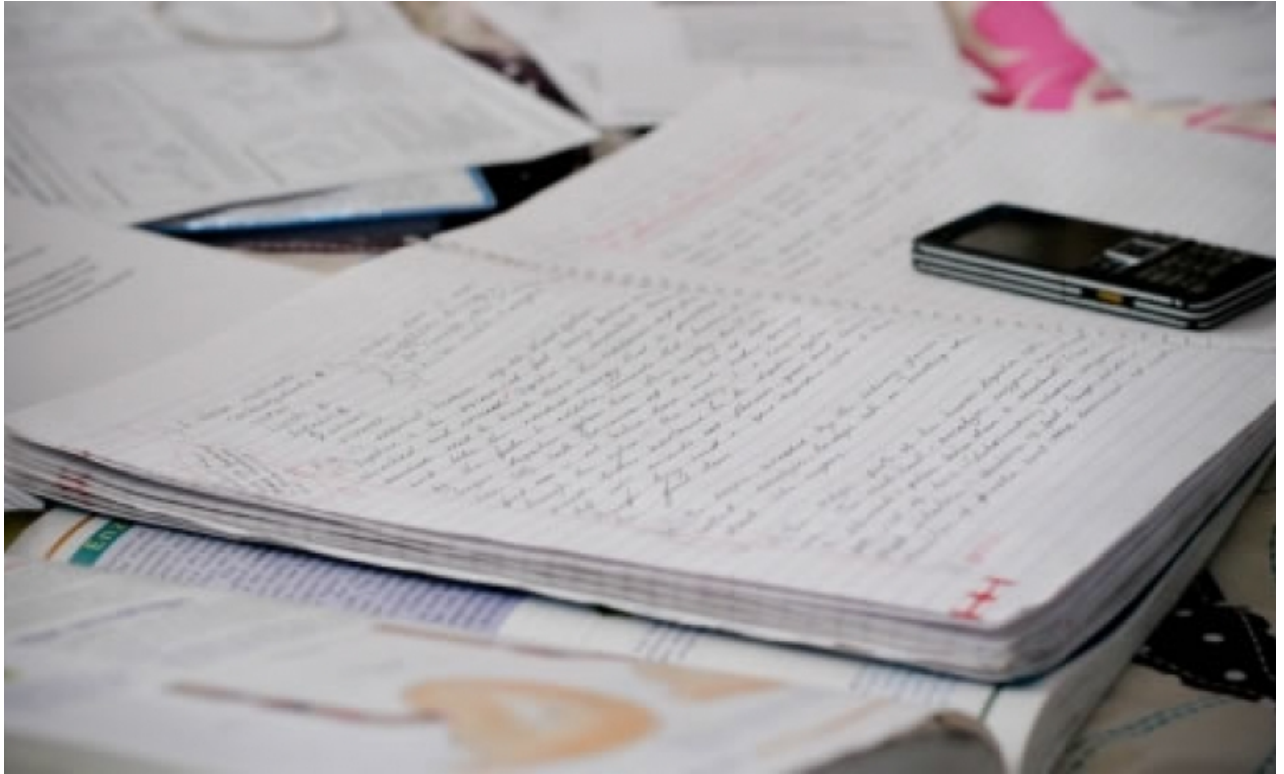


## Resilient leaders: resilient sector



04/26/2017 - 16:38



Third sector leaders daily operate in an environment of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity), according to ACOSVO's CEO.

### Pat Armstrong

Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Wed, 04/26/2017 - 16:17

**Description:**

Chief Executive of [ACOSVO](#).

**Vertical photo:**



Square photo:



Twitter: [@patacosvo](https://twitter.com/patacosvo)



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A recent UK report from the Lords Select Committee described charity leadership as being like "juggling on a unicycle" - balancing a huge range of tasks and skills while simultaneously facing unrealistically high expectations. Also the stress of knowing if one ball drops, that will be the one that is noticed, not the many others that you are still successfully managing to juggle.

Sit this alongside what is now being described as operating in an environment of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity), together with recent studies which have shown in times of austerity, the third sector buffers the impact on frontline provision by managing with less staff and less money but trying to provide the same level of service- all indicating the potential for burnout in our third sector leaders.

So what do we, as those third sector leaders do to boost our resilience, make sure we are up to the challenge, look after ourselves and do the best for our staff, our organisations and our client groups. We are often very good at making sure our staff and clients are well looked after, but I think sometimes we forget to think about our own "refuelling" and risk running on empty.

Firstly, having time to work on the business rather than in the business – so easy to keep firefighting rather than step back and see the bigger picture and look for creative ideas and solutions. Sometimes that walk on the beach or foray into the hills is hugely justified by the creative head space it allows.

At [ACOSVO](#), we recognise that peer support and good practice sharing are essential support mechanisms – and that safe space and strong networks are needed to facilitate it – but do we really have to be sitting round a table to do this? We are trialling an Active Leadership programme, offering walks, cycles, outdoors spaces, activity taster sessions and a residential to explore whether there are new ways to build resilience and strong leadership.

We also know we have to be creative, brave enough to fail fast, take measured risks – and keep all those balls in the air. An important part of having the right environment to do this is the relationship between the CEO and the board. Usually the main relationship between exec and non-exec is through the chair. Building a strong, trusting, open relationship is essential to developing that platform for thinking about the appetite for risk, finding creative solutions and sticking to the core ethos, values and mission of the organisation.

Another area we have started to look at is in relation to succession planning. A study in the States showed that a large percentage of current third sector CEO's are planning to leave or retire in the next 5 years. I would guess that the situation is not too different in the UK. How do we ensure a good transition? Often one of the biggest risks to an organisation is to lose a key figure without a plan in place. Do we have the next generation of leaders ready to step into the roles? And what about the leaders moving on? How can we help them stay connected to their networks, not lose their knowledge and expertise from the sector and help them transition to the next stage of life.

When hearing the term VUCA for the first time, my immediate reaction was that this is what we all deal with in a "normal" day at the office in our sector. We are used to working in an ever-changing world, we just have to take the time to look after ourselves a little better to make sure we are up to the challenge and ready to face the next day with as much energy and enthusiasm as the last.

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