 24 months (Maciejewski et al., 2007). Grievers that have not concluded each stage will have difficulty with 'moving on'.

Attachment theory suggests the essential nature of a connective relationship, albeit modified, with the deceased 'other'; and supportive networks alone cannot compensate for the loss of a significant other (Stroebe et al., 1996). Grief may be too complex for simplistic stage theories and a 'continuing bonds' approach offers a more dynamic perspective. Silverman and Klass (1996) assert that 'the resolution of grief involves continuing bonds that survivors maintain with the deceased and that these continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life' (Silverman and Klass, 1996: 22). Bell and Taylor (2011) suggest a conceptual shift away from stage theories to continuing bonds theories within bereavement scholarship, and that this

> notion of continuing bonds… asserts that the living can maintain relationships with the dead at emotional, social and material levels, sometimes long after death has occurred. This challenges the former orthodoxy that bereaved people need to detach from relationships with the dead in order to regain independence (Bell and Taylor, 2011: 2).

Benore and Park (2004) describe many representations of relationships between bereaved and deceased, maintaining attachment through belongings, visiting a grave, prayer, rituals and stories.

The conceptualisation of attachment is often as a set of personality traits that extend to many relationship situations in life, and the theory has been applied to a range of scenarios: substance misuse and addiction (Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn, 2009); divorce (Brennan and Shaver, 1998); sexual abuse (Alexander, 1992); and human motivation (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Although Bowlby was concerned predominately with child-parent relationships, other studies have addressed attachment and organisation relationships which could be with: co-workers; leaders; or the institution itself. Love and work are intertwined in attachment theory (Hazan and Shaver, 1990).

Attachment, grief and job loss

The literature on attachment, grief and job loss covers a range of experiences, and authors apply different theoretical perspectives to their work ranging from the general effects of job loss (Archer and Rhodes, 1993; Albert et al., 2015), to applying Kübler-Ross (Blau, 2008); and Continuing Bonds (Bell and Taylor, 2011) theories of bereavement. In all these, connection with the employing organisation is a significant relationship, through which employees can, in Bowlby terms, become attached as a 'significant other'. In this situation - that of 'workplace attachment' (Scrima, Rioux and Di Stefano, 2017) - employment becomes more than a source of income: it brings regulation and structure, security, social interaction and status, purpose to living and that of goal setting (Vickers, 2009). When employees feel valued, they have high levels of trust and commitment, but when the relationship breaks down, they can become 'angry, betrayed, and tend to experience withdrawal cognitions, similar to an interpersonal relationship' (Albert et al., 2015: 95).

Consequently, loss of employment can be traumatic, and the grief that ensues is not necessarily linked to loss of income: it is more to do with emotions of abandonment (Albert et al., 2015). Archer and Rhodes (1993) report various aspects of grief in their sample of 70 men who had experienced job loss: common effects were restlessness, depression and irritability, whilst reminders and guilt or self-blame were less common. There was preoccupation with job loss, anger and feelings of loss of self, against the general background of emotional disturbance such as irritability, anxiety and depression. The loss of routine can create systemic loss, with no appointments, places to go or deadlines to keep leading to feelings of isolation and fearfulness (Antczak, 1999). Other effects include lower self-esteem (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman and Mullan, 1981), suicidal intentions, high blood pressure (Cobb and Kasl, 1977), psychological ill-health (Jackson and Warr, 1984) and other physical health issues (Rásky, Stronegger, and Freidl, 1996). Mckee-Ryan and Kinicki's (2002) consequential dimensions of job loss include: direct economic impact, and its indirect impact when relationships are tested by restrictions on what they usually do together; psychological impacts; social impacts which include loss of social network related to job; and physical health impacts such as chronic liver and respiratory diseases. A meta-analysis of 104 studies concerning job loss observed that job loss was related to significant decreases across multiple indices of well-being, and these decreases were highly related to work-role centrality (the extent to which work provides more or less meaning to one's life) and loss of self-image, esteem, and/or efficacy (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Papa et al. (2014) argue that some studies addressing grief and job loss have not looked at Prolonged Grief . They describe Prolonged Grief symptoms as: longing/yearning; feeling stunned/shocked/dazed by the event; trouble in accepting what happened; damage

to self-concept; role confusion; a foreshortened future; guilt and worthlessness; social problems such as mistrust and detachment from others; cognitive disruptions such as memory recall and depressed mood; and loss of appetite and energy. Triggers remind those affected what happened and bring back associated emotional pain. Attachment theory suggests that we use others to fulfil biologically-driven needs of the primary caregiver. Papa and Maitoza (2013) suggest grief can occur from the loss of a significant other or a significant social role as "that person or role was essential for a primary relational self" (Papa and Maitoza, 2013: 164). This is not the same as proximity goals as can be identified in early childhood attachment theory, but rather as one that defines the self, disrupting goal building and "undermining critical aspects of the self" (Papa and Maitoza, 2013: 164). Prolonged Grief occurs where the job is of a self-defining role.

Kübler-Ross stages of grief are also applied to job loss in the form of redundancy following downsizing (Marks and Mirvis, 2001; Blau, 2008; Vickers, 2009). Blau (2008) finds that anger did not decline over time although denial, bargaining and depression did. Vickers samples middle and senior executives, finds evidence for Kübler-Ross stages and concludes "as with all grief experiences, people affected may be permanently damaged, traumatized, and alienated by their experiences - they may never be the same" (Vickers, 2009: 416). Others, such as Bell and Taylor (2011), criticize Kübler-Ross applications to job dissolution, whereby former employees go through set stages to improve their personal situation: for them, the continuing bonds theory is preferable as grief is a complex dynamic, rather than a static, staged phenomenon. Continuing Bonds theory is based on people's construction of lasting symbolic representations of the deceased, with relationships continuing long after the death has occurred: these aspects can have a positive effect,

whereas stage theories feature a series of temporal stages to regain independence. Bell and Taylor posit that there may be no recovery from, or resolution to, loss and grief, and mourning may be long-lasting. Grievers need parting rituals and have 'memorialisation' of lost ones in order to grieve. Bell and Taylor apply these notions to job and organisational loss in other cultures, indicating that this framework may well increase our knowledge of organisational death and pose potential solutions for grief.

For many researchers, the connection between job loss and grief is clear and, as Albert et al. (2015) point out, "research suggests that the sense of loss that occurs as a consequence of employment dissolution is strikingly similar to feelings of grief and abandonment associated with the loss of a critical relationship in one's life" (Albert et al., 2015: 104). Another comparison of the two states is made by Papa et al. who assert that the "phenomenology of grief is a common experience in job loss …and not unique to the death of a loved one" (Papa et al., 2014: 141).

Educational leadership as an emotional activity and principal career journeys

School leaders work in emotionally-intense environments (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015), and in what Leithwood and Beatty (2009) refer to as emotionally 'hot climates'. Beatty (2000) argues against the commonplace "Cartesian notion of emotion as a polar opposite to cognition" (Beatty, 2000: 25) and asserts that there are emotional underpinnings to many recommended leadership behaviours. As Crawford (2007b) notes: schools themselves are emotional places; the core of school work lies in relationships; there is an affective side to leadership; and emotion is inherent to the practice of leadership not separate from it (Crawford, 2007a). The practice of schooling requires emotional activity which is used productively (James and Jones, 2008; Dale and James, 2015), and Blackmore

(2010) emphasises that leadership is about the 'desire to make a difference.' However, Blackmore also asserts that leadership is equally about "fear of failure, pain, exhaustion…and guilt associated with the ethical dilemmas that leaders confront on a daily basis" (Blackmore, 2010: 642): emotional activities. If these emotions are inherent in the practice of leadership itself, the separation from it will create an emotional response. The school principal is the personification of the school and feels responsible for the whole organisation, whilst "losing a principal position means leaving behind people with whom one shares values, passions and experiences" (Thomson, 2004: 46).

Early educational leadership research focused on school principal career narratives (Ribbins, 1997; Gronn, 1999) and phases of school leadership were developed (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Day and Bakioglu, 1996). Whilst the number and nomenclature of the stages differed, nonetheless the assertion was that all principals pass through them. The final stage described disenchantment or 'moving on'. Earley and Weindling (2007) return to these concepts and explore whether periods of fixed-term contracts for principals would assist in professional and organization renewal.

This philosophical theory of career stages fails to address the realities of the principalship in twenty-first century neo-liberal times, however. Significant changes in the educational landscape comprise: increasing numbers and range of employers varying types of principal role (Executive Principal, Head of School); increasing principal turnover; and what Thomson (2009) refers to as 'new accountabilities'. Thomson outlines the context of new accountability systems in inspection regimes (for example, Ofsted in England and cyclical school reviews in Australia) and changes within the inspection framework that creates longer periods of stress. On-going stressful key perfomance indicators, such as

student performance in public examinations, have contributed to the prevailing new climate of likely job loss in the face of poor indicators (Gibson, 2016); a common climate for principals in schools around the globe. The reality is that "while many heads grit their teeth and cope with the new accountabilities, some chose to go, and some go because they have no choice but to do so" (Thomson, 2009: 122). It is within this context that this study is set.

Thomson's work appears to be the only other academic work similar to the data collected in this study, although it involves only two participants, both from England. One is a principal who had retired sick, but also because the system had increasingly-less autonomy, with national government interventions 'straight-jacketing' teaching, and mounting accountability pressures, national curriuculm, testing at different ages and the responsibility for large financial budgets. The workload resulted in mental and physical ill-health for the headteacher. Thomson's empirical singular case is similar to the work in this study and refers to a primary school headteacher who becomes so dissolusioned with headship that she resigns. She describes the regular scrutiny from external agencies for her to meet externally-set targets, believing that there is "more stick than carrot" (Thomson, 2009: 127) and that she spends more time documenting what is happening than actually doing things to improve the learning within the school. She feels she is forced to do things that are counter-productive. It appears as though aspirant principals in England, as elsewhere, have little formal preparation for this aspect of the role (Robbins, 2013; Steward, 2014).

In summary, attachment theory provides a theoretical basis for the personal effects of involuntary occupation dissolution; the grieving effects are akin to bereavement. There

is little research on school principal involuntary job dissolution and seemingly none that relates to attachment and grief theory. These effects on individuals are more marked when the job role is part of their self-concept, where the work-related identity is intertwined with the personal self-identity: a role such as that of a school principal.

Methodology

This multiple case study (Stake, 2013) involved ten participants - four in England and six in Australia – who were former school principals and had undergone involuntary job dissolution. The majority of those from England had experienced job loss more recently than those from Australia (see Table 1).

The research question was a singular overarching one regarding how involuntary job loss affected former principals and consequently how it may relate to the established literature on job loss. Face-to-face, hour-long, semi-structured interviews were held (apart from one case where the interview was undertaken via an online telecommunications video call, due to physical distance, and was suggested by the participant). The same semi-structured questions were used with each participant, but researchers encouraged elaboration on areas of significance. Conversations in this qualitative study were therefore highly individualised. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and emergent themes analysed (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Table 1 here

Unique case sampling (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2013) was adopted, with snowballing in order to increase size (Given, 2008), and interviews were conducted in 2016 and 2017. There were significant difficulties in gaining the sample: many principals, as part of their job-dissolution, sign severance agreements with their employer including

confidentiality statements specifically precluding them speaking about their former employer (sometimes referred to as Compromise Agreements). Although wishing to participate in the research, some were fearful of consequences and the protection of anonymity was a key ethical feature. One participant summarised this by stating that his former employer was "particularly litigious". The sample appears diverse due to the difficulties in obtaining participants, the authors are unaware of any other research that has gained this size sample, albeit small, in this area. This diversity also brings a richness to the study. None of the participants 'advertised' that they were former principals due to involuntary loss; on the contrary, they deliberately masked the reason for changing role or career paths within their professional lives. This is possibly due to the embarrassment they felt at such loss. However, this made finding potential participants difficult. There was no clearly identifiable population from which a systematic sample could be derived.

The difficulties of access were not restricted to enlisting participants but also in accessing the participants' knowledge. Both authors utilised the fact that they had held senior positions in schools and appreciated the demands of such roles. This disclosure brought an element of association between interviewer and interviewee, allowing the participants to feel that they can openly give information to an understanding audience (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

The researchers had several conversations with each participant prior and post interview. These conversations included informal, face-to-face meetings, telecommunications conversations and emails. These communications were designed to increase trust and rapport and provided information such as interview questions in advance (Ostrander, 1993). It would not be possible to elicit genuine participant information in these

situations without this prior relationship-building exercise; a one-hour interview is a somewhat brief time to conduct such sensitive discussions so the authors perceive the interview as part of a longer process.

Interviewers need to be knowledgeable about the role and situation of their interviewees particularly in the situation of elite interviewees (Harvey, 2011). Whilst some of the participants no longer occupied an elite position, there are elements of such research methodology that were adhered to. It was important therefore that the interviewers indicated wide-ranging knowledge about the participants' role in order to develop rapport. Whilst these were not co-constructed ethnographic knowledge productions in the same way as Ellis and Berger (2003) describe, nonetheless there were elements of 'conversation' during the interviews.

Ethical approval was sought and gained from both a British and an Australian University. There were significant ethical issues surrounding the nature of the subject matter in that the actual study and act of interviewing could create further harm for the participants. Researchers were, therefore, respectful of the situation and participants' potential grief, which restricted direct questions that could create emotional consequences and relived experiences: these, in turn, could exacerbate symptoms of grief. However, the authors were keen to explore appropriately the nature of each participant's experience, through probes and prompts. Conversations and emails prior to the interview, reassured participants, built rapport and developed a sense of trust regarding subsequent data use. The approach was not dissimilar to that of Gabriel et al. (2013), as one whereby the researcher is a sympathetic audience, but, at the same time, encourages participants to reflect on their situation. Direct questions are avoided due to the potential for arousing

defensive attitudes. Whilst the researchers were empathic towards the participants, they also acknowledged Rubin and Rubin's (2012) assertion that qualitative interviewers can be too empathetic, as it may create a situation where researchers fail to gain the larger picture. The researchers ensured that they posed questions that required the participants to be critically reflective of themselves and the situations they were involved in. Like Gabriel et al. (2013), the term 'journey' was particularly fruitful in eliciting the narrative. By these means, deeply unsettling events could be viewed as part of a longer story: a journey. Post-interview discussions were crucial to minimise potential distress, and information on counselling support services was offered. However, participants often revealed that the process was cathartic for them. Triangulation of other views was not sought (for example, from employers) as the focus of the research is not the breakdown of the employer/ employee relationship nor evaluating events, but rather it is on the principals' experience and the effects upon them.

The Cases

The backgrounds of the sample and reasons for job dissolution are varied. None of the sample were dismissed by their employer, but instead, negotiated removal often took place with a 'voluntary' resignation which frequently involved a financial settlement. The names of the participants have been fictionalised to protect anonymity although gender is preserved.

Sample from England:

All participants were aged in their 40s and had no other employment apart from school teaching, with each school being state-funded.

Peter. Peter was a principal of an academy school in a rural area of England. His job-loss occurred when the school was brokered into being with another Multiple Academy Trust. His school was involved in a 'take-over' from a new employer; one with which he felt he did not share the same values.

Sarah. Sarah was an interim principal of an academy school in a city in England. She was the permanent vice-principal but became interim principal when the vacancy occurred due to the principal leaving. She was unsuccessful in gaining the permanent post and felt she had to resign due to a breakdown of her working relationship with her employers.

Mary. Mary was a principal in a faith-based primary school. She was vice-principal and acting principal then appointed principal. The school was regard as a high quality, catholic school in an urban setting. Mary's case focuses around the issues following a poor inspection report by the national inspection service, Ofsted.

Alan. Alan was the principal of a secondary school for six years. The school became a sponsored academy within a Multiple Academy Trust and the sponsors were clear that they wanted to take the school in a different direction; Alan did not share the new vision, resulting in conflict.

Sample from Australia:

These participants were in the age range of 40 – mid-60s and they had worked in a range of systems and schools. Several had long careers in educational leadership prior to their most recent post.

Stella. Until six months prior, Stella believed that her leadership of an independent P-12 school was progressing well. But, then a combination of ex-staff and parent issues led to

the school council instigating a school inquiry which led to the council's withdrawal of their support of her.

Brock. Brock's position as principal of a new independent P-12 school was short-lived, because he believed the school governing body had a style and approach to educational provision contrary to his own, and he resigned on principle, feeling that he had no alternative.

David. David had worked for the state education system for 30 years, successfully gaining his first principalship at an early age and subsequently going on to lead large complex schools in a variety of locations. He moved into more senior positions at regional level, until he was forced out, based on what he perceived to be political maneuvering at a senior level within the system

Isaac. Isaac was successful as the principal of a new P-12 independent school, until there were changes in school board composition. Isaac said he continues to be perplexed as to the real reasons why he was compelled to resign, as these were never made clear to him.

Jake. Jake's first principalship entailed leading a school which had serious financial problems not disclosed to him on appointment. In addition to the immediate essential redundancies, there were undermining elements in the school community, which resulted in the Board's audit of the school, which then lead to his downfall.

Martine. Martine had served as principal of several primary and P-12 schools, going wherever the state education department had required her services. Her removal from the primary school where she had been for two years, was based on her superiors' conflicts of interest, and their failure to maintain equitable selection procedures and ethical professional practices.

Findings and Discussion

Participants were interviewed with the same semi-structured questions but encouraged to elaborate on significant areas. Consequently, conversations were highly individualised, and strong feelings were demonstrated consistently through: expressions of anger; crying; and participants talking for an extended time, sometimes up to 30 minutes, with no intervention. These participants articulated poignant memories from events, which, in some cases, happened many years prior.

Congruence of themes

Specific themes were anticipated to emerge: self-image; self-esteem; self-efficacy; job motivation (initial and continual); task perception; and future perspectives. It was significant that the two samples reflected highly-congruent themes: and it was noted that, across the various systems and phases of learning in which the principals worked, there emerged equally congruent themes.

Subsequently, findings were grouped within four themes and sub-themes to provide clarification of principals' issues surrounding job loss. Firstly, principals were found unilaterally to have strong prior role-efficacy – a disposition which influences their reactions to job loss along with a sub theme of attachment to their institution. Secondly, these personal reactions provide insights into the deep impact felt, with sub themes of emotions, powerlessness and a loss of self-esteem. Thirdly, there were broader community implications, the media, parental disaffection and economic considerations, emerged as

significant sub themes. Lastly the long-term personal effects of health and sense of grief depict what future principals may need to deal with.

Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Prior role-efficacy

Participants talked passionately about their original motivations to teach and then to lead a school. They had a strong sense of belonging to a community, feelings of pride regarding efforts made in the role and were pleased with achievements made possible during their tenure. In several cases, recent performance appraisals revealed high levels of performance for example Stella commented that, "up to 6 months before I resigned, I was regarded as extremely successful: the last appraisal was excellent, with everything going well" and David suggested that, "up until this time I had been extremely successful in everything I did as a leader". Most felt relatively secure, enjoyed governance and community support, were content to continue their hard work because they felt 'attached' to their community, and were committed to a role with purpose and opportunities to make a difference to students and staff.

Attachment

Participants' comments reflect aspects of Attachment Theory (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1980) and indicate that, prior to job loss, the principals' attachment to their community and the institution itself, encouraged them to feel secure in their role. This phenomenon may be "particularly relevant for understanding the dissolution of this relationship" (Albert et al 2014: 96). Participants consistently used descriptors such as "proud" and "successful"

to elucidate their role-efficacy during this period. This work placed attachment (Scrima et al., 2017) then creates difficulty in accepting the job dissolution.

Theme 2: Personal reaction

Emotions

The emotional anguish felt through job loss was evident in many participants whose emotions ranged from anger, to bitterness, to reluctant resignation, to extreme sadness about what was unfolding within the community to which they had felt so 'attached'. Furthermore, emotions were still re-called years after the event, and the emotional potency remained strong regardless of time passed since job loss. The participants used emotional language when describing the point of job dissolution for example Brock says he was "angry", Stella was "shocked", whilst Martine described herself as being so "deeply hurt". The highly personal reaction to job dissolution was apparent when Isaac stated, "I reflected on work I had done and sacrifices I had made – and my family had made – for that place – all for the betterment of the school. And then, they were just turning around and kicking me in the teeth". This analogy to personal violence from their employer was also the case for Alan who felt that, "I wanted to transform people's lives through education and that was stolen from me. I had been violated. This was an act of professional violence against me… I was devastated". The emotional response was targeted at their employer with the job dissolution perceived as highly personal.

Powerlessness

In contrast to feelings of powerfulness and the high degree of autonomy these principals had experienced before they lost their jobs, there was now a pervading sense of powerlessness. David exemplifies this when he says that he "felt powerless – I had been in control throughout my career. Perhaps naively, I thought I had demonstrated I could do the job and I would be right". References were made to the chair of governors being controlling (Brock) and Alan said he "felt emasculated. It was very traumatic…tearful. Lonely moments". On occasion, there was a recognition of the harsh reality of the situation and the power balance, Peter became aware that there was little reason for discussion with his employer as he had "no power" and that his primary concern was financial as he "quickly realised that the only discussion I was going to have with my employer was about severance pay". These emotional and powerless responses are very similar to Gabriel et al.'s (2013) work on executive job dissolution.

Loss of self-esteem

Underlying the raw emotions and feelings of powerlessness, there was significant impact on participants' self-esteem, in alignment with McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) who found connections in multiple studies between decreased well-being and self-esteem following job loss. In both England and Australia, a school principal role is held in high social esteem.

The loss of self-esteem is not only on a personal level but also the participants' perception of their social standing, particularly with loved ones. David stated that he "had been a high performer all his life" whilst Alan and Stella felt personal shame, both independently referring to believing that they "felt like some sort of criminal". This

personal loss of self-esteem has had repercussions on subsequent self-belief in work for Alan and Jake who refer to feelings of doubt surrounding capability during subsequent employment. The loss of self-esteem was particularly pertinent for the participants' relationships with their family. Peter mentions that he did not need to explain to his daughters, as he was "thankful" that they were "too young to understand", but for Alan his children's perception of him was a particular concern when he said, "how did my kids see me? They would tell friends their dad is a headteacher… now they are going to be saying he's unemployed". For Mary the difficulty was informing her mother, who she felt would be very disappointed, "mum was really proud of having a headteacher as a daughter. I found great difficulty telling her I was resigning. She didn't want me to leave the job. My grandmother, mum's mum, had to tell my mum". Mary had to involve the only person she felt could explain the loss to her mother; her mother's mother.

Other participants felt the impact of sudden job loss but rationalised the situation contextually by identifying misaligned values and ethics, such as Brock reflecting that he was "proud for sticking to [his] values and making the right call". By way of contrast, Isaac reacted angrily, saying, "Oh, yes, I will get the b…..ds!" but believed he experienced less detrimental effect on his self-esteem because he gained employment relatively quickly.

The participants here have a primary relational self that includes their work-related identity, they will describe themselves as a school principal (as opposed to what work they do); the job is a self-defining role. For Papa and Maitoza (2013) such scenarios may produce prolonged grief following job dissolution.

Theme 3: Broader community implications

Parental/ community disaffection

Each participant faced a unique scenario leading to job loss with varying degrees of parental or community disaffection. In some cases, parents were instigators of heated public debate about school issues, which led to eventual job loss, and in other cases the catalyst was the result of a school inspection, which, in England, has become one of the new accountabilities identified by Thomson (2009). Other scenarios involved the escalation of parental concerns when the principal, who had been so 'attached' to their school community, was not going to be 'attached' for much longer. The de-stabilising effect that this had on the wider stake-holder groups of the school, was regarded as another challenge to be dealt with.

These challenges for some of our sample were very significant, Stella felt that a former member of staff "managed to whip up support of influential parents against me", whilst Martine was required to face difficult, "dreadful…personal" questions from parents in a public forum and felt she had to respond, "I am not going to answer that here". Mary's job loss, stimulated by a poor school inspection report, was accelerated by parental action. She describes the situation as one of high emotions:

> What I wasn't expecting was the backlash from the parents…. It was horrendous. The parents' meeting then became the problem. There was a band of parents that got together and apparently had meeting after meeting outside of the school to generate the hatred against me. Then the emails started to come. The emails…the hatred … the hatred …inside them…. Emails saying: "You're unfit to be a headteacher;" "You've got to leave." Pages and pages of demands. My husband received emails and my brother. Another family member was stopped in the street by parents saying, "She's not doing a good enough job." The school parents were split. It was either this side or that with no in-betweens. Parents were either very supportive or full of hatred. (Mary).

For Mary this was difficult as she felt the inspection report was inaccurate and was in reference to her predecessor. As a faith based school though this situation was problematic, the principal's role is at the centre of the faith community, for example attending weekly church with the parents.

Poor press coverage

As with parents, the wider community has a vested interest in knowing what is occurring in their local schools, and local media provides stories of 'public interest'. The added pressure associated with job loss press coverage was reported as being particularly difficult to deal with. In our sample both Mary and Stella faced unsatisfactory personal press coverage. Stella felt the public nature of her departure difficult to deal with, the local paper "loved scandal" and she felt "publically humiliated". Modern web based media may well bring further problems that would not occur previously, for example Mary was aware that a photograph of her on the school web site had been copied to accompany an article in the local newspaper. Both participants were aware that their cases were still available on the internet and the researchers could locate them, "just google my name …its still there" Mary advised. For Mary this also meant that it was difficult to try to resurrect a career. In her new role as an Assistant Principal, a parent said to her, "What are you doing here? You're the one who ruined [name of school] aren't you? You have no right to teach my child." Mary felt she needed to professionally confront such views with the support of the principal. The issue of media coverage may become larger for principals as new technologies allow greater dispersal of (sometimes-inaccurate) information.

These themes involved in principal job loss and community disaffection are also noted by Thomson (2004; 2009) in her case studies involving the stresses of principalship along with job dissolution.

Financial concerns

When facing sudden job loss, concerns regarding associated income reduction are understandable, especially if it happens early in a career still being established, or with high levels of personal or family commitment. However, in this research, financial concerns, although important, were still over-shadowed by psychological and professional career concerns, a feeling of abandonment (Albert et al., 2015). Predictably, the more recent the job loss occurred, the more likely the participant was to reflect on the damaging effect of loss of income, particularly if they had not yet secured another form of employment. Isaac described the financial loss as "the least of my worries", though Peter noted he felt "too young to retire and have to pay the bills". Alan's solution to pay loss was understandable; he returned to classroom teaching. Unfortunately for him, this only caused further distress noting, "all my status gone…I felt terrible about myself … I am divorced and have a dependent child, but I cannot pay child maintenance because I'm not earning. I do not feel like a good father...I cannot take my child on trips etc." The resulting financial loss had ramifications for his self-esteem and feelings of parental capabilities.

Theme 4: Long-term personal effects:

Health issues

All participants reported some health issues relating to themselves and their spouse, along with participants' desire to remain, or become, physically fit. Health and wellbeing issues ranged from anxiety and depression (Martine), to suicide ideation (David & Peter),

to cardiac problems (David), to social withdrawal (Martine). Mary, Sarah and Stella all found counselling helpful. Peter and David were both prescribed antidepressants. Alan underwent significant weight loss, and Mary had significant health issues. A minority of participants indicated that the time made available to them when they had exited the school, enabled them to recover physically. For Mary the health issues were large and it is of interest that during the interview she recalls past events in the present tense, indicating a strong vivid event:

> I'm getting ill, I'm covered from head to foot in spots, absolutely covered. My hair is coming out in large amounts. I lost a quarter of my hair in the end. I lost two stone in weight I went from 9 to 7 stone (57-44kg). My husband called Father (Catholic Priest). Father told me not to go to work but to see my doctor and get signed off...by this stage I could not physically walk. I stayed in bed for two weeks, but I don't remember any of it. (Mary).

Health issues are reported significantly in the literature on job loss and our results concur with other work in this field (Jackson and Warr, 1984; Rásky, Stronegger, and Freidl, 1996; McKee-Ryan and Kinicki, 2002; Thomson et al., 2003; Thomson 2004; 2009).

Sense of grief

Albert et al. (2014) compared feelings of grief and abandonment experienced after job loss with those felt after the loss of a critical relationship in one's life. In this study, the length of time since job loss ranged from a few months to 14 years. In keeping with the findings of Archer and Rhodes (1993), the expressions of grief and the impact that this has had on the participants was found to be unrelated to this length of time. People affected by

grief through an event such as job loss may never be the same again (Vickers, 2009). Martine said directly, "I am not the same person".

Often participants directly referred to grief in their interviews and the language of loss and even bereavement. David felt a sense of "loss" believing he recovered since physically moving to another part of Australia and "divorcing myself from (the organisation)". Both Alan and Peter specifically refer to grief, "There is a grief process here…I think this is part of the grief. I had some very, very dark moments. It's like when a marriage breaks up, all you can think about are the things that you think you did wrong or could have done better" (Peter) and Alan saying, "definitely feels like bereavement, a significant loss. I didn't realise there was another member of our family; it was my job. I've lost something that I loved. I can't get that back." Triggers can also bring feelings of grief many years later, "every now and again I get days where it just comes back to me and smacks me on the back of the head" (Peter) and Stella referred to ongoing support she still required, "something happened earlier on this year, the events were 5 years ago, but it reignited my feelings and I said to my husband that I think I need to seek out some counselling again because I know I am not over this yet".

Time not as a healer

This study is not a longitudinal study with milestone reporting, but rather a series of vignettes along different career journey paths. The focus of the article is also the implications of involuntary occupational dissolution for school principals not career journeys. However, this study has data recorded on the effects of the job loss at different time intervals from the events, which is useful to explore. Table I shows the length of time after the loss that the interview took place; it varies from one month to fourteen years with

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a range in-between. The data here, albeit from a small sample, suggests that time is not a healer, which is similar to Archer and Rhodes' (1993) and Bell and Taylor's (2011) findings. Despite career rebuilds, those participants with events happening years previously were still angry and emotional over the job loss; their response in interviews appeared as strong as those who had recent events, for example Stella, some five years after the event, became tearful during the interview and fourteen years afterwards, Jake's disclosure of self-doubt.

The common themes are striking, given the range of schools and from two countries. However, differences in the responses were also apparent. The financial concerns of job loss differed; some participants displayed a sense of bewilderment and lack of focus for future career development whilst others were clear from the onset and some participants felt the need for medical services as a means of support.

Thematic relevance

These findings, within an educational leadership context, align with those found in the literature on the effects of involuntary job loss in a range of other settings. All four of McKee-Ryan and Kinicki's (2002) consequential dimensions were found in our sample. To a greater or lesser extent all our participants had experiences of economic, social, psychological and physical health impacts. There are high parallels with the work of Gabriel et al. (2013) whose study focused around job loss of managers and professionals. They reported that their participants recalled a sense of considerable trauma and disorientation upon first losing their job, still had clear recollections of the events some time later and referred to being exiled from the world of the corporates, in the same way that our sample feel removed from the world of principalship. Like Gabriel's professionals,

the loss of self-esteem and image was indicated by all our participants; the post they held as a school principal has significant social standing in both countries.

All our participants had 'workplace attachment' (Scrima et al., 2017). Employment not only brings income but security, regulation, structure, status and a purpose to living (Vickers, 2009). The institution becomes a significant other in Bowlby's terms, and when the bond is broken and there is no longer attachment, then the ex-employee undergoes grief. These former principals underwent a feeling of abandonment (Albert et al., 2015). These feelings are stronger depending upon the degree of work-role centrality and the extent to which work provides meaning to one's life. When the work-related identity and self-identity are closely aligned, then the removal of work creates greater loss. Peter, demonstrates that he is unsure of who he has become, when he says, "I must stop calling myself an ex-headteacher".

Blackmore's (2010) assertion that leadership is about the emotional activities of pain and guilt rings true here. All participants found the post, and in particular the dissolution of it, extremely painful. The fieldnotes from interviews indicate nonverbal information where the former principals shook their heads, hit the desk and raised their voices in recollection of the emotions they went through during interviews. There was often deep-seated anger aimed at themselves and others, anger at regretting decisions and anger at parents, other staff and their former employers.

Significantly, the manner of departure is important in dealing with the level of grief experienced. It is common practice that when principals leave a school in UK or in Australia, there are celebrations of their achievements and farewells. This happens at assemblies with children and parents, and staff parties. These events were not allowed for

some of our sample; their employers prohibited them. This has caused further anxiety and has not allowed the principals to deal with their grief . In Peter's case he continued working for several months knowing he was leaving, but was prohibited from sharing this with colleagues. Similarly, Alan and Stella felt very strongly about their departures. The following three quotes are important to give in full as they summarise the feelings and anxieties about departure:

> It was very emotional, like a break up (of a relationship) really... I was there at the end of term, I knew I was leaving but no one else did. The Chair of Governors told the staff on the first day of the next term… The worst thing about the whole process was that I was not allowed to say goodbye. (Peter).

> To add insult to injury, in education when someone suddenly disappears, the worst is thought. Has something untoward happened…with a child for example? …When I offered my resignation, it was immediately accepted. I requested to work for the next few months to bring stability but that was not accepted...I wanted to go and do the talk I was due to do with the children, that was not allowed either. I had to collect my personal belongings from my office, not then but at a later time, with just the business manager there. It felt like I had done something wrong, I was a criminal and felt guilty…Even the sight of me could not be tolerated in that building…When a headteacher goes, it's a big thing in schools. There's special assemblies. The press come in, there's photographs. Your spouse comes into school when they do not normally. A big, big thing. A celebration. People were told not to have any communication with me. I was not allowed to communicate with them. (Alan).

> There was no official farewell to students or staff. When I left my previous school where I had been foundation principal, there was a big celebration of what I had achieved…which was amazing. Not to have any public acknowledgment is a very strange thing. (Stella).

A negotiated arrangement, which involved a farewell event and subsequent visits to the school, has been beneficial for some. Mary made a particular point of ensuring she had her a "great big leaving party" as part of her severance agreement, to which other local

headteachers came, and this "really helped". Furthermore, Mary has been invited back to the school as an ex-headteacher for events such as speech days and prize-giving events.

Such events can be regarded as types of essential rituals as is proposed by continuing bonds theory and the purpose of them can be compared to that of funerals, graves and photographs of lost ones. Those principals who are denied attendance at farewell events, could well be stuck in what Bell and Taylor (2011) refer to as 'destructive grieving' rather than 'constructive grieving', which then causes health and wellbeing issues (Bell and Taylor, 2011: 4). 'Memorialsation' is suggested as being helpful in the grieving process (Bell and Taylor, 2011: 7) but in these cases in this study, this has not been possible.

These points really help to explain why the effects on principals confronting this situation seem to be so deep and long-lasting. They have often not 'recovered' or 'found a solution to' their situation within the 24-month period assigned to the stages of grieving theory.

Conclusion

The data presented here agrees with literature regarding the similarities of effects of job loss and loss of a significant personal relationship (Albert et al., 2014; Papa and Maitoza, 2013). The role of a school principal involves a strong 'attachment' to the school (Bowlby, 1969, 1973 and 1980) which results in significant, wide-ranging, immediate personal and professional effects, and long-lasting persistent grief when separation occurs. Additionally, the fact that some principals were appointed on fixed-term contracts (as in the case of Australia, where three-to-five-year contracts are common) made little difference to their attachment to the school and the sense of loss in losing their post. The findings confirm that the effects of job loss were significant for all participants. The vastly different

lengths of time since the person's job loss did not seem to reduce the vividness of the trauma experienced, with powerful memories still being recalled up to fourteen years later. The authors posit that school principals may have greater attachment to their occupation than those in many other jobs, and this may lead to more profound personal and professional impacts being experienced when the role and their 'attachment' to it are suddenly cut short.

These conclusions should not be surprising: in both England and Australia, the language of the discourse surrounding school principalship is often the language of familial bonding: 'John's' or 'Jane's' school; family of schools; school development; and 'your' school. It is the language of love: a love relationship. Principals will frequently refer to 'my' school; it is as though the school is a child or a significant other to the leader, so why should (enforced) separation not follow attachment theory and grief? In both countries, the 'sales pitch' of principalship recruitment uses such language; the language of emotion and love.

The manner of departure was significant for the participants and is an area that employers may wish to address. The departure was often sudden and almost exclusively secretive. This was the case even when principals stayed in post for several months. The prohibition on principals to be able to 'say goodbye' brought feelings of shame. The Continuing Bonds theory of attachment applied to job loss (Bell and Taylor, 2011) is useful here in that it indicates a continuation of connection with the former employment to be a type of 'memorialisation' for former staff, in the same way as photographs and gravestones help with grief of deceased loved ones.

There are issues here surrounding Leadership Preparation and Development. Aspirant leaders and those in post will need to appreciate the potential fall and prepare for it; such Leadership Preparation and Development courses need to address these issues. Those who manage principals and specifically deal with occupation dissolution, may also need to appreciate the significance of job loss to a school principal, which will be different to other job losses.

The importance of these findings becomes greater when one considers that teachers are becoming principals younger (Lynch and Worth, 2017) and simultaneously their pensionable age is increasing. Some of the participants in this study, therefore, have a further 20 years of work life. There is a longer phase of operational principalship compared to studies undertaken previously (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Day and Bakioglu, 1996), the educational landscape has changed and such theories ought to be revisited. There may be a period, for example, of *Post Leadership.* Involuntary occupation dissolution, and its consequential harm, may become part of the new landscape of principalship.

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