

A new approach for developing resilience

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Psychological resilience has been defined in various ways, but most agree that the core concept involves coping with adversity, rebounding and adapting successfully to change or uncertainty. Developing resilience is increasingly important in the workplace. With budget cut backs across all sectors, employees are being pressured to increase their productivity with fewer resources. Since some people cope with this better than others, it is vital for employers to provide their staff with the support they need.

The *i-resilience* profiling tool is one valuable framework employers can use. *i-resilience* gauges the

How **we** see things – our perception of events – is central to our level of resilience. We are not all alike; the different situations in which we find ourselves affect us in different ways. Therefore, as individuals, we can build an awareness of the situations in which we are least resilient and focus our efforts on developing personal resilience there.

As employers, we can understand the workplace situations that challenge people's resilience and do what we can to address them, while providing a positive environment in which resilience can be developed.

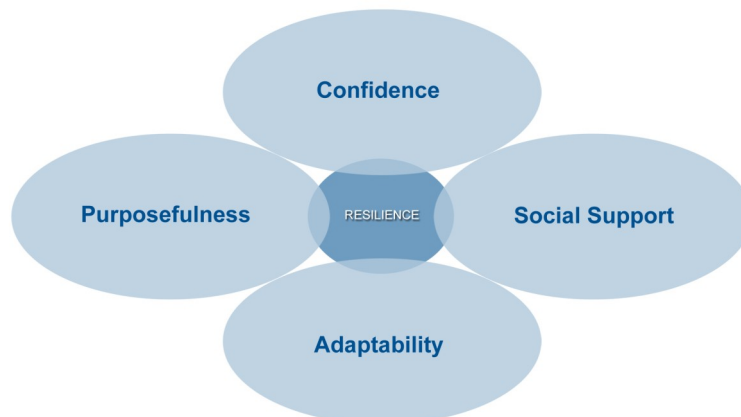
What makes us resilient?

Resilience is multidimensional – partly driven by internal factors which we cannot change, such as our biology and personality, but also by specific skills and

techniques which we can learn. This is good news for individuals and organisations because it means resilience **can** be developed.

The *i-resilience* framework

At Robertson Cooper, we have developed the *i-resilience* model of resilience (shown below), drawn from the latest thinking and research evidence. Each component encompasses various aspects of personality, behaviours and skills. For example, social support includes natural sociability (a personality trait), but also includes coping strategies (behaviours) such as making time to nurture friendships even when work demands are at their highest.



The table below outlines a new model for developing resilience:

Confidence

- Positive emotions fuel resilience to stressful events.
- The experience of negative emotions (e.g. feelings of discouragement or anxiety) are associated with lower levels of resilience.
- Having a strong sense of your self-worth and confidence in your abilities is important for resilience.

Social Support

- Greater levels of social support are associated with more positive outcomes following a wide variety of stressors.
- Social support has been linked to a reduced rate of high-risk behaviours.
- Higher levels of social support foster adaptive coping strategies.

Purposefulness

- Purpose provides people with a foundation that allows them to be more resilient in the face of obstacles, stress and strain.
- Purpose in life is associated with higher levels of happiness and satisfaction and lower rates of depressive symptoms.
- Aspects of personality related to drive and persistence are linked to greater levels of resilience.

Adaptability

- People who are able to think flexibly and reframe events positively are more resilient.
- Those who accept challenging situations tend to be more psychologically resilient than more inflexible thinkers.

How does personality affect our resilience?

i-resilience uses a measure of **personality** to examine these four components. Everyone is different in terms of where they draw their resilience from. For example, some people will cope well with change and be flexible in their thinking, yet not be very confident in their abilities or in interacting with others. Others may be very self-confident, but not have a strong drive or purpose and be uncomfortable with uncertainty.

The other key part of the equation included in *i-resilience* is the **situation** in which people find themselves. Individuals can build their resilience through training programmes, for example, but different situations can also bring quite different challenges.

ASSET – the situational requirements for well-being at work

There are many situations in the workplace that test our resilience and we all respond in different ways. It is important to consider them from two perspectives:

1. How does the person see the situation? Are their perceptions realistic or do they need to reframe them?
2. What can be changed in the situation? Are the workplace factors set up to challenge the person in a positive way, with appropriate support in place?

The ASSET framework identifies **the** six situational requirements which are necessary for employees to achieve and maintain positive well-being at work, and

the role that personality plays. For managers, these are the six critical things that need to be achieved and maintained. Importantly, as they are all about the work situation they are things that can be controlled, at least to some extent. *i-resilience* looks at how an individual's personality is likely to affect their resilience in each of these six situations. Below we look at each in a little more detail:



Informed and equipped

To perform effectively, people need to feel they have the appropriate training, equipment and resources to do the job. It's also important that they feel informed about what is going on and receive appropriate feedback. When these things are missing, some people will thrive but others will struggle. For example, people who are assertive and proactive are more likely to seek out the information and resources they need, rather than relying on others to deal with the situation.



Collaborative relationships

Positive work relationships can promote high levels of engagement and satisfaction. They are also an important source of social support when things get difficult. Our personality has an impact on how we view and interact with others. For example, people who are more comfortable with conflict or more assertive will be more resilient in challenging interpersonal

Resilience in action: different personalities in the same situation

A finance team has just received their results from a well-being audit. The results highlight some issues around working relationships, job security and resources and communication. They are largely in accordance with what the manager expected, considering the major changes which they are facing. There is a large amount of uncertainty due to a lack of communication and the rumour mill is particularly active.

Let's take a look at three members of the team to see how they are coping:

<p>Julie is an accountant within the team and has worked for the organisation for about 25 years.</p> <p>Key aspects of Julie's personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socially confident; comfortable dealing with other people • low need for variety; prefers to stick to tried-and-trusted approaches • dislikes conflict • motivated by specific goals that interest her • very helpful; willing to put herself out to help others 	<p>Edward is an analyst on the finance team.</p> <p>Key aspects of Edward's personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generally quite serious in his approach • cool and formal manner with most people • comfortable standing his ground; can be competitive or stubborn • very confident in his abilities and coping with pressure • low level of personal energy 	<p>Molly is an administrative assistant on the team and has joined relatively recently from a different department.</p> <p>Key aspects of Molly's personality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong results focus • very self-disciplined; always finishes what she starts • flexible in her approach to tasks and changes • generally anxious; worries about things going wrong • quite sceptical of others' intentions
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Is the team member's resilience being challenged and how are they responding?

Julie

With her preference for the tried-and-trusted, Julie is not very comfortable with the prospect of big changes. It will be important for her to be kept informed as much as possible and supported through the changes. This will be especially important because she is unlikely to accept the changes unless she sees their value. Her helpfulness and confidence in interacting with others means that she is good at keeping others involved. She does not like conflict, however over the years she has learned not to back down too easily when negotiating – but it can still be difficult for her.

Edward

Being generally quite serious and formal with people, Edward does not readily draw on the support of others, even when he recognises the need. He has a strong relationship with Julie that has developed over the years but others in the team, such as Molly, think he is a bit unfriendly and aggressive. His confidence in dealing with stress and in his own effectiveness is helping to maintain his resilience at this time, but his preference for a more relaxed pace means he is suffering from the strain of working longer hours at the moment.

Molly

Molly has not coped well with the uncertainty – she has been quite anxious about what might happen, made worse by the lack of communication about the changes. In addition, her scepticism means that she does not readily take comfort in support given, questioning peoples' motives. This has had a negative impact on some relationships in the team. However, her drive and motivation are proving valuable resources at this time in helping her achieve goals and make a success of everything.

As you can see, we have the same situation but three very different responses. This example illustrates why resilience is an important underpinning factor that can influence a range of key organisational outcomes.



Well-managed change

Organisational change can be stimulating, exciting, and an improvement when well-planned and managed. However, when change is not well-managed there

can be very negative consequences, such as feelings of job insecurity and unnecessary upheaval. Aspects of confidence are an advantage in these situations, for example those who are less anxious will not spend so much time worrying about what might happen. Adaptability is also important – those who are naturally more flexible will be comfortable responding quickly as situations develop. People also have different preferences for variety. Those who prefer to stick to routines and tried-and-tested approaches may be less comfortable in times of change.



Balanced workload

We need to maintain a healthy balance between our work and home lives. To achieve this, we require challenging but manageable workloads. Obviously

this is not an easy balance to strike but some people are naturally more resilient when there is an imbalance. For example, having a high level of personal energy can help people to cope with a high workload – but only in the short term.



In control

Feeling we have no control over how we do things is one of the biggest challenges to our resilience. To feel our best at work, we need to have a say and an influence over

what is done and how. When we perceive a lack of control, for example when our ideas and suggestions are ignored, it can lead to a lot of negative pressure. Those who are naturally more assertive and comfortable in taking the lead may have a stronger sense of control, proactively finding ways to overcome obstacles. Others may find it difficult to take a firm stand when challenging or negotiating for more influence and may need to make sure that they do not give in too easily to others' demands.



Sense of purpose

It is vital that we have a clear understanding of the meaning of our work. We need specific and challenging goals which we are bought in to and committed to achieving. When goals are ill-defined, we may need to take responsibility in creating our own sense of purpose at work. Those who have a strong results focus, for example, are likely to be motivated to identify and achieve challenging goals. A high level of proactivity is also likely to lead to a strong sense of purpose.

The way forward

The composition of an individual's personal resilience is very complex. Employees and employers must understand how they are likely to respond in different situations and *i-resilience* is a valuable tool to help do this. However, the benefit of this knowledge on its own is fairly limited. The next step is to learn and develop techniques to build resilience – some of which were described in last year's Business Well-Being Network report. Employers can help here too. Firstly, by providing employees with opportunities and training to increase their resilience. Secondly, by managing the six situational requirements to limit the extent to which people need to cope with negative pressures at work.

More information on *i-resilience* can be found at:

www.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience

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