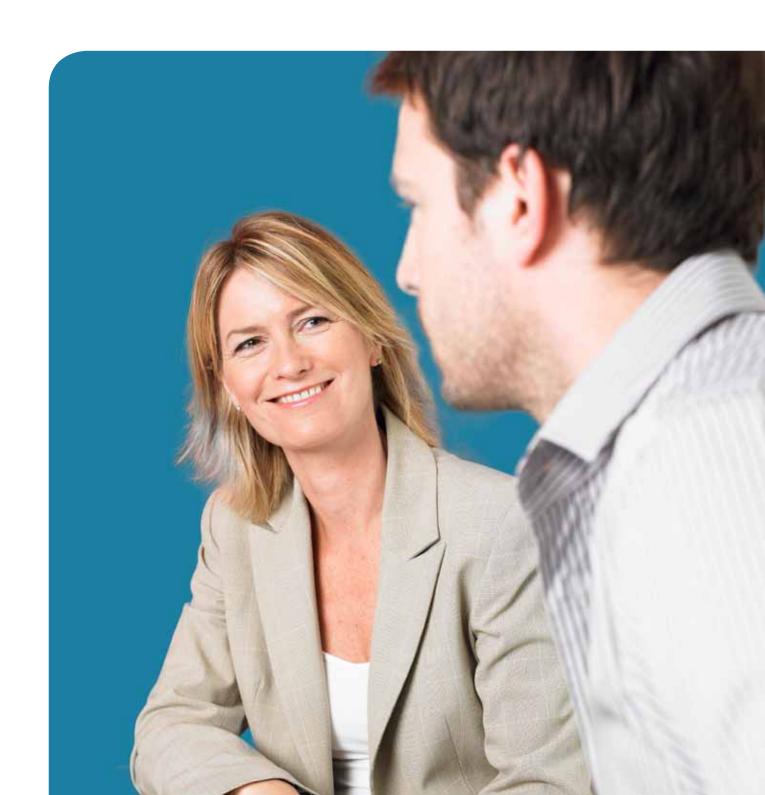# Developing resilience
An evidence-based guide for practitioners

Developing resilience:
An evidence-based guide for practitioners

Resilience is now recognised as an important factor in the workplace. In the increasingly and endlessly turbulent context of today's working world, the resilience of both individuals and organisations becomes paramount in order to survive and thrive. This leaflet is designed to give guidance to practitioners based on a thorough review of the available evidence about how to develop resilience at individual and organisational level.

What is resilience?

Resilience at the individual level

A consistent theme among the range of definitions of resilience is a sense of adaptation, recovery and bounce back despite adversity or change. Most of those working in this field identify resilience as a dynamic process that involves a personal negotiation through life that fluctuates across time, life stage and context. There is a huge diversity and complexity of definitions, concepts and approaches used, but the following captures the essence of resilience succinctly:

'the **successful** *adaptation to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions'* (Windle 1999, p163).

Resilience is also contextual in many ways and is therefore best understood as multidimensional and variable across time and circumstance.

Resilience at the organisational level

At the organisational level, resilience is defined in the same way as it is for individuals but with a different focus: it must include not only the individuals within the organisation, but also the processes and culture those individuals work with on a daily basis. Organisational resilience looks at how well the organisation can 'weather the storm' or adapt to challenges it faces. This requires a combination of resilience and an understanding of the circumstances which pose the greatest threat to survival: for example, organisations may become more susceptible to adverse events if they have faced previous crises, as their resources are stretched and defences weakened.

The greater the diversity of resilience strategies available to an organisation, the greater its ability to respond to challenges. Having a number of strategies provides a bigger buffer to survive larger crises, or the cumulative effect of frequent crises. Risk management provides a good framework for organisations to be proactive in thinking about and managing the unexpected, though it may bring uncertainties, such as 'we don't know what we don't know'.

What approaches are taken to resilience?

Approaches to individual resilience

The approaches taken to individual resilience can be clustered according to whether they focus on internal attributes of the person, the social environment or a combination of the two:

1 Personality/individual characteristics – resilience is internal to the individual and is seen as an innate ability that forms part of their personality. This might include: internal locus of control (control over one's life), perseverance, emotional management and awareness, optimism, perspective, sense of humour, self-efficacy (belief in own capabilities) and the ability to problem-solve: *'innate human psychological immune capacity'* (Kelley 2005).

2 Environment – resilience is wholly dependent on the experiences that a person has with their environment. So, factors external to the individual will determine how resilient a person is, such as how much social support they receive. The person's personality is not seen as relevant: *'a multi-faceted process from which people draw and learn from the best they can find in their environment, which can include family, school or the community'* (Greef 2002).

3 Person–environment – resilience is a product of a person's personality in combination with environmental influences such as family, peers and social environment: *'…categories that promote resilience, namely individual dispositional attributes, family support and cohesion, and external support systems'* (Richardson 2002).

Approaches to organisational resilience

Approaches to organisational resilience can be clustered according to their focus on: the characteristics of a person's job; the culture and operating procedures of an organisation; the characteristics and influence of leaders in the organisation; or external events and the environment within which the organisation operates:

1 Job design – resilience is dependent on the features of a person's job role, that is, how demanding the person's job is, how much control they have in their job, what type of motivators or rewards (internal and external) are associated with a particular job: *'the ability to interpret events, manage complexities, improvise, redefine roles, immediately correct errors and learn from them'* (Weick and Sutcliff 2001).

2 Organisational culture and structure – the culture of the organisation and way the organisation adopts work processes and procedures are seen as central to resilience. For example, if an organisation has a bureaucratic structure coupled with a command and control culture, this may be detrimental to the extent to which people within the organisation are able to respond and adapt to challenges: *'A resilient organisation effectively aligns its strategy, operations, management systems, governance structure and decision support capabilities so that it can uncover and adjust to continually changing risks, endure disruptions to its primary earnings drivers, and create advantages…'* (Starr et al 2007).

3 Leadership – emergent leadership (leadership from middle managers) and engaging, supportive leadership styles may heavily influence the ability of employees to be resilient to adverse events: *'Leaders are the stewards of organisational energy [resilience]...they inspire or demoralise others, first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they manage, focus, invest and renew the collective energy [resilience] of those they lead'* (Loehr and Schwartz 2003).

4 Systemic/external environment – the external environment and social relationships are seen to be key to resilience. If networks of successful relationships are not established, both for employees and for the organisation itself, the organisation may not have the resources to adapt to change effectively and positively. Social and institutional support is seen as key at every level. Also, organisational resilience is seen as dependent on the resilience of stakeholders, competitors and the industry in which it operates: *'People with trustworthy relationships and personal support systems at work and with friends and family are more able to cope with stress and organisations more likely to hold up in a crisis'* (Johnson-Lenz 2009).

Key messages

- Despite considerable variability in approaches to defining and building resilience, there is a substantial knowledge base on how and why individuals and organisations are able to achieve a higher level of functioning than would be expected during exposure to adversity. Individual, social and institutional factors all play a role in buffering some of the effects of adversity and facilitating 'healthy' adaptation.

- It is largely up to practitioners to determine when and whether interventions would add value to their client base. For instance, at the organisational level, organisations need to consider their available resources before embarking on building resilience, as appropriate human and physical resources will be key to sustaining adaptability and to changing behaviours.

- It may be useful to think of resilience in terms of occupational health and stress of employees. Many of the interventions cited in the literature use approaches that closely model stress management interventions. It could be argued, therefore, that components of stress management interventions would be a good place to start thinking about organisational resilience interventions.

- A wider range of approaches for individual interventions are reported in the literature than for organisational interventions. Almost all of these individual intervention approaches draw upon psychological models such as acceptance and commitment therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and techniques drawn from positive psychology. At the practitioner level particularly, there appears to be a good number of service providers drawing on one or more of these models to address individual resilience.

- Coping skills and building buffers to adverse events appear to be only part of the solution. It is increasingly clear that building social networks and support into the intervention is a critical success factor.

The resilience grid

The resilience grid provided on the following pages outlines organisational and individual interventions designed to build resilience. It is based on a review of the evidence base from both practitioner and academic literature.

Resilience grid layout
- Tables with blue headings refer to individual interventions and those headed in orange refer to organisational interventions.
- Within individual and organisational categories, there are separate tables for each of the approaches outlined on page 3.
- Within each table, separate columns provide academic and practitioner references. Some key points about each approach are provided as well as references for further exploration. If measures used in the studies were provided, these are also listed.

Special notes
1 The resilience grid includes only practitioner interventions that provide open source, free materials that are readily available to practitioners. The information presented in the grid is not intended to be a best practice or prescriptive framework, but more an idea of the possible approaches practitioners can take to address resilience. The main reason for this is that there is little information available on what the most effective interventions are and 'what works' in given situations, particularly in organisational domains.

2 In the organisational interventions section of the grid, references to generic leadership and organisation development (OD) research have been made instead of specific references to organisational resilience research. This is because there is very little research available specifically related to organisational interventions that do not borrow from traditional organisational theories of leadership and OD. It therefore seems fitting to provide practitioners with traditional management literature as a theoretical framework for organisational resilience, as this is the most applicable to the organisational context.

INDIVIDUAL			
WHAT IS IT?		**WHAT CAN WE DO?**	
CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	ACADEMIC	PRACTITIONER
Personality/ individual characteristics	Resilience is seen as part of a person's personality or innate characteristics.	**1 Cognitive behaviour bibliotherapy (Gregory et al 2004)** Reading materials in the form of exercises that help overcome negative thoughts and feelings to combat depression. *Measures:* * Beck Depression Inventory * DASS-21 **2 Mindfulness (Tugade et al 2004, Bond and Flaxman 2006, Hayes et al 1999)** Relaxation techniques, promoting acceptance rather than change, and value-based actions. *Measures:* *GHQ-12 * AAQ **3 Resilience regimen (Margolis and Stoltzharvard 2010)** Managers can grasp their own and their direct reports' habits of thought and help reframe negative events in productive ways through writing about control, impact, breadth and duration of adverse event. **4 Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or psychological debriefing (PD) (Devilly and Spence 1999, Foa et al 1991)** CBT aims to solve problems by addressing and challenging the thoughts that underlie unhelpful emotions, behaviours. PD is a brief, short-term intervention aimed at mitigating long-term distress and preventing emergence of post-traumatic stress. CBT is effective for post-traumatic stress disorder as it allows clients to 'face' and deal with the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with traumatic events. *Measures:* *BDI *SCL-90-R *PTSD-I **5 Self-efficacy training (Noble and McGrath 2005)** Self-efficacy is a belief in one's own capability to perform a task successfully, handle a situation, and so on. Self-efficacy built through strengths-based approach using humour and optimism. Encourages 'positive tracking', which means finding any positive aspects of a situation. Also teaches coping skills using cognitive behaviour therapy.	**1 ROBERTSON COOPER** http://www.robertsoncooper.com/resilience/ your_resilience/ Looks at the nature of stress and how it interacts with people differently (emphasise personality characteristics) and provides coping mechanisms and tools. Designed for new staff, existing staff, leaders. *Measures:* Accessed by the hyperlink above **2 COPE OHS** http://www.copeohs.com/news/business-psychology/managing-workplace-stress/ Cognitive behavioural techniques that can help to bolster resilience and enhance performance. Including: coping strategies and stress management techniques, strategies for challenging negative thoughts and promoting positive thinking, dealing with difficult or challenging people/ situations. **3 Mayo Clinic** http://www.mayoclinic.com Resilience education and training integrated with medical care to achieve well-being of the mind, body and spirit. Uses mindfulness and other mind–body techniques. Focus on cognitive (attention, memory, judgement and problem-solving), physical, emotional, spiritual (forgiveness, acceptance, compassion, true meaning and purpose). **4 Trauma resilience training** Training includes exploration of what normal stress responses feel like, identifying potential future danger zones, developing advance response plans, learning a skill pre-trauma to aid conscious control of responses and thought patterns, identifying support network, control of intrusive memories and flashbacks, relaxation. **5 In Equilibrium** http://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/resources Understanding resilience, pressure, stress and adversity. Focus on boundaries, internal vs. external locus of control (whether you perceive life experiences as within or out of your control), optimism and negative thinking, emotional awareness and regulation, empathy, reaching out, problem-solving, self-efficacy, controlling impulses (willpower) and tolerating ambiguity. **6 Organisation Health Psychologists** http://www.orghealth.co.uk/document-library/ Focus on how to reduce impact of adverse events and maintain psychological well-being, Also, how to communicate challenges effectively, embrace change, tackle negativity and set personal goals. Four principles of personal effectiveness are offered: control, aligning actions to values, antidotes to negativity and psychology of stress prevention.

INDIVIDUAL			
WHAT IS IT?		**WHAT CAN WE DO?**	
CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	ACADEMIC	PRACTITIONER
Environment	Resilience is dependent on the social or environmental context.	**1 Job demands (Ferris et al 2005)** Assess, evaluate and facilitate a level of job demand that a person in a particular job could manage, for example adequate rewards, providing conflict resolution strategies, defining scope of jobs, decision-making control, flexible hours, health and nutrition. *Measures:* *WWP	**1 Psychological first aid (Rutter 2007)** http://www.axa-icas.com/home.php Training for volunteers in typical trauma reactions and how to listen, respond and provide support. **2 London Resilience** http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk/businesscontinuity/essentialdocs/ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience.aspx Responses to emergencies – focus on business continuity (risk mitigation).
Person–environment interaction	Resilience is a result of the person's personality combined with social and environmental factors.	**1 *(READY)* Psychosocial resilience training programme (Burton et al 2009)** Targets key psychosocial protective factors of: (a) positive emotions, (b) cognitive flexibility, (c) life meaning, (d) social support and (e) coping strategies. Based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which teaches acceptance of adverse events and helps the individual get in contact with a transcendent self. *Measures:* *Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being *CES-D **2 Hardy training (Maddi 2002, Maddi et al 1999)** Teach 'hardy skills' of coping, social support, relaxation, nutrition and physical activity. This builds hardy attitudes of commitment, control and challenge. *Measures:* * Personal Views Survey (3rd ed rev/PVS–III–R) * HardiSurvey III-R **3 Develop resilience buffers synergistically (Armendariz et al 2009)** Attention to external supports (organisational and community resources), inner strengths (individual personality characteristics) and learned skills (coping skills). **4 Develop positive psychological resources (Luthans and Youssef 2007, Luthans et al 2007)** Develop hope and optimism, by building assets (for example confidence and social support), risk-management strategies (for example contingency planning) and facilitate cognitive, emotional and behavioural adaptation. *Measures:* *NEO-PI-R **5 Team resilience (Bennett et al 2010)** Five key resources are focused on: (a) personal competence (self-esteem, self-efficacy, hope and determination); (b) social competence (social adeptness, cheerful mood and good communication skills); (c) personal structure (ability to uphold daily routines, to plan and organise); (d) family coherence (family co-operation, loyalty and stability); and (e) social support (access to support from friends and family, intimacy and ability to provide support).	**1 Integration Training** http://integrationtraining.co.uk/blog/2010/06/integral-business.html#respond Tailor-made to fit workplace needs. Focus on relaxation, mindfulness, and stress management, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques, problem-solving and creativity, social support and empathy, supporting organisational structures, processes and culture, realistic optimism, gratitude, mood management, emotional intelligence. **2 Smithfield Performance** http://www.smithfieldperformance.com/topics/res/default.aspx Explore thinking, behaviour, internal motivation and lifestyle factors that influence levels of resilience. Focus on how delegates interpret situations, especially successes and failures that they have experienced. Emphasise being realists and personal responsibility in situations. Work–life balance, lifestyle choices and their impact on motivation and engagement.

ORGANISATIONAL			
WHAT IS IT?		**WHAT CAN WE DO?**	
CATEGORY	**DESCRIPTION**	**ACADEMIC**	**PRACTITIONER**
Job design	Resilience can be developed by focusing on a person's role and how non-monetary rewards may contribute to reducing stress and motivate a person to be more engaged and productive in the organisation.	**1 Luthans et al 2006** Risk-focused HRD strategy fosters a positive employee–employer psychological contract. Risk is managed by creating an ethical and trustworthy culture. Asset-focused HRD strategy. Assets include human capital such as knowledge, skills and abilities, and social networks of support. Process-focused HRD strategy. Uses self-efficacy, self-enhancement, locus of control to adapt to stressful circumstances. **Also refer to literature on psychosocial hazards in the workplace and job design theory.**	**1 wellbeing4business http://www. wellbeing4business.co.uk/about-us/resources/** A risk assessment approach, based on HSE Management Standards to identify and address pressure hot spots within teams and organisations. **2 WFD Consulting http://www.surveymonkey. com/s.asp?u=83146511579** WFD works with leaders, managers and teams to engage and educate leaders about resilience, identify impediments to resilience in the organisation, empower managers and enhance their capabilities to foster resilience, engage employees in eliminating inefficiencies and practices that lead to excessive workload dissatisfaction, monitor resilience levels. **3 EJT Associates http://www.ejtassociates.co.uk/articles.html** Critical incident aftercare (CIA) and trauma first aid. Turner Rebuilding Resilience Programme (TRRP) – alternative to CI debriefing. Group work aimed at normalising effects. Identify resources and build on them, how to recognise and deal with dissociation and/or high arousal states and supports individual with relationships. TRRP for Managers – how to relate skilfully with employees post-incident (for example provide an adequate level of support and allowances for adjustment back to work). Mediation Service – 'buddy scheme'/trauma support volunteer. Offer of an incident guide for vulnerable staff, outlining how to maintain resilience and the procedure if exposed to an incident.
Leadership	Focus on the role of leadership in resilience and how it may promote resilience.	**Refer to various leadership models on engagement, well-being and emergent leadership such as transformational, transactional, functional, situational and contingency theories.**	**1 Team resilience** Academics and practitioners from a range of disciplines supporting leaders and managers in organisations who must support teams and the individuals within them to operate effectively when faced with continuous business re-engineering. **2 WFD Consulting http://www.surveymonkey. com/s.asp?u=83146511579** WFD works with leaders, managers and teams to engage and educate leaders about resilience, identify impediments to resilience in the organisation, empower managers and enhance their capabilities to foster resilience, engage employees in eliminating inefficiencies and practices that lead to excessive workload dissatisfaction, monitor resilience levels. **3 Steelhenge http://www.steelhenge.co.uk/index.php** Crisis and incident management approach which includes business continuity, crisis management, emergency management. Focus on business continuity methods such as business impact analysis and risk assessment. Also provide scenario-based workshops to rehearse decision-making and actions during response and recovery phases following an incident.

ORGANISATIONAL			
WHAT IS IT?		**WHAT CAN WE DO?**	
CATEGORY	**DESCRIPTION**	**ACADEMIC**	**PRACTITIONER**
Leadership (continued)	Focus on the role of leadership in resilience and how it may promote resilience.		**4 EJT Associates** http://www.ejtassociates.co.uk/articles.html Critical incident aftercare (CIA) and trauma first aid. Turner Rebuilding Resilience Programme (TRRP) – alternative to CI debriefing. Group work aimed at normalising effects. Identify resources and build on them, how to recognise and deal with dissociation and/or high arousal states and supports individual with relationships. TRRP for Managers – how to relate skilfully with employees post-incident. Mediation Service – 'buddy scheme'/trauma support volunteer. Offer of an incident guide for vulnerable staff, outlining how to maintain resilience and the procedure if exposed to an incident.
Organisational structure and culture	Resilience interventions using processes and organisational culture to best equip organisations to face challenges.	**1 Luthans et al 2005** Risk-focused HRD strategy fosters a positive employee–employer psychological contract. Risk is managed by creating an ethical and trustworthy culture. Asset-focused HRD strategy. Assets include human capital such as knowledge, skills and abilities, and social networks of support. Process-focused HRD strategy. Uses self-efficacy, self-enhancement, locus of control to adapt to stressful circumstances. **2 Gibson and Tarrant 2010** Four broad strategic approaches to improved resilience: resistance, reliability, redundancy and flexibility. **3 Kobasa et al 1982** HardiAttitudes are the '3 Cs' of commitment, control and challenge. HardiOrganizations see their way of excelling as based on anticipating the direction of relevant environmental and social change and turning that change to advantage by helping to bring it about and improving life in the process. HardiOrganizations are not solely motivated by financial success. They are especially energised and excited by the conviction that participating in ongoing change is of potential environmental and social value and by helping to find that value through their efforts to turn the change to advantage. *Measures:* * Schedule of Life Events * Seriousness of Illness Survey * Self and Alienation From Work scales of the Alienation Test * External Locus of Control Scale **Refer to organic vs. mechanistic corporate structures. Also consult OD theory/management literature such as Schein's model, Lewin's model, action research and implementation theories.**	**1 UK Work Organisation Network.net** http://www.ukwon.net/resilience/index.php The Resilience Action Resource Kit (ARK) is an online questionnaire and learning resource: designed to help organisations assess their ability to survive and thrive in an environment in which radical change and uncertainty have become commonplace. **2 Steelhenge** http://www.steelhenge.co.uk/index.php Crisis and incident management approach which includes business continuity, crisis management, emergency management. Focus on business continuity methods such as business impact analysis and risk assessment. Also provide scenario-based workshops to rehearse decision-making and actions during response and recovery phases following an incident.

ORGANISATIONAL			
WHAT IS IT?		**WHAT CAN WE DO?**	
CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	ACADEMIC	PRACTITIONER
Systemic/ external environment	Interventions that use risk management and assess risk by examining external factors and threats.	**Refer to various OD theories such as Schein's model, Lewin's model, action research and implementation theories.**	1 **Steelhenge** **http://www.steelhenge.co.uk/index.php** Crisis and incident management approach which includes business continuity, crisis management, emergency management. Focus on business continuity methods such as business impact analysis and risk assessment. Also provide scenario-based workshops to rehearse decision-making and actions during response and recovery phases following an incident.

How we developed the grid

A comprehensive literature search was designed and carried out by occupational psychologists at Affinity Health at Work to provide information on the theories, research approaches and practice-based interventions relating to individual and organisational resilience. The aim was to compile a framework that practitioners could use as a quick reference guide to assist in deciding what interventions to use when thinking about building resilience or providing clients with advice in this area.

For the full research report, *Developing Resilience*, including a reference list and more information on methodology, gaps and limitations in the literature, and the measures used in resilience interventions, go to: **cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/research/ developing-resilience.aspx**

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