# Building and sustaining workforce resilience

A resilient workforce is a productive, profitable and content workforce

Resilience is the term used to describe how effectively we, (an individual), bounce back to our base line norms after experiencing adverse events at home and at work. Resilience is also a term that is used to describe someone who has a high level of energy and determination, to drive through ideas and actions in the face of challenges. Resilience is about personal strength and robustness as well as physical and mental stability.

Resilience is typically idiosyncratic. One person's resilience against seeing spiders in the bath can be another person's terrifying ordeal; one is not affected by spiders whilst the other may suffer shock, anxiety and stress for some time after the event. Resilience is, therefore, a form of de-sensitisation or reducing our levels of sensitivity to adverse events and providing us with the skills, knowledge and experience to overcome difficult experiences.

By being resilient to various diversions at work, employers see an increase in productivity and efficiency. Understanding the degree of resilience an individual has is a great starting point to building and sustaining the capacity to be resilient. Resilience assessments can be undertaken in order to gain a benchmark.

Assessments usually look at values, beliefs, attitudes and leadership qualities. Achieving high levels of resilience at work makes a significant contribution to the reduction of sickness absence, staff turnover and the high costs that these incur.
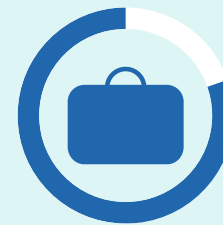
Of those surveyed, **80% of people** stated that job reorganisation or job insecurity contributes to work-related stress[1]

Around **a third of all people** with a mental health problem have sought no professional help at all[2]

Women between the ages of 16 and 24 are **almost three times as likely** (at 26%) to experience a common **mental health problem** as their male contemporaries[3]

Sources
(1) www.essentialskillz.com
(2) Research Foundation for MH/2015/6
(3) Mental Health Foundation/2016

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Resilience and COVID -19

We cannot talk about building and sustaining a resilient workforce without mentioning the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has demonstrated the need for all organisations and their employees to be able to weather major, unforeseen disruption.

Being able to adapt and adjust to changing situations in quick succession can be challenging and emotionally draining. It has been a test of resilience for all.

The lessons learnt from living and working through this pandemic must be used positively to build on both personal and organisational stamina. It is important to enable individuals and teams to reflect on their experiences and encourage discussion of the coping strategies that worked and those that did not work so well.

During the pandemic many individuals found themselves making decisions at a speed, solving multiple logistic and personal issues, being flexible beyond what would ordinarily be reasonable and dealing with uncertainty and the unknown, all of this would have been unthinkable in pre-COVID-19 times.
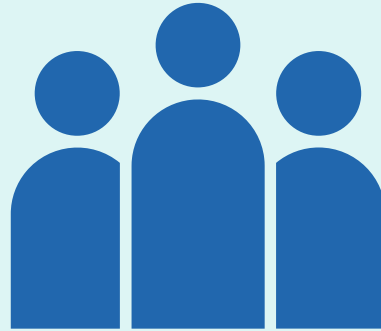
39% of the population say that the pandemic

The ability to draw upon personal strength and resilience has been demonstrated and the recognition and appreciation of this is worth celebrating.

Although for many people, the pandemic has sought to show people they are stronger and are more able than they think, it must be noted this is not the situation for all.

Throughout the pandemic, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published statistics on the extent of mental wellbeing in the UK population. Its most recent findings, from a survey carried out between 26th-30th August 2020, among adults aged 16 and over, show that a minority of people (39% of the population) say that the pandemic has (negatively) affected their wellbeing through, for example, boredom, loneliness, anxiety or stress.

People with a pre-existing mental health problem were much more likely than the overall population to report not coping well.

When considering building and sustaining resilience it is not a 'one size fits all' approach. The pandemic has illustrated that those with mental health problems may, not surprisingly, need more proactive support than others. Individuals and employers have a responsibility to take the lessons of the pandemic to reconsider support mechanisms and build on resources.

Why build corporate resilience?

Resilience at the corporate and business level is needed to manage risks – the risks of change, loss of reputation; change in the economic environment; political change; changes in the workforce – all of which might damage the success of the enterprise.

Resilience in the workforce is needed to manage the risks brought about by uncertainty, change, mergers, acquisitions, changed personal and work circumstances, dis-engagement – all of which might make the workforce underperform, and threaten the survival of the enterprise.

Why build personal resilience?

Resilience in individuals is needed to manage risks arising from life events that may include any challenges or threats to health and wellbeing – moving home, bereavement, job changes, fear, uncertainty, redundancy – all of which might result in underperformance, placing at risk the future for the individual.
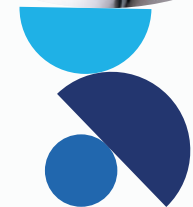
What are the specific features of resilience?

Self confidence This dimension includes an appropriate level of self-confidence and self-belief, together with the ability to rise above challenges, and to see ways through them.

Vision This provides clarity as to what an individual can achieve. It enables the individual to approach challenges as though they are opportunities. There is optimism and energy.

Flexibility and adaptability This enables individuals to respond to changes, and view the world as a constantly changing place. Being able to adapt to change is key to being resilient.

Organisation In the face of chaos, increasing demand and time poverty, this contains the ability to prioritise and focus, leaving aside irrelevant distractions.

Solving problems Resilient people get to grips with solving problems. They have the determination, tolerance and patience required to get to the bottom of problems, and by doing so, provide them with opportunities of resolving problems.

So what helps to sustain resilience?

- Understanding emotions and developing emotional control.

- Proactivity.

- Realistic positivity.

- Developing flexibility and elasticity.

- Finding the root cause of issues and then finding solutions.

- Enhancing and growing self-belief.

- Humour – using all appropriate emotional responses and feeling comfortable in doing so.

- Acceptance of what is inside and outside of your control.

- Seeing the big picture – how is what I am doing relevant, significant and how does it impact on the situation?

- Gaining perspective – viewing the situation from another landscape.

- Creating a support network – support for self and others.

- Knowing how to self-protect – maximising opportunities, minimising threats.

You can find out more information from **www.hse.gov.uk/**

Responsibilities of the employer:

- To nurture a culture of honest and open communication between all employees.

- To ensure job descriptions are well defined, are realistic in content and reasonable.

- To provide training, information and mentoring.

- To ensure equipment and work environment is conducive to the work being undertaken.

- To create provision for employees to communicate with managers, question practice and share ideas and or concerns.

- To develop and implement risk assessment, stress policies.

- To identify, manage and reduce stressors.

- To monitor individual, team and organisational stressors that may impact on workforce wellbeing.

Responsibilities of the employee:

- To take personal responsibility for one's own wellbeing and to increase skills, knowledge and coping strategies to improve resilience.

- To ensure that timely action is taken if it's felt that personal resilience is under threat or pressure – talk to your manager, friends, family and if need be, a GP.

- Developing resilience is an on-going learning event and time and effort is required so invest some time as part of your personal improvement plan.

- Be observant and aware to the needs of others and help someone else to help themselves where appropriate.

- Take control and manage risks, both personal and professional, this will help to improve resilience and stamina and minimise impact should issues arise.

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