

Resilience at Work



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We are coming out of one of the worst recessions in living memory, but the pressures on people at work are still very high. There are fewer people, having heavier workloads, feeling more job insecure (as organisations outsource, hire more part-time staff and short term contract workers) and working longer and longer hours (with the UK topping the European league table for long working hours). This scenario has meant that many employers are now talking about creating a more resilient workforce, people who are more adaptable and can cope with whatever is thrown at them. The University spin off company Robertson Cooper Ltd has developed psychometric test i-Resilience, which measures an individual's resilience in four areas (you can fill it in free of charge and get your own profile, just go to www.robertsoncooper.com and access the i-Resilience test).

Resilience is comprised of four characteristics: adaptability, that is how flexible and adaptable you are to changing situations which are beyond your control, and how well you cope with change. As Winston Churchill once said "to improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often". Confidence is the second characteristics of resilience, which is about your feelings of competence and effectiveness in coping with stressful situations, in essence, whether you have a firm sense of self-esteem. The third characteristic is social support, that is, can you build good

relationships with others, and whether you have the ability to seek social support from others to overcome adverse situations. And finally, purposefulness, that is, having a clear sense of purpose, clear values, drive and direction in face of setbacks. This means being more positive, a 'glass half full' type. As Kahlil Gibran once wrote: "the optimist sees the rose and not the thorns, the pessimist stares at the thorns, oblivious to the rose". Most of us are strong on some of these and weak on others, but being able to identify where you are strong and weak is important in developing your own resilience.

Until recently, the public sector have had poorer scores on resilience than private sector workers, but this is changing as the 'jobs for life' public sector has gone and people have had to learn to adjust quickly. The gap between the two has now narrowed. In terms of age the most resilient are the 20-30 something's, followed by the over 60s. The first group have grown up during difficult times and have learned to be more resilient, and the over 60s have developed these skills over the years of trial and error in coping with one economic downturn and then another. The age groups most vulnerable are the 40-50s who have multiple commitments and are facing the two way demands of their workplace and family, and trying to cope during difficult economic times. The evidence is growing (Cooper, Flint-Taylor & Pearn, 2013) that resilient employees are significantly more

productive, and with every 20% increase in positive emotions re resilience leading to an average increase of productivity of 7.5%.

The good news is that most people can change the various aspects of their resilience through proper training and development (see Cooper, et al, 2013), but this can also be reinforced when organisations themselves attempt to create more resilient cultures. This can be achieved by carrying out wellbeing audits to identify where they are and are not adaptable, supportive, purposive and giving people enough autonomy for them to feel more self-confident and in control.

Resilience then is a two way street, where individuals can help themselves and where organisations can provide the culture that enables this to happen. As John Ruskin, the social reformer remarked in 1851 about the resilient workplace: "In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it, and they must have a sense of success in it".

Reference:

Cooper, C.L., Flint-Taylor, J. & Pearn, M. (2013). Building Resilience for Success. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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