

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a colorful striped shirt, is sitting at a desk in a bright office. She is looking down at a tablet device, holding a yellow pen. The desk is cluttered with papers, a color palette, and other office supplies. Large windows in the background let in natural light. A blue and pink graphic overlay is on the left side of the image.

Resilience in 2021

How to build resilient individuals, teams, and leaders

Introduction

We often talk about resilience as being like a muscle. There's the famous Sheryl Sandberg quote, of course: *"You are not born with a fixed amount of resilience. Like a muscle, you can build it up, draw on it when you need it."* Let's just say that if there was ever a time we needed to flex that muscle, now would be it.

The past few months have been incredibly testing, and even when we think we're out of the woods another challenge presents itself. Perhaps it's no wonder that, according to reports, only a lowly 37% of full-time workers are exhibiting high levels of resilience right now.¹

With seemingly endless lockdowns, the invasion of our homes by work, and job pressures that may see employees feeling overworked and under-appreciated, it's not overly surprising. So while we should all be rightfully proud of how much we've achieved over the past few months, despite the huge challenges, it's also important for all of us to

work on building that resilience back up.

And when we say 'all of us', we mean individuals, teams, and leaders. Because while some elements of resilience are individual and inward – such as looking after our wellbeing – some of them extend all the way up to strategic organisational aims. The pandemic has, in the long-term, acted as a reset. Now it's time to think about what we take from it.

Did you know?

Only 37% of full-time workers are exhibiting high levels of resilience right now.



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Resilience and the pandemic

We're all in this together... except that we're not. Like with many things relating to the pandemic, resilience also hasn't treated us all equally. Whether it's been juggling home schooling, caring responsibilities, or working from a crowded apartment, *we've all experienced the pandemic in different ways*. However, our resilience is also closely aligned to our status at work.

We mentioned in the introduction that, according to one report, only 37% of full-time workers in the US are exhibiting high levels of resilience at the moment. That's not a high number by any means, but the figures are even less for part-time and furloughed workers, which came in at 28% and 26% respectively. There's also the link between age, with those aged between 18-23 describing themselves as having the lowest levels of resilience with only 22%.

There could be a number of factors at play here. If we look at age, we could speculate on the home working environments of Gen Z

employees, the fact they've been more vulnerable to job losses², or that they've simply not built up as high a level of resilience as their more senior peers.

However, even with that in mind, it's fair to say the experience hasn't been easy on any of us. It's therefore important to consider how we 'top up' resilience across the whole of our organisations; not just in individuals but in teams and leaders as well.

Today, we'll be discussing nine critical ways you can drive up resilience across your business in the context of..

- *Individuals*
- *Teams*
- *Leaders*

A photograph of a person's hand reaching into tall grass, overlaid with a teal gradient. The hand is positioned in the center-right of the frame, with fingers slightly spread. The person is wearing a plaid shirt and dark pants. The background is a field of tall grass, and the overall image has a soft, natural feel.

“Resilience is not about what you have; it’s about what you do.”

- Forbes

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Viktor Frankl

Developing
resilience as
individuals

1

Activate wellbeing

For all its positives, the word “resilience” has some negative connotations - and its meaning may have even become misconstrued over time.

Forbes touches on the darker side of resilience³, noting that the ‘tough’ approach to resilience has been *eulogised in our corporate and sporting worlds and “heralded as our ability to work long hours and prioritise work above all else.”* Sound familiar? We may have been conditioned to think we’re being resilient when we stay late or don’t push back on impossible deadlines – but that’s not how it should be.

Thankfully, the meaning of resilience in 2021 is shifting, and what comes with that is the focus on wellbeing. More organisations are tuning into wellbeing initiatives as a way of enhancing employee happiness and resilience, but it’s also important for individuals to self-regulate and try to design the workday that works for them – at least as much as they can.

Whether that’s limiting the amount of meetings you have, going for a walk at lunch time, or deactivating emails on your mobile, it’s important to find out what works for you and build it into a personal wellbeing plan.

2

Focus on soft skills

It wasn't that long ago that careers were fairly linear things. People would study x which would lead to y and from there a very traditional career trajectory would unfold. These days, not so much. *People change careers 3 to 7 times over the course of their lifetime*, with the term 'squiggly career' now being coined. With that in mind, individuals are always going to have to keep their skill sets sharpened so that they're braced for the next big change. But what skills should they focus on? That's where employers can play a role in shaping where that focus lies...

According to Deloitte⁴, around 48% of respondents say that their workforce strategy is anchored on hiring people with technical skills, rather than the 52% hiring great learners who can meet future needs.

But a lot of research shows that it's actually capabilities – or soft skills – that make us the most resilient in our careers.

That's what enables us to do all the things we need to do to be successful at work: building effective relationships, getting stakeholder buy-in, connecting with customers, and collaborating with our teammates.

It's our soft skills that play hard ball for us and that we can carry with us across different careers, and that's what makes us resilient.



3

Build self-awareness

According to TrainingZone⁵, “high levels of emotional intelligence can help employees deal with stress and work more effectively.”

Why? Well, it’s believed that having emotional intelligence – or self-awareness – in place can enable workers to develop a robust ‘resilience toolkit’ that they can draw on day to day. Knowing how you respond to change, for example, is the first step in making sure you’re more prepared for change in future. If you don’t know, how can you plan for it?

Once you apply this thinking to your strengths, weaknesses, stress triggers, how you handle team conflict, and everything else that you deal with at work then you really build a clearer picture of yourself. You know what you need in order to feel more comfortable, right?

It’s that clearer picture of your personal communication style that will enable you to *catch yourself before you fall down a rabbit hole of stress or frustration... and reroute you towards increased resilience.*

Want to know more about our stance on self-awareness and its superpowers? Head over [here](#) to read more.

Developing resilience as teams

“Cooperation is
the thorough
conviction that
nobody can
get there unless
everybody gets
there.”

Virginia Burden

One thing that's become really clear is how difficult it is to keep connections in place when working remotely. It's easy for team connectivity to just unravel; for people to slip into siloed working, not switch on their screens for meetings, or simply skip out on the social calls because they're under too much pressure to meet deadlines.

This is backed up with data; according to research by Salesforce⁶, *nearly one third of employees say they feel less connected to their colleagues while working remotely.* But why is connectivity so closely tied to resilience? Well, it's all about trust. If there's no connection there's no trust and if there's no trust... there's no resilience.

Connecting as a team shouldn't be viewed as an after-thought or something just for more junior members of staff to engage in. Forbes put it like this: "When team members have a true connection and mutual trust they can not only cooperate but also challenge each other, pull apart problems, and co-create solutions."⁷

If we want resilient teams then it's important that we activate social capital within them, just like we would any other strategic objective.

4

Stay
connected

Psychological safety means feeling safe and being able to speak up without fear of negative consequences, and it's something that's really important for building resilience in teams. Teams can only be resilient if they're innovative, future-focused, and adaptive, right?

But those qualities aren't enough in themselves: *they need psychological safety in order to ensure they're verbalised – and acted on.* Forbes cite a great example⁸ of how a lack of psychological safety in one organisation resulted in a mistake that cost over \$2 million – all because a team felt that they were unable to speak up and challenge their manager on a decision.

It's an extreme example, but it certainly illustrates the point. What else is being lost if your people don't feel safe to speak up?

Psychological safety is also a way of building that very human characteristic – failure – into what we do. Embedding it into our teams is a way of enabling teams to openly talk about and learn from their experiences so that they can do better in future – without fear of looking like they failed. It's by doing this that they make themselves resilient.

5

Create psychological safety



According to one report⁹ shared by Glassdoor, only 2% of teams are resilient. That's probably not a number that will fill anyone with much confidence, especially post-pandemic. However, this particular report is pretty interesting, as it also presents findings on the other types of teams that aren't categorised as 'resilient'. A group of individuals working under a team name will never be as resilient as a team that operates as one unit. What the report neatly illustrates is just how important alignment, team goals, and connectivity are to resilience.

In short, a resilient team has to be created and nurtured, it doesn't just happen by itself. However, the endgame is that it's always stronger than the sum of its parts. One way to do that is to introduce the idea of self-awareness into the team.

Because if people know what they're good at – and not so good at – then they know what gaps they need to plug when they're tackling a project or task. They're less likely to miss any blind spots and they're more likely to play to their strengths. If four individuals work as a team then they essentially pool their strengths and cover their blind spots, making them much more resilient to challenges.

6

Operate as one

“Resilience is based on compassion for ourselves, as well as compassion for others.”

Sharon Salzberg

Developing
resilience as
leaders

7

Be compassionate

Remember that muscle analogy? Leaders may perceive challenges – even those as hard-hitting as the pandemic – as mere obstacles to overcome - because they've learned that resilience over time. Their more junior counterparts may not be in the same boat, however.

Harvard Business Review¹⁰ build a brilliant picture of how leaders may be miles ahead of their teams in terms of resilience. They may have gone through many challenging scenarios over a number of years and effectively built their resilience up. This comes through in the reporting around resilience; we mentioned earlier that Gen Z, those aged between 18-23, had the lowest levels of resilience at 22%, right?

Leaders need to keep this in mind if they want to get the best out of their people. We're not saying they shouldn't be inspiring their teams to face challenges head on; that's part of their role as leaders.

But you don't role model resilience by setting impossibly high standards for your teams. *Leaders do that by showing up with compassion and kindness for where their teams are right now*, and by supporting them through their own resilience journey.

8

Role model resilience



Individuals and teams are always going to look to their leaders for how they conduct themselves at work – sometimes without even realising. Leaders are the ones who write the script, and the people around them perform it. Before too long, it becomes a blueprint for how the whole department operates.

But what happens if leaders aren't giving out good direction? If leaders work late, that probably means that their teams will work late. If leaders are critical of other departments, their teams will be critical of other departments. And if leaders flap, their team will flap too.

However, none of these things are conducive for building resilient, future-proofed teams. With burnout now recognised as an occupational phenomenon by WHO, *it's worth taking a critical look at some of these inherent cultures and asking: is this still serving us?*

If leaders really want to lead with resilience – and send that ripple effect through their organisations – they need to think about what signals they're sending out. Because they can only cultivate the next generation of leaders by being positive, purposeful and productive.

9

Lead with authenticity

We've talked a lot about the value of being able to bring your whole self to work each day. Not the 'work' version of yourself. Not the one who's entirely different at home as they are in the office. Working remotely has blurred those lines and, in many ways, that's a good thing because it's enabled us to show up as ourselves. Casual clothes, clutter, children, you name it, it's all made an appearance on our Zoom calls and in many ways it's further altered how we think of leadership.

Maybe in times gone by we would think of resilient leaders as ones that remained ever-so detached from their teams? Maybe we thought resilience was not discussing mistakes for fear of looking weak? Maybe resilience meant showing up in a certain way?

Actually, honesty and authenticity have been what's helped us during those challenging times. *Resilient leaders know that being genuinely themselves is the way to get the most out of themselves – and their teams.*

Because as we say [here](#), "authentic leadership holds out the first and foremost principle, 'it's not about me.'"

Conclusion

We're still feeling the impact of the pandemic, and it's likely we'll continue to feel its legacy for a long time to come. But one thing it has created is a pause between the past and the present. In that moment it makes sense to take a breath and think about how we reset and rebuild.

Resilience in 2021 shouldn't mean simply snapping back to how things were before and simply serving up more of the same, because being resilient is about changing for change. *We can only build our resilience if we look at the world as it is now and ask ourselves: what do we need to do to be at our best within it?*

Is resilience about prioritising well-being, connecting with our team members, or slipping the mask and showing up in a way that feels authentic to us? One way that you can do that is by introducing self-awareness into your organisation, and that's where Insights come in. When people understand themselves better they understand what's helping – or

hindering – their own resilience. We can help your workforce discover their personal communication style, what they need to perform at their best, and how to implement key strategies that will enhance overall resilience. Because we all need a personal resilience toolkit right now!

Let's be clear: if we keep shifting, adjusting, and evolving we can ensure we're poised to bat away the curve balls coming our way in future. Resilience should never be about sticking to the same old, it's about repositioning ourselves, our teams, and our leaders for the future.

Top resilience takeaways for individuals, teams, and leaders

- 1** **Activate wellbeing**
Putting our own wellbeing ahead of our workload is key to resilience.
- 2** **Focus on soft skills**
It's only when we keep our skills sharp that we make ourselves resilient.
- 3** **Build self-awareness**
Enhancing self-awareness can help to build a robust 'resilience toolkit'.
- 4** **Stay connected**
With remote working, we have to work harder to keep connectivity alive.
- 5** **Create psychological safety**
What innovations are we missing if we don't create a space that feels safe?
- 6** **Operate as one**
A resilient team needs to be nurtured, but the results speak for themselves.
- 7** **Compassionate**
Leaders must remember that their resilience may not be matched by everyone.
- 8** **Role model resilience**
If leaders are setting a blueprint for resilience, it needs to be a good one.
- 9** **Lead with authenticity**
The lines have been blurred, so now it's time to bring our whole selves to work.
- Find out more**
Would you like to find out how Insights can enable resilience in your organisation? Take a look at some of our solutions [here](#).

How Insights can help

Who we are

We are a people development company that works with businesses all over the world to improve the effectiveness of individuals and organisations. The core of our solutions is self-awareness, which is the foundation on which many soft skills are built, including communication, collaboration and relationship-building.

How we help

With 22 global offices, we support our customers with their most pressing business and people challenges. From team engagement and culture to sales performance and productivity, our people-centred approach helps you shape the workforce you need.

Through a combination of instructor-led sessions and personalised reports - or self-learning using our digital tool - we'll enable individuals, teams, and leaders to make more of an impact in their roles, ensuring that everyone in your organisation brings their best self, every day.

Why we're impactful

We've built our content on verified psychology and we've made it so vibrant that people instantly find it easy to use and apply. The language and model are based on four colours, with memorable descriptors that help learners quickly relate. Beyond that, we make learning personal and human, encouraging each individual to make a positive difference through their behaviours and actions. Through this approach, we've already made a difference to more than six million learners.

Our Customers



Contact us today at
breakthroughs@insights.



www.insights.com

Sources

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